

Everything I hate is on Twitter – how can the alternatives compete?

Level 3: Advanced

1 Warmer

a. Discuss the questions below.

1. Are you on Social Media? Which platforms do you use?
2. Do you have an active X account (formerly known as Twitter)? How often do you use the app?
3. What do you think made X so successful?
4. Do you know any alternatives to X? Would you try them? Why (not)?

2 Key words

a. Fill the gaps in the sentences using these key words from the text.

broad brush	curate	discourse	disgruntle	goad
half-hearted	hooliganism	inalienable	incitement	monetise
overhang	repartee	triviality	verification	

1. _____ is funny and quick remarks in conversation.
2. _____ is something that has a negative effect on a situation.
3. _____ is the act of encouraging someone to do something violent.
4. To _____ is to make money from something.
5. _____ is the act of checking that something is true or correct.
6. _____ is debate or discussion.
7. If something is _____, it cannot be taken away.
8. To _____ is to select content to be included in a collection or website.
9. Something that is _____ is considered in a general way without paying attention to minor differences or details.
10. To _____ is to make someone react to something by continuously upsetting or annoying them.
11. If someone is _____, they are annoyed, unhappy, or disappointed about something.
12. _____ means showing no interest or enthusiasm.

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13. A _____ is something that is not important.
14. _____ is the actions of a violent person who causes damage in public spaces.

b. Now, use words from task a to complete the sentences. You may need to change the form of the word.

1. They decided to invest in the app because they saw its _____ potential.
2. I fully trust her recommendations. She works as a university _____ at a library.
3. The paper has decided to go in a new direction, and this has _____ many regular readers.
4. I believe any comments that _____ hatred should be removed.
5. I don't think that problem is a _____, but there are more important things to discuss today.
6. Unfortunately, the victim provided no _____ details, and the suspect was released.
7. The article should serve as a _____ to action.
8. _____ the controversy is the question of how much individuals should be held accountable for systemic wrongdoing.
9. "Of course," he answered _____. He did not care.
10. It was not the first time those football fans had been accused of _____.

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When Elon Musk took over the platform, the downward slide was depressing. But then, the horror may always have been a big part of its appeal

Zoe Williams

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- 1 “And he couldn’t do it. He could not die. How could he leave? How could he go? Everything he hated was here.” The end of Philip Roth’s *Sabbath’s Theater* is a perfect distillation of how many of us felt about Twitter when Elon Musk bought it last October. But I didn’t know that from reading it, even though I have; I knew that because someone faster, smarter, probably younger, with a better memory (@hayleycampbell) put it on Twitter.
- 2 So even though everything I hate is there, so is a lot of what I love. My father never owned a TV because he said every time you thought you were good at something – cooking, repartee, being alive – on the telly, there’d be someone who was better at it than you. I thought that was just an unlovely overhang of a 40s childhood: the whole point of repartee, and indeed cooking and being alive, is that the more people who can do it, the better. Also, I really wanted a TV.
- 3 Quite soon after Musk’s purchase of the platform, more of what I hated was there. Donald Trump was readmitted, having been barred to avoid the risk of further incitement of violence after the ambush of the Capitol in 2021 – and the sheer brazenness of the free speech justification was depressing to witness.
- 4 Blue ticks were monetised, destroying any trust in verification while generating not much revenue. Some staff walked, some were fired, and the endless pranks of the new owner – walking into HQ with a sink, sending a turd emoji as an auto-response to journalist enquiries – were, again, deadening to watch. A rich enough man can erode workplace rights yet talk about the work ethic of his staff; he can drag the discourse into a mire and have you debating that as an inalienable freedom; he can engage the whole world in having the wrong conversation.
- 5 And at the user level, Twitter was rubbish. Long conversations I wasn’t interested in flooded my timeline. How could this possibly have been specifically curated “for me” when I blocked all that stuff years ago? Was it just a broad-brush algorithm for the middle-aged, or a more precisely targeted goading?
- 6 My direct messages, meanwhile, were full of accounts with pretty avatars touting a scam that was quite novel to me. A young woman who wants to sell you some crypto but has also just split up with her boyfriend and is drunk: fair play; I’m glad to know this exists as a genre. As alternatives to Twitter sprang up, the question moved on: Mastodon, the so-called “fediverse”, was an early migration option and ticked all the right boxes politically. It can never be bought, is democratically moderated, and is also nothing like horrible enough. There are more mature faults to find – it is more sparsely populated, and the timelines are quite repetitive – but the main void is of gleeful spite. Despite hating Twitter, there is something compelling about the horror of it all.
- 7 Threads, Mark Zuckerberg’s rival network tied to Instagram, overcame many of those early hurdles just by having more money and being part of an existing platform: almost overnight, it had 100 million users. People with large armies of followers mourned the fact that they would have to start from scratch, but rebuilding didn’t seem as unrealistic as it did on Mastodon. It was also gratifying to see the new platform work so well, having scooped up so many of Twitter’s disgruntled employees, and more pleasing still to see Musk’s half-hearted legal challenge to Zuckerberg on that basis. It turns out there are still kinks in the winner-takes-all capitalist model; your employees are still free to work for your competitors.
- 8 Essentially, all these town-square platforms, the rivalries and differences between them, and more importantly, the emotional and intellectual investments we make to build them, make questions that have been building for years more pressing. What makes Wikipedia Wikipedia – an astonishing display of human cooperation and expertise, of both unbelievable richness and winsome peculiarity – and Facebook Facebook – a place where people gather to drive each other into unlovely spasms

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of envy, delusion, triviality, and extremism?
What is it about the funding models, the governance and the vision that creates such incredibly different experiences from the same raw material: people participating? Is it as simple as the profit motive, and if so, why aren't all non-profit platforms naturally, atmospherically, better?

- 9 In one way, Musk did everyone who cared about Twitter a favour, teaching us how vulnerable it was to the hooliganism of one ego, but we must figure out some solution better than “boycott and find a hobby”; we don't need Zuckerberg to teach us that lesson twice.

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3 Comprehension check

a. Which of the following statements reflect the author's point of view? Choose all that apply.

1. I have a love–hate relationship with Twitter.
2. After Musk bought Twitter, the verification process became more intense.
3. Musk should have engaged the world in a more meaningful discourse.
4. My experience on Twitter changed: suddenly, there was less irrelevant and annoying content.
5. I was bombarded by messages from avatars looking for a new boyfriend.
6. I appreciate that Mastodon is democratically moderated, but it's not horrible enough.
7. Threads had the advantage of being tied to Instagram and had millions of users overnight.
8. I think it is basically the profit model that differentiates these platforms.
9. The best way of dealing with this situation is to get off Twitter and spend time on other things.

4 Key language

a. Match the adverbs in the left-hand column with the adjectives in the right-hand column to make phrases from the article. Scan the article for these words to help you.

- | | |
|-------------------|--------------|
| 1. specifically | a. curated |
| 2. democratically | b. different |
| 3. sparsely | c. moderated |
| 4. unbelievably | d. peculiar |
| 5. winsomely | e. populated |
| 6. incredibly | f. rich |

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b. What other adverb–adjective collocations do you know? Write sentences about online platforms using some of the collocations below.

absolutely devastated/fantastic/stupid/ridiculous	bitterly disappointed
deeply concerned/divided	highly controversial/unlikely
completely different	perfectly normal
readily available	reasonably priced/well

- 1. _____
- 2. _____
- 3. _____
- 4. _____
- 5. _____
- 6. _____
- 7. _____
- 8. _____

5 Discussion

a. Discuss these questions.

- Which of the author’s points do you agree or disagree with? Why?
- What are the consequences of a single platform monopolising the market? Do you think there should be laws that limit this, or do you think it is a natural consequence of a good product?
- What would make platforms like Twitter, Facebook and Instagram better?
- What do you know about the alternative platforms mentioned in the article (Mastodon and Threads)?
- What solution can you imagine that would be better than “boycott and find a hobby”?



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6 In your own words

- a. Research two alternatives to Twitter. Complete the table below. Choose some aspects to evaluate below or add your own in the left column.

quality/diversity of content
tone

user experience
discourse/topics

account verification/trust
advertising

Category/Aspect	Twitter	Option A	Option B

- b. Write a short comment in reply to this article with your opinion and some of the information you have come across in your research.