To RT or not to RT: Authorship and attribution on Twitter

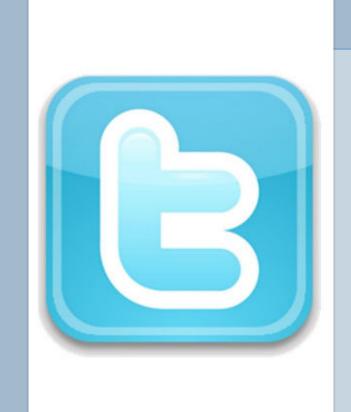
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Evolution of Retweeting



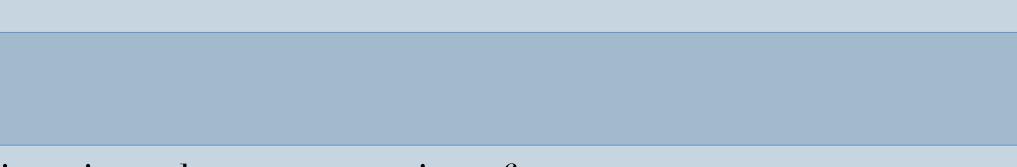
Modal Affordances of Twitter

- Character limit of 140 characters per tweet
- usernames and RT notation count towards this limit
- Addressivity
- @username notation results in a notification to the user that you are "addressing" or talking about them
- RT as a user-created convention
- As there was no affordance built into the Twitter medium to replicate another users tweet, around 2008, users began to create their own conventions for "retweeting" using the RT notation to indicate retweeted texts



boyd, Golder, & Lotan study retweets!

- In 2009, boyd, Golder, & Lotan conducted a study of retweeting practices and found that:
- the most common syntax for retweeting is: (optional comment) RT @user Original Text
- attempting to conform to the modal affordances of Twitter can cause erasure of authorship and attribution
- "preservers" were most concerned with maintaining chains of attribution; "adapters" valued their added comments being fleshed out over preserving the integrity of the original tweet



Twitter introduces retweet interface

- In 2010, Twitter introduced a new tool for retweeting, which replicates the tweet wholeform
- "It will be very quick and easy to retweet, you'll never have to edit the text, and you also won't have to worry if your followers have already seen something, so this should encourage retweeting more and more useful stuff flowing farther." –Twitter co-founder Evan Williams
- The developers did not intend for the new retweet function to replace the "organic" RT, but to work alongside it
- Our question is: how did the introduction of this new feature change retweeting practices?



Our framework

- In current Twitter usage, we find the coexistence of both the user-created RT form and the form introduced by Twitter
- Preserving Retweets
- Direct reproduction of a user's tweet, including username and avatar as well as original text. Does not allow for added content by the retweeter. Facilitated by Twitter interface.
- Adapting Retweets
- Copy of a tweet made by a retweeter, usually signaled by the acronym "RT". Allows for added content and modification of original tweet. Facilitated by some Twitter clients but not the Twitter interface.

The Takeaway:

Preserving Retweets remove the possibility for confusion of attribution, but are inflexible

Adapting Retweets allow for user input and modification, but often result in confusion over authorship and attribution



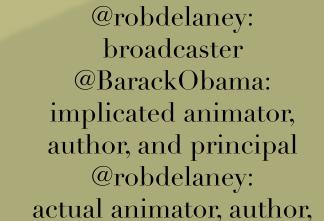
@robdelaney:

all roles

all roles

robdelaney rob delaney No. RT @BarackObama: Is the song "Piano Man" about a guy who is actually part piano, like a monster?

The Mad Hessian @TheMadHessian BAZINGA! MT #Pitt QB Tino Sunseri said transition from 2011 to 2012, like going from "a high school offense to a pro-style/college



and principal(?

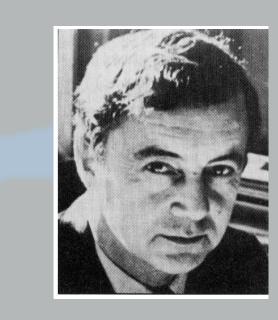
Evolution of Participant Roles

Traditional production roles

animator – the participant who physically utterances; "the sounding box"

author – the participant who composes the utterance; "the agent who scripts the lines"

principal – the participant responsible for the utterance; "the party to whose position the words attest



Goffman, 1981

@PhilReizenstein: broadcaster Humiliating RT @Steelersdepot: Pittsburgh Mayor Luke Ravenstahl @Steelersdepot: animator, Pays Off Bet & Does Tebow Pose In Broncos #15 Jersey author, principal



uigiLemieux

12 mins A Pittsburgh Penguin walks into a bar....No timetable for his return.

iPad goes here!

by PensNation_Ken

josephperson

@PensNation_Ken: broadcaster

Twitter production roles

Retained from Goffman:

author – the participant who composes the utterance; "the agent who scripts the lines"

principal – the participant responsible for the utterance; "the party to whose position the words attest

Adapted from Goffman for Twitter medium:

animator – the participant who physically produces the text; "the typist"

Created for Twitter medium:

broadcaster – the participant who makes the available to recipients; "the transmitter"

Works Referenced:

boyd, danah, Scott Golder, & Gilad Lotan. 2010. Tweet, Tweet, Retweet: Conversational Aspects of Retweeting on Twitter. Proceedings of the 43rd Hawaii International Conference on Systemic Systems. Hawaii: IEEE Press.

Goffman, Erving. 1981. Forms of Talk. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania

Kress, Gunther. 2010. Multimodality: A Social Semiotic Approach to Contemporary Communication. New York: Routledge.

Williams, Evan. 2009. Why Retweet works the way it does. *EvHead*, November 10. http://evhead.com/2009/11/why-retweet-works-way-it-does.html (September 12, 2012.)



@PhilReizenstein:

all roles

@LuigiLemieux:

animator, author,

principal

@josephperson: all roles

animator, author.

principal



Meemah2AOBL 16 hours RT @peggyskid: RT @josephperson: Joe Adams will get a chance to return kickoffs this week against the Steelers. AWESOME!

Joe Adams will get a chance to return

kickoffs this week against the Steelers.

@Meemah2AOBI broadcaster Ambiguous: Animator, author, principa

@TheMadHessian:

broadcaster

Unattributed sources

principal

Ambiguous:

author, animator



20 hours



Check out our poster at http://ow.ly/efXVt -- or so http://ow.ly/efXVt -- or scan this