Part 2: Ethnomethodological Study (Retweets)

Ethnomethodology is the study of the common methods that individuals reason about, understand and approach everyday problems and tasks (Garfinkel, 1967) [1]. Ethnomethodology focuses on the social context of tasks and behaviour, as shown in this analysis of the convention of Retweeting on Twitter, which is a socially emergent convention as a direct result of social behaviour.

Retweeting is a convention that emerged by use of the varied syntax, purposes, uses and social-groups that are involved with the concept; now a convention. Twitter’s developers recently added a Retweet function with limited functionality and flexibility; it was not originally a part of Twitter (Boyd et al, 2010) [2]. Retweeting is structurally a method of rebroadcasting a message local to a user’s own timeline and list of followers such that their own followers can see a Tweet that they may not otherwise. There are several social-purposes of Retweeting (in relation to social-networking site, Facebook):

- Showing that a user likes somebody else’s Tweet (Facebook “Like”).
- Add a comment about the original Tweet (Facebook “Comments”).
- Have conversations (Facebook “Wall”).
- Promote self/others (Facebook “Pages”/“Status”).

In addition to the multiple purposes of Retweeting, there are two methods of Retweeting. Firstly a Retweet function on all of Twitter’s interfaces (e.g. website and iPhone application, see Fig. 1 and 2) and secondly manually retweeting. Often this is with the use of the keyword “RT” (Appendix 7).
Retweeting serves as a basis to have quick conversations with others especially for those users who are friends (Appendix 5); here retweets are being used to hold group conversations. The original tweet is tweeted such that everybody following the user can see and is aimed at everyone, then a second user rewteets manually using the RT keyword and prefixing a response (now directing the retweet to just the original tweeter). The original tweet includes the words “Byee everyone” but the retweet was a direct response. This shows users are socially compensating for the limitations of Twitter (e.g. no chat facility) by holding conversations using the retweet convention. Perhaps suggesting that a new functionality of conversing might be introduced. Due to the retrospective nature of ethnomethodology this cannot be commented on further because the future conventions are unknown to date.

Retweeting is also used to show that a tweet is well liked so prefixing/appending a message can portray this, as shown in Appendices 1 and 3. Appendix 1 shows a manual retweet whereas Appendix 3 shows an automatic retweet. The manual retweet prefixes “Good times” to the tweet signifying the liking of the original tweet, but also to self-promote because the user mentioned (@mikethemiz) in the original tweet is a celebrity-figure. The retweet in Appendix 1 therefore has multipurpose. Some users tend to use auto-retweets because it is convenient; from a social perspective this complements the ease of using a social networking website.

Another celebrity-promotion retweet is shown in the automatic retweet in Appendix 2 where a fan has retweeted a celebrity’s tweet. This shows that the fan has an interest in the topic of wrestling and has therefore promoted her own interest and also helped
to promote the celebrity in the process. Appendix 3 shows the reverse of Appendix 2. It is now a celebrity retweeting a fan – this has an impact on other users because it becomes a new topic to talk about because a celebrity has interacted with a fan. A celebrity retweeting a fan has a bigger impact as shown in the nature of the tweets of Appendix 4. Therefore a retweet can influence other tweets and an increase in activity by those users surrounded. Showing that a non-celebrity follower of the fan has acknowledged the retweet that was carried out by the celebrity stated in Appendix 3 – hence indicating that a retweet from a superior figure such as a celebrity can have a bigger impact; suggesting some social-groups will use retweeting for different purposes and will also be effected in different ways from a retweet.

The transcripts show that some users use Twitter’s automatic retweet function (Fig. 1 and 2) whereas other users use the social (but varied) syntax that in fact ‘invented’ the retweeting function on Twitter. Appendix 7 shows the multiple ways that a user may want to manually retweet because it allows for appending/prefixing messages, something that Twitter does not allow in the built in retweeting function.

Concluding, different social-groups (fans, celebrities) use retweeting in their own way depending on the different implied meaning behind the retweet, thus serving a different purpose. Depending on the social-groups retweeting will differ and the effect of retweets will certainly differ. The retrospective nature of ethnomethodology does not suggest how behaviour will change or what new conventions will be created, however Appendix 6 suggests that socially emergent, context-based vocabulary may be the new Twitter convention we are headed towards.

(Word count: 800, excluding Appendices, Figures and Captions)
Appendix 1

Manual Retweet for Celebrity Promotion (mikethemiz and 987LA)

987LA (98.7 FM) tweeted a message and mentioned the user (celebrity and pro-wrestler) @mikethemiz to promote a visit. This was followed up by a MANUAL retweet by @mikethemiz with a prefixed message to show that he likes the original tweet and to self-promote himself because the retweet still contains the @mention for himself. The prefixed message is “Good times” followed by the RT keyword, and then the original tweet to show this is a retweet.

Original Tweet:

![Original Tweet](image)

Manual Retweet using RT:

![Manual Retweet](image)
Appendix 2

Auto Retweet for Celebrity Promotion (JoeyStyles and YessicaRivera)

An employee/commentator (Joey Styles) for WWE promotes and hypes the return of the Chairman of the company on TV for the same night. A fan (Yessica Rivera) then does an automatic retweet using Twitter's own retweet function to help promote the celebrity topic. Thus showing that a fan has an interest in the topic thus has involved herself to the topic by attempting to promote her interest, and as a result re-promote by using the retweet function.

Original Tweet:

---

JoeyStyles Joey Styles
WWE Chairman, Mr. McMahon returns to @WWE TV tonight to begin Monday Night Raw live at 9/8 C on @USA_Network!
7 Feb

Automatic Retweet:

---

JoeyStyles Joey Styles  via YessicaRivera
WWE Chairman, Mr. McMahon returns to @WWE TV tonight to begin Monday Night Raw live at 9/8 C on @USA_Network!
7 Feb
Appendix 3

Automatic Retweet by Celebrity to show Liking a Tweet (JohnCena and ilovejusmainee)

This example shows the reverse of Appendix 2. This is a celebrity retweeting a fan (a more rare occasion on Twitter). The fan originally tweets to hope that singer – Justin Bieber; pro-wrestler and actor – John Cena and singer – Justin Timberlake all follow her because she is following them. John Cena does an automatic Retweet for the fan’s original tweet to show that he likes her tweet and is now also following her on Twitter.

Note: Due to the fan having more than 4000 tweets and her activity on Twitter being extremely frequent on a daily basis it was not possible to find the original tweet. This is because the tweet is old and would take a lot of searching time. However because the retweet was automatic (thus editing the original tweet is not possible) it is safe to say the original tweet does exist.

Retweet by the Celebrity (JohnCena):

![Retweet by JohnCena](image-url)
Appendix 4

Effect of Appendix 3

This example shows the affect that some retweets have. This is a follow on from Appendix 3. A friend of the fan mentioned in Appendix 3 comments that she was retweeted by a celebrity-figure. This shows that some social-groups retweeting can have a larger effect than an ordinary person retweeting. This is evidently because of the popularity of any celebrity in comparison to any fan. For similar reasons to Appendix 3 – the original tweet cannot be found, however the retweet is shown below.

Retweet:

ilovejustmainee

RT @CenationUCME: @ilovejustmainee wow u got a RT from John Cena! congrats :)
Appendix 5

Retweeting Serving as Conversation-Feature (ilovejusmainee and JustMeitisa)

This example shows retweets can be used as a way to hold conversations as either a group or a person-to-person basis. The original tweet shows that the tweet is directed in a conversational manner to everyone, however the retweet shows that the prefixed message is directed only at the original tweeter.

*Original Tweet:*

```
JustMeitisa Hey! Me Melt$a <3
Byee everyone ..i gotta go!! :D Byee
5 hours ago
```

*Retweet with prefixed message (as a reply in conversation):*

```
ilovejusmainee it's me <3charmme
Bye! :D RT @JustMeitisa: Byee everyone ..i gotta go!! :D Byee
5 hours ago
```
Appendix 6

Retweeting perhaps Socially Emerging Other Conventions?

This example shows the impact of Twitter and related-vocabulary that is beginning to arise because of the social-uses of Twitter. This tweet shows the use of the word – “tweetdreamsh” which is a play on the phrase “sweet dreams”. The “sh” suffix is added for a baby-talk effect which is not relevant. However the use of the word “tweet” in a common phrase shows that as social tasks e.g. conversations take place, more users are influenced to using new socially emergent conventions, even this type of terminology.

![Example Tweet](image)
**Appendix 7**

**Varied Manual Retweet Templates**

The example retweets are purely fictional. This is to simply show that there is no fixed way of manually retweeting as there is in automatic retweets via Twitter.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Template</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RT: @user “original tweet” – appended message</td>
<td>RT: @qmid2011 “Coursework marks released” – Thanks I got an A in this coursework!!!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RT @user: original tweet &lt;&lt;&lt; appended message</td>
<td>RT @qmid2011: Coursework marks released &lt;&lt;&lt; Thanks I got 100% in this coursework!!!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>prefixed message RT: @user original tweet</td>
<td>What a fun night! RT: @TheUser I played twister with @SomeOtherUser and @AnotherPerson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RT @user “original message” #hashtag</td>
<td>RT @TheUser “I am now a Farther” #SpellingFail</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RT @user “original message” #hashtag appended message</td>
<td>RT @TheUser “I am now a Farther” #SpellingFail Back to school maybe?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This list is by no means exhaustive.

Retweeting manually can be done in any format, specified above, or in any other manner using different syntax, a different ordering of the main elements of a retweet or by even editing the original message and then retweeting.
References
