Sebastian Williams Dr.

Matthew Jones

Composition 101

6 May 2014

Social Media Giants

Since social media’s origin over a decade ago, several sites have enjoyed time in the

spotlight. Indeed, individuals of all ages and lifestyles often manage several social media

accounts at the same time, ranging from the big names to more specific platforms, such as the

book-sharing site Goodreads. The two giants of the moment are likely Facebook, used by

tweens and grandparents alike, and Twitter. Most individuals have one or more of these

accounts and may even use them in integrated ways. For example, Twitter has a feature that

allows users to post their tweets to Facebook, thus updating two sites at once. Often, these sites

share the same major features. Facebook and Twitter are similar on a basic level but differ in

appearance and in the way users employ them.

Facebook has the typical offerings associated with social media sites. Account holders

have a home page containing their “news feed,” a list of posts by other users with whom the

account holder is “friends.” Additionally, posts by fan pages for businesses, products, and

celebrities the account holder “likes” will appear on the news feed. Users can arrange their news

feed by “top stories” or “most recent.” The home page also contains the Facebook chat feature,

where users can instant message one another, and links to the private message page and the

account holder’s personal profile. The individual’s profile contains a personal picture – as well

as a banner picture – biographical information, and a compilation of all the individual’s posts,

called the “timeline.”

Twitter is not much different on these points. The homepage also features a list of tweets

by other users whom the account holder “follows.” The account holder can choose to view a list

of tweets generated by Twitter’s assessment of his or her interests under the “Discover” tab. A

Twitter user also has a profile with his or her photograph situated over a larger photo at the top.

Underneath, the user provides a short biography, his or her location, and a link to a personal

website, if applicable. Direct messaging is also available on a separate page.

Despite these major similarities, Twitter and Facebook differ in the details. On Twitter,

everything from the layout to individual tweets is condensed. Posts are famously limited to 140

letters, numbers, spaces, and other characters, and on the home page, tweets are “collapsed,”

often hiding photos, links, and other users’ responses. A user must click “expand” to view the

whole story. This feature keeps the contents of the homepage uniform. On Facebook, the entire

post (unless the post is unusually long) and many of the comments are always visible.

Additionally, the process for tagging other users in a post differs between Facebook and

Twitter. On Facebook, a user can only tag individuals with whom they “friends,” meaning the

two share information with each other, as well as fan pages. Twitter makes no distinction

between the personal accounts utilized by individuals and the accounts of organizations and

celebrities. Most accounts on Twitter are public, and a user can “follow” an account without that

account “following” them back. The relationship is not necessarily mutual, as it is with

Facebook friends. Any account holder can address another user with that user’s twitter handle

(the @ sign followed by a distinct name or word combination). This tweet will not automatically

appear on the addressed user’s profile, as it would on a “friend’s” Facebook page. The

addressed user would have to “retweet” in order for the tweet to appear on his or her page.

“Retweeting” is similar to “sharing” on Facebook.

These subtle nuances in Twitter and Facebook impact the way the account holders use the

sites. Facebook emphasizes a circle of friends, family, and acquaintances through the mutual

relationship of “friends.” Thus, the information users share on Facebook tends to be personal.

Users are able to post large numbers of photos in albums and additional biographical information

is compiled under the “about” tab. A compilation of the pages a user likes is visible to his or her

friends. Twitter is less about friends and relatives and more about an enlarged conversation.

There is no place for users to upload 200 photos of their latest family vacation. Since most

tweets are public, Twitter users have an expanded audience, and there are more opportunities to

engage with other users who are interested in the same news stories, businesses, and blogs.

Twitter also updates faster because the posts are shorter, creating an ideal environment for news

and conversation in real time.

Facebook and Twitter are similar in their major features. They both provide account

holders with an online platform for connecting with others through posts, profiles, and content

sharing. However, they differ in the details of appearance and focus, thus creating two unique

environments: one that emphasizes friends and personal information and another that highlights

cultural conversations.