

# I don't give a tweet what you're doing

MEGHAN DAUM

**W**HAT AM I doing right now? If you must know, I'm staring at the computer screen, toggling between this column and my e-mail program, my online bank balance and photos of my dog. Oh wait, that was a few seconds ago. Now I'm hungry. Now I'm realizing I have no bread for toast. Now an hour has passed since I started this paragraph.

Do you find this interesting? Me neither. But the Age of Over-sharing is upon us, and those of us who lack enthusiasm for minutia are in a distinct minority. The current enabler-in-chief of this movement? Twitter, that suddenly ubiquitous "microblogging" system that lets users post updates of 140 characters or less that answer the question "what are you doing now?"

Most people still aren't quite sure what Twitter is — with only 14 million users, it's no Facebook yet — but it's insinuated itself into the popular lexicon so vigorously that just about everyone seems to have at least heard of it and its infinitive, "to tweet" (when you use Twitter, technically you are tweeting.)

This is due in large part to a rather sudden media embrace. Last month, both the Doonesbury comic strip and "The Daily Show" poked fun at Twitter and its users, which now include a number of members of Congress (Jon Stewart scolded them for tweeting during hearings). Last week, election protesters in the nation of Moldova were reportedly aided and galvanized by the play-by-play rally updates afforded by Twitter. And over the weekend, when Amazon.com experienced a "glitch" — Amazon's word — that caused tens of thousands of gay-related books to be de-ranked on the site, the Twitter outcry went viral so effectively that the company is now experiencing a major public relations crisis.

Meanwhile, many news outlets, ever desperate to attract even a passing glance from tech-obsessed, attention-impaired youngsters, are now tweeting about breaking news (as well as less-than-breaking, not-necessarily news) with the same vigor they bring to reporting. This week, CNN's Breaking News Twitter

account (then the most popular account, according to the tracking site Twitterholic) was inching toward a record-making 1 million followers ("followers" are the people who actually read your posts). This was apparently so exciting and dramatic that Ashton Kutcher, whose account was ranked third, challenged CNN to see who could be the first to reach that 1 million mark. Guess who won.

Incidentally, the account of Kutcher's wife, Demi Moore, is now ranked 15th. Other popular tweeters include Britney Spears at

No. 2, Barack Obama at No. 6 and Whole Foods Market at No. 24. That's right, nearly 425,000 people have signed up for updates that, presumably, let them know what a \$21 jar of olive oil is doing right now.

Look, some of my best friends are tweeting. I know this because their e-mails now have signatures listing their Twitter account names along with their cellphone numbers, website urls and notices that the message has been sent from a hand-held device (as if that's not obvious because they typed "sluts met 4 lunge" instead of "let's meet for lunch.")

But at the risk of unilaterally offending 14 million people, I need to say this: If Twitter were a person, it would be an emotionally unstable person. It would be that person we avoid at parties and whose calls we don't pick up. It would be the person whose willingness to confide in us at first seems intriguing and flattering but eventually makes us feel kind of gross because the friendship is unearned and the confidence is unjustified. The human incarnation of Twitter, in other words, is the person we all feel sorry for, the person we suspect might be a bit mentally ill, the tragic oversharer.

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## Are Twitter posts merely inane, or do they carry the faint whiff of the insane?

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Of course, privacy as a cultural or even personal value has been going out of style for some time now; in a world without boundaries, Twitter alone cannot be blamed for making spewing into a sport. And, to be fair, its initial function was to serve as an information conduit between close friends and family, the idea being that even if the whole world didn't care that you were buying frozen peas right now, your mother (God help her) still might.

But as Twitter's popularity wobbles at the tipping point between faddish distraction and worldwide obsession, it's worth wondering how much of this "connecting" is simply hastening the erosion of our already compromised interpersonal skills. Are we tweeting because we truly want to communicate with a select group of true friends, or because typing has replaced talking and indiscretion has been stripped of all negative connotations? Are most Twitter posts merely inane, or do they carry the faint whiff of the insane?

The jury's still out. But, along with "what am I doing right now?" maybe it's time to ask "what the hell are we doing?"

mdaum@latimescolumnists.com

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