

The pragmatics of rebroadcasting content on Twitter: How is retweeting relevant?

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Sharing and Rebroadcasting

Rebroadcasting involves sharing existing, usually third-party, content with other users in an online social network.



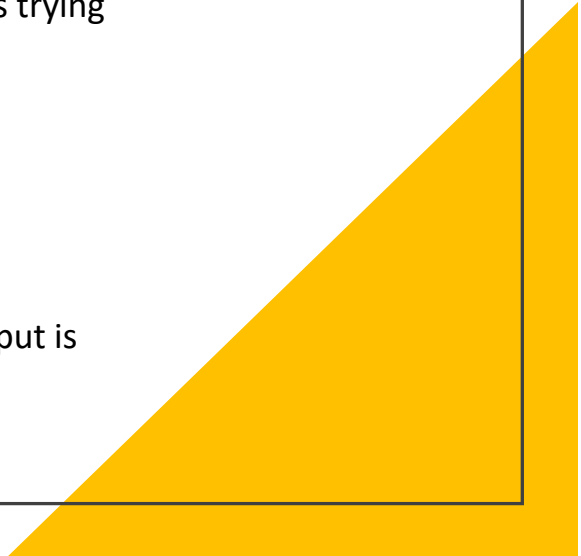
Aim of this talk is to establish that...

- Rebroadcasting is an ostensive act. It is an act of showing.
 - Rebroadcasting is attributive in nature;
 - We find the same range of attributive uses in acts of rebroadcasting as we do in offline acts of communication.
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Rebroadcasting as an Ostensive Act

- Rebroadcasting causes a post to appear in the timeline or feed of anyone following the rebroadcaster's account.
- The rebroadcaster is, in effect, showing the post to her followers.
- According to Sperber and Wilson (1995: 49) there is 'no point in drawing someone's attention to a phenomenon unless it will seem relevant enough to him to be worth his attention'.
- By requesting someone's attention you are communicating that you think that 'by paying attention,[the addressee] will gain some relevant information'(49).

Ostension and Expectations of Relevance

- 'Someone who engages in any kind of ostensive behaviour intentionally draws some attention to himself' and by doing so makes manifest the assumption that 'he is trying to be relevant' (Sperber and Wilson 1995: 53-54).
 - An audience is entitled to assume that the communicator is aiming at optimal relevance.
 - A stimulus will be optimally relevant when the effort required to process the input is warranted by the resulting cognitive effects.
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How is rebroadcasting relevant?

- Zaki (2017: 46) suggests that sharing be seen as the 'virtual equivalent of reported speech in cyberspace'.
- 'Quotations are the most obvious examples of utterances used to represent not what they describe but what they resemble' (Sperber and Wilson 1995: 228).
- We can understand rebroadcasting as *attributive use*.

Descriptive and Attributive Uses

- (1) Esam: What did Lee say when you asked him to come next week?
- (2) Mel: I'm not talking to you.

Descriptive: Mel is not talking to Esam.

Attributive: Lee is not talking to Mel.

Attributive Use and Relevance

Different varieties of attributive use achieve relevance in different ways:

- **Informative:** To inform the audience of the content of the attributed thought (Wilson & Sperber 2012: 128).
- **Phatic:** To indicate that the preceding utterance has been heard and understood (Sperber & Wilson 1981, p.306).

(3) Bob: I've got toothache

(4) Dentist: **You've got toothache.** Let's take a look.

The dentist 'meant to indicate that the preceding utterance has been heard and understood'

(Sperber and Wilson 1981, p.306)



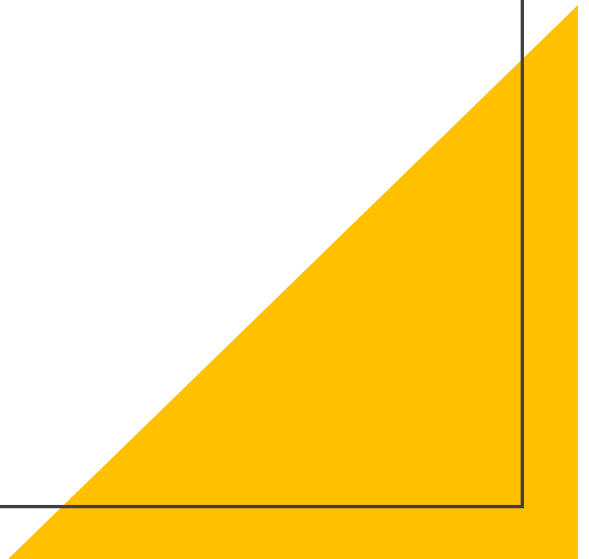
Attributive Use and Relevance

Different varieties of attributive use achieve relevance in different ways:

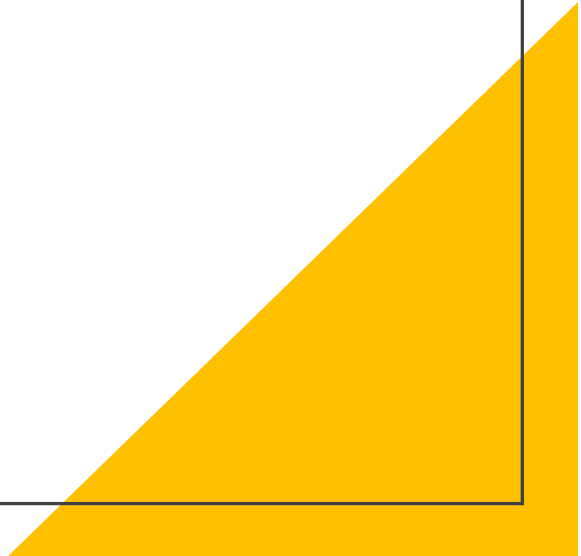
- **Informative:** To inform the audience of the content of the attributed thought (Wilson & Sperber 2012: 128).
- **Phatic:** To indicate that the preceding utterance has been heard and understood (Sperber & Wilson 1981, p.306).
- **Echoic:** To convey an attitude or reaction to the attributed thought (Wilson and Sperber 2012: 128-9).

Why do people (say they) retweet?

Findings from boyd et al (2010).



What do you think are the different reasons for why people [retweet] something (boyd et al. 2010)

- a) To save tweets for future personal access.
 - b) To amplify or spread tweets to new audiences.
 - c) To entertain or inform a specific audience, or as an act of curation.
 - d) To comment on someone's tweet by retweeting and adding new content, often to begin a conversation.
 - e) To make one's presence as a listener visible.
 - f) To publicly agree with someone.
 - g) To validate others' thoughts.
 - h) As an act of friendship, loyalty, or homage by drawing attention, sometimes via a retweet request.
 - i) To recognise or refer to less popular people or less visible content.
 - j) For self-gain, either to gain followers or reciprocity from more visible participants.
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(b) To amplify or spread tweets to a new audience

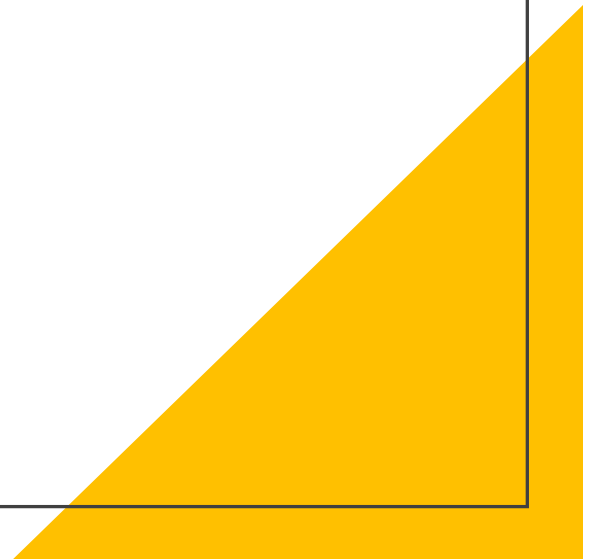
(c) To entertain or inform a specific audience, or as an act of curation.

These retweets are motivated by the retweeter's belief that the information will be relevant to their followers.

Informative Retweeting

A non-communicative motive?

(a) To save tweets for future personal access.



Attitudinal (Echoic)



Attitudinal Retweeting



(d) To comment on someone's tweet by retweeting and adding new content, often to begin a conversation.

(f) To publicly agree with someone.

(g) To validate others' thoughts.

In these cases, the motivation for retweeting is (at least partly) to communicate an attitude to the original message.



Social
(Phatic)
Retweeting



Barack Obama  @BarackObama · Oct 1

...

Happy 97th birthday, President Carter! Thank you for the extraordinary example of lifelong service that you've set for all of us.

 1.9K

 12.4K

 175.2K



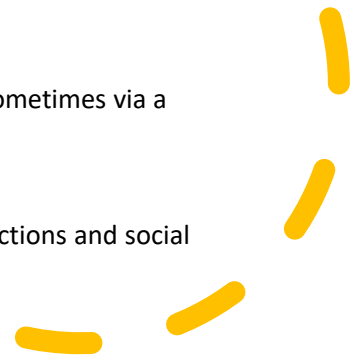
Social (Phatic) Retweeting

(d) To comment on someone's tweet by retweeting and adding new content, **often to begin a conversation.**

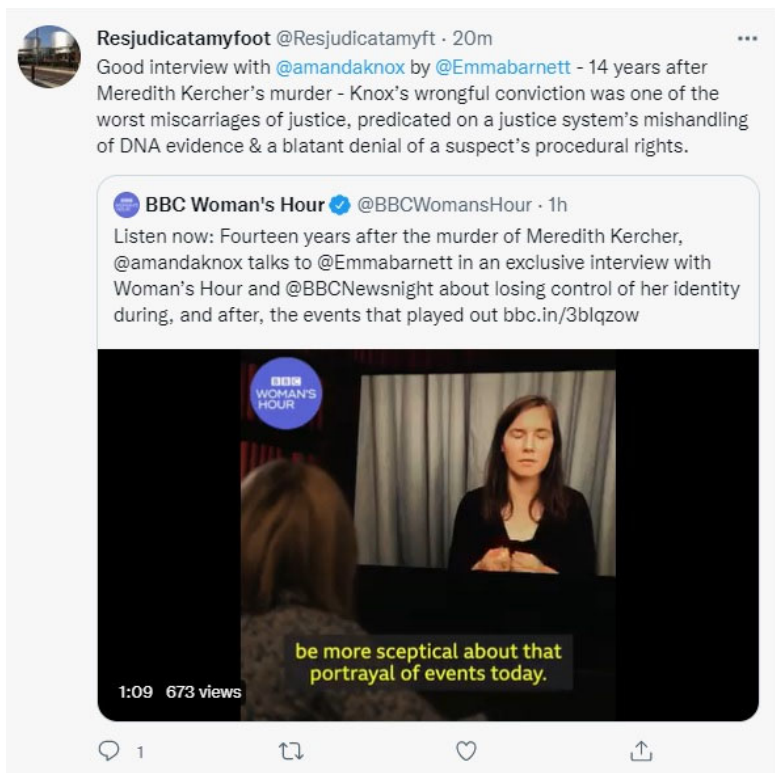
(e) To make one's presence as a listener visible.

(h) As an act of friendship, loyalty, or homage by drawing attention, sometimes via a retweet request.

Some users knowingly use the retweet option to manage social interactions and social relationships.



To comment on someone's tweet by retweeting and adding new content, often to begin a conversation.



Perlocutionary Motivations

In some cases, the respondents to boyd et al.'s survey framed their response in terms of the perlocutionary acts that were performed.

They explained their actions in terms of effects of the act on the participants involved:

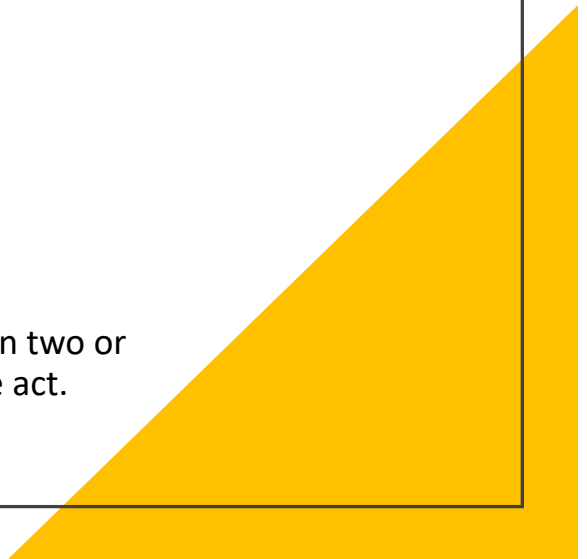
- (i) To recognise or refer to less popular people or less visible content.
- (j) For self-gain, either to gain followers or reciprocity from more visible participants.
- (c) **To entertain** or inform a specific audience, or as an act of curation.

Relevance and Rebroadcasting

Retweets (like other attributive uses) may achieve relevance in various ways:

1. Informative
2. Social / Phatic
3. Echoic

NB: These categories are not mutually exclusive, and one tweet may be relevant in two or all of these ways, each of which may play a role in the overall interpretation of the act.



References

Boyd, d., Golder, S. & Lotan, G., 2010. Tweet, tweet and retweet: Conversational aspects of retweeting on Twitter. Honolulu HI, s.n., pp. 1-10.

Sperber, D. Wilson, D., 1981. Irony and the use-mention distinction. In: Cole, P., (Ed.), Radical Pragmatics. Academic Press, New York, pp. 295-318.

Sperber, D. & Wilson, D., 1995. Relevance: Communication and Cognition. Oxford: Blackwell.




Wilson, D. & Sperber, D., 2012. Meaning and Relevance. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Zaki, M. 2017. The pragmatics of Arabic religious posts on Facebook: A relevance-theoretic account. Res. Lang., 15(1), pp.37-60.




Online Audiences and Relevance

- It has been argued that when communicating on one-to-many social media platforms such as Twitter, users are writing for what has become known as an 'imagined audience' (Marwick and boyd, 2011; Brake, 2012; Litt, 2012; Litt and Hargittai, 2016).
- "In broadcast communication, a stimulus can even be addressed to whoever finds it relevant. The communicator is then communicating her presumption of relevance to whoever is willing to entertain it" (Sperber and Wilson 1995: 158).




Retweeting and Endorsements






James Mackintosh ✓
@jmackin2
Senior Markets Columnist at the Wall Street Journal. Ex FT Investment Editor (writer of Short View column). Retweets not endorsements. Views mine. All...






Rohit Kachroo ✓
@RohitKachrooITV
Security Editor for @itvnews. Previously, UK Editor. Before that, Africa Correspondent for @itvnews and @nbcnews. Retweets aren't...






John Sinnott ✓
@JohnSinnott
Supervising Producer of CNN International's digital sport team. All views my own. Retweets are not endorsements.



zenaida machado ✓
@zenaidamz
Mozambican. Researcher, Human Rights Watch. Ex-BBC World Service journalist. Most of my tweets are about Lusophone Africa. Retweets are not...



Caroline Wyatt ✓
@CarolineWyatt
BBC Religious Affairs Correspondent. Was BBC Defence, Paris, Moscow, Berlin/Bonn corr. Views my own, not BBC's. Retweets not endorsements.



Mary Nightingale ✓
@nightingaleitv
Presenter @ITVEveningNews but I tweet my own views. Retweets are not endorsements etc etc. Find out more on my website.

Retweeting and Endorsements



Owen Jones Retweeted



Daniel mcdougall @Danielmcdouga13 · 14 hrs

@OwenJones84 you tell yourself that !! If it makes you feel better! your one of the most leftie idiots on here Owen



1



9



[View conversation](#)



Owen Jones @OwenJones84 · 15 hrs

The worst is people on Twitter who dress up being unpleasant people as something political. Nope. Just an unpleasant person.



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[View conversation](#)