

Digital Life: Celebrities take to Twitter, but for most, it's a one-way tweet

March 20 2009, By Walin Wong

Stars -- they're just like us!

So trumpets *Us Weekly* magazine in a regular feature that pictures celebrities buying toilet paper and wearing sweatpants at the airport. Now, [famous people](#) are joining the "micro-blogging" service [Twitter](#), making them even more like us, or at least like a few million of us.

Of the famous Twitter accounts that have been verified as real, some of the active ones are Ashton Kutcher ([aplusk](#)), Demi Moore ([mrskutcher](#)), Shaquille O'Neal ([THE_REAL_SHAQ](#)) and Sean "Diddy" Combs ([iamdiddy](#)). In the past week, I've learned that Combs fasted for 48 hours drinking only natural juice, and that O'Neal was sad about losing a game on his birthday.

It's riveting stuff. But I would caution against embracing the notion that celebrities on Twitter are just like us. Fans who think they are getting closer to their star crushes by befriending them on Twitter likely are headed for disappointment.

Social media such as Twitter are supposed to be two-way. In other words, these Web services should facilitate communication and build relationships among their members. The Twitter twist on virtual friendships is that members can "follow" others, or sign up to receive their updates, without those people's permission.

Within industry circles or groups of friends, the prevailing etiquette

dictates that you reciprocate when you are followed. I'm happy to follow other bloggers and media professionals even if we've never met, and the resulting conversation can be interesting.

The normal rules of engagement do not apply to celebrities. Kutcher follows 55 people and has more than 292,000 followers, for example. This is not two-way communication.

In fact, the huge disparity between numbers of followers and follow-ees means that celebrities are using Twitter as another broadcast system for their public relations needs.

Ian Corbin created celebritytweet.com in November to aggregate feeds from famous people. This week, he launched a free [iPhone](#) application for his site - all "for the good of Internet stalking," as he put it. But he's not buying into the mystique.

When fans get a response from celebrities, "they completely flip out about it," said Corbin, 28. "They'll say, 'I got my first [celebrity](#) tweet!' like it's a badge or something. ... You get as much communication if you go see Shaq play basketball and wait for him to come out and he says, 'Hey, what's up?' "

Twitter enables celebrities to project an image of wanting to connect with fans. Sometimes they do just that. Moore recently had an adorable exchange with a 15-year-old boy from Knoxville, Tenn., who asked: "do you ever follow or talk to non working actors or famous people?"

Her reply: "of course we do do you?" before asking about his homework.

But even if celebrities are posting updates on social media without the filter of their publicists, they still have an image to maintain. The entertainment industry is a personality-driven business, and it's naive to

think that a Twitter account is exempt from a celebrity's deliberately crafted persona.

Sending digital mash notes to celebrities in the vain hope that they'll validate my wit is a fruitless pursuit that ignores many of Twitter's benefits.

"Most of them are boring," Corbin said of celebrity tweeters. "There are so many more people that post links to interesting stuff or videos that are funny."

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