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Are We a Bunch of Twitter Snobs?

Or Are You a Big Crybaby?

Posted by [Nat Ives](#) on [06.02.09](#) @ 05:25 PM



At least a couple of commenters on our recent post "[25 Media People You Should Follow on Twitter](#)," called us "Twitter snobs only following a few people."

"Do they not get what Twitter really is?" one asked.

"It's good Twitter etiquette to follow your followers," another agreed.

If that's true, we are varying degrees of rude. Right now Assistant Managing Editor [Ken Wheaton](#)* has 1.2 followers for every person he's following, a relatively even ratio. Digital Editor [Abbey Klaassen](#) has 5.4 followers for every one she's tracking. And our media reporter, [me](#), has 14.3.

Ashton Kutcher, for an extreme comparison, has more than 12,000 followers for every person he follows.

What's your ratio? And are you a good person or bad? What about us?

Before you answer, consider some potentially mitigating -- or aggravating -- dynamics.

- Men have 15% more followers than women, [according to new research](#) by a Harvard MBA student and an assistant professor at Harvard Business School.
- "Men also have more reciprocated relationships, in which two users follow each other," they wrote. "This 'follower split' suggests that women are driven less by followers than men, or have more stringent thresholds for reciprocating relationships."
- Some Twitterers, both men and women, have followed as many people as possible, knowing a fair share will follow them back and run up their follower count as a result. [Some even then went back and stopped following a ton of them](#), making themselves look, they hoped, really popular.

Then again, there's no way 2 million people are actually monitoring Ashton's tweets. Many people who try Twitter don't make it a habit, producing something like a 60% abandonment rate, [according to a Nielsen Online estimate](#). So the counts include a lot of phantom followers on all sides.

Speaking of Ashton, the much-touted Lord o' Twitter may not get what Twitter "really is." He's held up as some sort of genius of social media, [when what he's doing is actually broadcasting](#), not trying to nurture real interactions with his followers. Reporters frequently do something similar, although maybe we shouldn't.

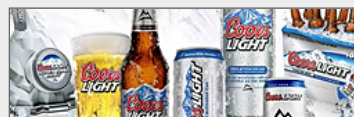
A lot of this has to do with how a person uses Twitter. When you check Twitter, are

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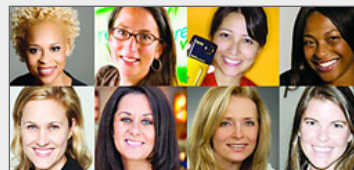
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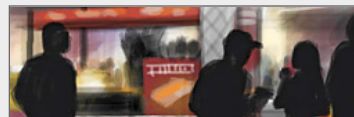
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degree it is. However, more important to me is to promote my writing, find interview subjects and engage in good old communication with other people. While having 16,000 or 100,000 followers would definitely be a boon to my article numbers. I prefer to take it slow and steady. As my popularity increases so go my twitter followers.

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By chris | princeton, NJ [June 3, 2009 09:58:17 am](#):

following everyone who follows you will ultimately devalue the twitter experience.

when you limit who you follow, the nuggets of gold are much easier to find and the reciprocal relationship can grow. when you follow 20,000 people, you're no longer interested in education and collaboration; you're just trying to win a popularity contest.

www.twitter.com/sully13

[Permalink](#)

By Rodney33 | FRISCO, TX [June 3, 2009 10:02:18 am](#):

Five things -

1) It is good practice to listen or acknowledge those who are listening to you in everyday life. Twitter can be overwhelming when you have a lot of followers. But filters are available to show top topics of discussion with your followers and provide an opportunity to jump in when appropriate. It could even lead to more fodder for your column. As a writer about marketing and consumer behavior, you might find a "tool" like this interesting, unless you consider yourself a tool.

2) I don't think there is prestige in multitude of followers, unless you have a dirty little secret - like you're an SEO fiend trying to get a bump out of Google - which many avid Twitters are. Or you're just starved for attention like Ashton and Oprah.

3) There cannot be a guru of Twitter, because there are no rules and everybody's playing.

4) Nat and Ken, a question, "What Would Emily Post Do?" Her foundation has no published opinion on the subject. Maybe you can get the scoop straight from them? Or better yet, just ignore the whole subject and behave however you choose on Twitter. You're free to move about the country.

5) Nat, I still think you should write a movie script based on your Strip Club Ad Review.

Rodney Mason, CMO
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www.twitter.com/moosylvania

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By piratealice | Chicago, IL [June 3, 2009 10:28:57 am](#):

I don't follow everyone who follows me. I've found that if I say certain key words people are looking for I'll suddenly get a bunch of followers of the same type. Like, I joke about my horoscope and suddenly I get 5 astrologers following me. I'm not going to follow them just because they started following me. I want to follow real people who have something of substance to say, people who I can talk to and learn from. That may make me a twitter snob, but so be it. I check the stream of everyone who follows me to see if I want to follow them. But following over 200 people without tweetdeck makes it impossible to really follow anyone.

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By Chris | Princeton, MN [June 3, 2009 10:41:34 am](#):

This all sounds like a Saturday Night Live skit.

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By IAN | NEW YORK, NY [June 3, 2009 10:43:44 am](#):

In order to become effective communicators (two-way), we as humans eventually learn to keep the signal:noise ratio down to maximize the value we extract. Twitter presents an issue for people because of the transient nature of the conversations -- there on your screen one minute, pushed down onto the 'next page' the next. The more people you follow, the more often that will happen, and the more messages you'll miss. This is inherently Twitter's fundamental flaw. But it's strangely endearing in its appeal to our sense of discovery of content and people, and its enabling of us to become voyeurs and exhibitionists at the same time.

[Permalink](#)

By thdpr | Broomfield, CO [June 3, 2009 11:42:13 am](#):

I definitely don't follow everyone who follows me. All the escort services and increase your twitter-atio and crap that I don't need. At first, I followed everyone. I was TweetBombed (back when that was happening) and got 5,000 tweets and about 500 followers in one day. I promised to follow back and I did for a while... until I realized the people I really wanted to follow and read (for professional development or because they were friends) were now buried so deep in the meaningless tweets that I couldn't find them. It was sad.

It's not about how many people you follow back. If you find the tweets interesting and worthwhile, follow back. If the tweet-world finds my tweets interesting, follow me. If you don't like to hear when the Denver skyline looks like a Bob Ross painting, don't follow.

And for G-dsakes! Do not beg me to follow you back just to up your followers. Quality vs. quantity people. I don't want the interesting tweets or educational ones to be lost in the noise.

That being said, my Bob Ross tweets reside here - <http://www.twitter.com/thdpr>

(And Steve, the login thing happened to me. That's for posting your note though, I copied and pasted just in case. I hate that glitch!)

[Permalink](#)

By gsflustered | SOUTHLAKE, TX [June 3, 2009 01:00:53 pm](#):

I figured I better log in before posting:) Agree with the points some made - if someone is uninteresting - why follow? I'm not sure I'm interesting enough to myself to follow at times. But - read an article here awhile back - and someone commented that Twitter is like a cocktail party - you have a snippet of conversation, if you're done you move on. That made some sense. Some people clearly like to Tweet to Twitter ala talk to hear themselves talk. But the 1 out of 10 things they tweet that is interesting, meaningful, funny or otherwise can be worth it.

Gayle

[Permalink](#)

By groovyruvy | Los Angeles, CA [June 3, 2009 01:23:24 pm](#):

We are new to Twitter and are learning a lot every day as we participate in the conversation, but at present we review the bios and postings of all those who follow us, and based on relevance, quality of postings, etc., we make a decision as to whether or not we'd like to follow them back. Following all those who follow us doesn't seem to make sense for us for a few reasons: first, we have some 'interesting' followers (get 16k followers in 90 days; aspiring adult film stars; people hawking wares and videos; etc.) and we're not really that interested in tracking them. Also in our attempt to navigate our way through the Twitter sea, we are trying to become a relevant part of the conversation. For us, that means following those that are within our area of interest (or at least have something to share that might be interesting to us), but it also means creating a group of relevant followers. Sure we're glad when someone chooses to follow us, but we feel like we've 'hit the mark' when a follower is within our field. Also from purely a time management standpoint, we're trying to be selective so we don't have to sort through the postings of hundreds (or thousands) of those we're following (although I realize there are filters we could use). For us, it's not so much about winning a popularity contest as it is about attracting intelligent, like-minded people and organizations who like what we have to say; and hopefully discovering they too are relevant and interesting, and therefore worth following.

[Permalink](#)

By ikepigott | Birmingham, AL [June 3, 2009 01:47:02 pm](#):

What's funny to me is the "social media gurus" who are worth their salt will tell you Following Ratios and Twitter Etiquette are stupid concepts.

All you're doing is subscribing to a real-time RSS feed.

The word "Follow" is the source of the confusion. I truly "follow" about a dozen people. I "randomly eavesdrop" on about a thousand others whom I have deemed worthy as entrants into my Attention Lottery.

If you think your adding me to your Attention Lottery means automatic entrance into mine, then you must believe that every salesman who knocks on your door or calls you on the phone is entitled to have their pitch heard. (Anything else is a violation of the spirit of Social Media!)

[Permalink](#)

By Rust | Cincinnati, OH [June 3, 2009 01:59:21 pm](#):

I guess Twitter is as good a vehicle as any for those who feel they must continue to relive high school. Of course there's FaceBook.....

[Permalink](#)

By smkim | Atlanta, GA [June 3, 2009 03:51:33 pm](#):

In addition to dialogue, our jobs are also to "listen." Therefore, for those in communications, the reverse ratio (less followers) is far more strategic than trying to appear popular with lots of followers. I agree that there are no rules. It all just depends on what you're trying to accomplish.

[Permalink](#)

By vedinteractive | seattle, WA [June 3, 2009 07:07:13 pm](#):

I follow people who actually have something to say that interest me. It is also a mode of communication with others which as we know is in almost real time.

[Permalink](#)

By MATSNL65 | LOS ANGELES, CA [June 4, 2009 01:06:17 am](#):

I think that most people have Twitter as a broadcasting medium to send people updates and share information. It's that broadcasting that spurs deeper conversation, reaction, and connection. Many use other means to communicate (calling on a phone, email, Facebook, LinkedIn and LinkedIn forums).

What you find on Twitter is a measurement of information that people want to have and how they wish to interact with that information. Some like to multitask and interact with more streams and their senders than the next person who just use tweets as a personal RSS service (which is really attractive to many people).

Langston Richardson
VP, Digital Brand Strategist, Creative
LazBro, Inc.
Twitter: @MATSNL65 @lazbro

[Permalink](#)

By pshoulahan | SAN DIEGO, CA [June 4, 2009 02:35:15 am](#):

The cracks in Twitter's armor are beginning to show. Twitter is not a social engagement tool. Instead, it has become a place where people can advertise just about anything. Why would I want to follow a bunch of spam? My TV shows already get interrupted enough.

It will be interesting to see what happens when they try to monetize the eyeballs they have. I fear that the 60% abandonment rate will be much higher. Perhaps Twitter should have built in a revenue model from the beginning. But alas, they did not. I think they should take the money and run. Mark my words, Twitter will be on the downward slope by the end of 2010.

Thanks,

Patrick Houlahan
VP, Business Development
www.AdJack.tv
Patrick@adjack.tv
[Permalink](#)

By saortega | westport, CT [June 4, 2009 12:24:23 pm](#):

I really enjoyed that article. Didn't browse through the comments because I wanted to get back to my Twitter browsing, but I agree completely with the Ken Wheaton comment at the end. Btw, if anyone is interested in my take on Twitter, check it out on my blog: <http://snarkentary.blogspot.com>

Samantha Ortega
recent grad seeking a job!
Newhouse/Syracuse creative ad major
<http://snarkentary.blogspot.com>
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