



Organizing the world's hashtags

“Tweeting”, #hashtags, FF (Friday follows), RT (retweet), MT (modified tweet): what is it all about and how can we take on yet another aspect of social media? Not so long ago, I was not convinced that I could take time to learn about many of the new tools rising in use and popularity first among post-secondary students and then among journalists and others. I ventured warily into the ‘twitterverse’, cautious of the ‘inane or banal’ elements and optimistic about the opportunities to network, share and learn.

I found out that that # - hashtags were essential to identifying key topic and made discussions more searchable. In twitter help and from watching others who seemed to know what they were doing – they are organic in nature, developed by Twitter users. #idlenomore is an excellent Canadian example. A memorable example for me regarding my conversion to using Twitter came on a quiet afternoon when I was home and suddenly felt the house move and the chair I was sitting in rock back and forth for a few seconds. I checked my usual local news websites, listened to the radio for a relevant report but there was no news. Then, I decided to enter the hashtag #earthquake and immediately found there had been an earthquake felt as far away as Boston. This experience demonstrated the immediacy of news cycles and as I began to participate more, the value as a new medium for news and discussions became apparent.

#Twitterstorians (historians on twitter) may be interested in #cdnhis, #cdnPSE and #cdnpoli. I had no idea, but there is a detailed website related to the world of defining and organizing hashtags: <http://www.hashtags.org>. Hashtags help to establish trends that may be further defined by location. To be located by individuals interested in following historians, researchers, academics, and subject specialists users should include key words that relate to their twitter usage. Including hashtags in your 140-character bio can also be helpful to searches. You should also decide what the purpose of your account will be and what your objectives are. If you are using your account to promote your work, career, or publishing for example, you should only use your account 10 % of the time for this endeavor and use your account to promote the work, activities, and information share by others by retweeting, modifying tweets, and favouriting them. It is important to share valuable resources with your followers and to endorse material appropriate for your community.

There are many conversations that still need to be had regarding social media and its many uses. What is the etiquette of using twitter at a public lecture, an academic conference or workshop? Vanessa Verin’s “Do’s and Don’t for Live Tweeting at Academic conferences: A Working Draft”, from the February 2013 electronic issue of the American Historical Association’s, *AHA Today* (<http://blog.historians.org/news/1953/the-dos-and-donts-of-live-tweeting-at-an-academic-conference-a-working-draft>) suggests that mistakes have been made and that more discussions about what to do and what not to do may be valuable among the profession.

There can be real value in using Twitter to note and share presenters’ ideas in real time and the discussion can be engaging for those not able to attend the session, which can often happen with simultaneous sessions. Do we need to be more open about tweeting to get around the idea that someone is not paying attention when tweeting during paper presentations? Twitter can supplement established networks and it can also serve to prime networks so that academic conferences also become the place where face to face conversations take place after extensive twitter exchanges.

How will scholars use twitter in the future? We know that the Library of Congress is working on archiving “Twitter” since 2006.<sup>[2]</sup> The use of Twitter in future is also an excellent methodology question for students. What can a database of 140 characters reveal about societies? What do we learn from reading the Tweets of the revived personae of @PMJAMacdonald (John A. Macdonald) and @TTLastSpring, Tom Thomson or the many commemorative accounts for the War of 1812? It seems to me there are many conversations to be had and more to learn about using Twitter among historians, academics and the interested public.

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[1] I have benefited from excellent mentoring from public historian Jenn Nelson, @unmuseum for correcting some of my early tweeting errors. See her blog on social media pet peeves, <http://jennnelson.com/2012/06/12/my-social-media-pet-peeves/>.

I would also like to thank Rudayna Bahubeshi, Social Media at HUB Ottawa for discussing her experience with Twitter and her experience as a humanities student and journalist. See <http://ottawa.the-hub.net>.

[2] See the January 2013 article regarding the estimated 170 billion tweets. <http://www.cnn.com/2013/01/07/tech/social-media/library-congress-twitter>