

How a wedding engagement changes Twitter feeds

February 13 2015



A researcher at the Georgia Institute of Technology has used Twitter as a lens to look into the lives of nearly 1,000 people who used the site to announce their wedding engagement. By comparing tweets before and after, the study was able to determine how people changed their online personas following the proposal. Some differences were split along gender lines. Others identified how people alter the words they use on Twitter after they are engaged.

The study followed 923 people who used "#engaged" to announce in

2011. The research team then looked at each person's [tweets](#) in the nine-month period before the engagement and 12 months afterward (2 million total tweets). They were also compared to a random sampling of tweeters during the same time frame (12 million tweets).

After people got engaged, tweets with the word "I" or "me" dropped by 69 percent. They were replaced with "we" and "us." There was barely any change within the [control group](#).

"People began to paint themselves as a couple, rather than as individuals," said Munmun de Choudhury, a Georgia Tech associate professor in the School of Interactive Computing who led the study. "They're going through a major change in life, and it shows on social media as they adapt to society's expectations of their marital identity."

Similarly, tweets using familial words such as "future-in-laws" and "children" jumped by 219 percent after the proposal (although men tended to wait until after marriage to tweet family-based words).

The study also noticed that men and women gush about each other differently.

The most frequent terms used by females when tweeting about their significant other were tied to emotion (for example, they "love" their "wonderful" fiancé). Men are more likely to use physical descriptors such as sexy, beautiful or gorgeous when talking about their fiancée.

De Choudhury and co-author Michael Massimi also noticed that engaged people are much more likely to think and tweet about the future. Instead of using past-tense verbs, future-tense verbs surged by 62 percent after engagement.

"People are more likely to post that they 'are going on a date night

tonight' rather than tweeting that they already did so," said Massimi, a former postdoctoral fellow at Microsoft Research Cambridge. "They're looking forward to the future in their real lives and boasting about it on social media too."

This is the first empirical study of engagement in social media. It centered on the anthropological concept of liminality - a phase people undergo when they transition from one role in society to another.

"Twitter can be a powerful tool that can mirror our thoughts and how we're actually feeling," said de Choudhury, who has done similar [social media](#) studies on mothers and postpartum depression. "This isn't based on what they told us they did. It's a reliable record → it's what they actually did."

More information: [The paper](#), "She Said Yes!" Liminality and Engagement Announcements on Twitter," was accepted and will be presented at iConference 2015 in Newport Beach, California, March 24-27.

Provided by Georgia Institute of Technology

Citation: How a wedding engagement changes Twitter feeds (2015, February 13) retrieved 11 May 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2015-02-engagement-twitter.html>

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