

# TWITTER FOR DESKTOP



HEURISTIC  
EVALUATION

“ — Internally we called this project '*Delight*' ”

Jesar Shah, web redesign product lead (Padres 2019)

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# INTRODUCTION

Twitter's desktop redesign successfully creates a platform that delights and engages users. An evaluation using Nielsen's 10 Heuristics for User Interface reveals that Twitter is easy to navigate, engages users through frequent feedback, and supports key affordances for online interaction.

A study found that using Twitter for informational purposes is positively correlated with Conscientiousness and Need for Cognition (Hughes et al. 2012, 566). The authors speculate that "information sought on Twitter might be more cognitively based, such as academic or political information that is best gained by reading source materials, for which links are often 'tweeted'" (Hughes et al. 2012, 567). This is consistent with the impact of the design choices that Twitter made in their 2019 desktop redesign. By making the like, comment, and retweet affordances front and center, the designers make their vision that "Twitter is for conversation" (Pardes 2019) salient to the users. A sleek, minimalistic interface draws the users attention to the platform's content and makes for easy scrolling.

While there are minor inconsistencies within platform, they do not impede usability. Small tweaks to error messages, icons, and user control features can easily remedy these issues.

# NIELSEN'S 10 HEURISTICS

Usability consultant Jacob Nielsen developed his 10 heuristics after synthesizing common usability problems from 11 projects. They describe “general rules that seem to describe common properties of usable interfaces” (Nielsen 1994b). A heuristic evaluation offers the benefit of being cost effective, suitable for low-fidelity and high-fidelity products, and is in terms of established usability principles (Nielsen 1994b).

This report assesses Twitter's 2019 desktop redesign using Nielsen's 10 Heuristics. The platforms adherence to each usability heuristic will be scored on a scale of 0-4, with 0 representing non-issues and 4 representing catastrophic usability impairments (Nielsen 1994c). This report suggests improvements to Twitter's interface and finally synthesizes its findings. The designers intention of creating a platform that facilitates conversation and delights users is taken into account when evaluating each criteria.

# @twitter

Twitter was launched in July 2006 as a side project of the podcasting company Odeo (History 2020). Originally named twittr, the microblogging platform was designed to share short status updates with SMS (History 2020). Users are limited to 280 characters per Tweet to share updates, art, and ideas. The platform also supports direct messaging, replies, and its signature trending tab that showcases popular hashtags and news stories (Lee 2019). This idea of Twitter as conversation was at the heart of the desktop's 2019 redesign (Padres 2019). In its first redesign in seven years, Twitter's design team increased personalization, added additional content containers, and updated the overall appearance of the website (Padres 2019).



Conversation



Collaboration

“

People use Twitter a lot on desktop to look for information, and it tends to be around their interests so we’re trying to make that easier for people, and leverage these new spaces we’ve created on the site and compliment their primary browsing experience.

Jesar Shah, web redesign product lead (Padres 2019)

”

# SCORING

from Nielsen 1994c

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0

I don't agree that this is a  
usability problem at all

1

Cosmetic problem only:  
need not be fixed unless extra  
time is available on project

2

Minor usability problem:  
fixing this should be given low  
priority

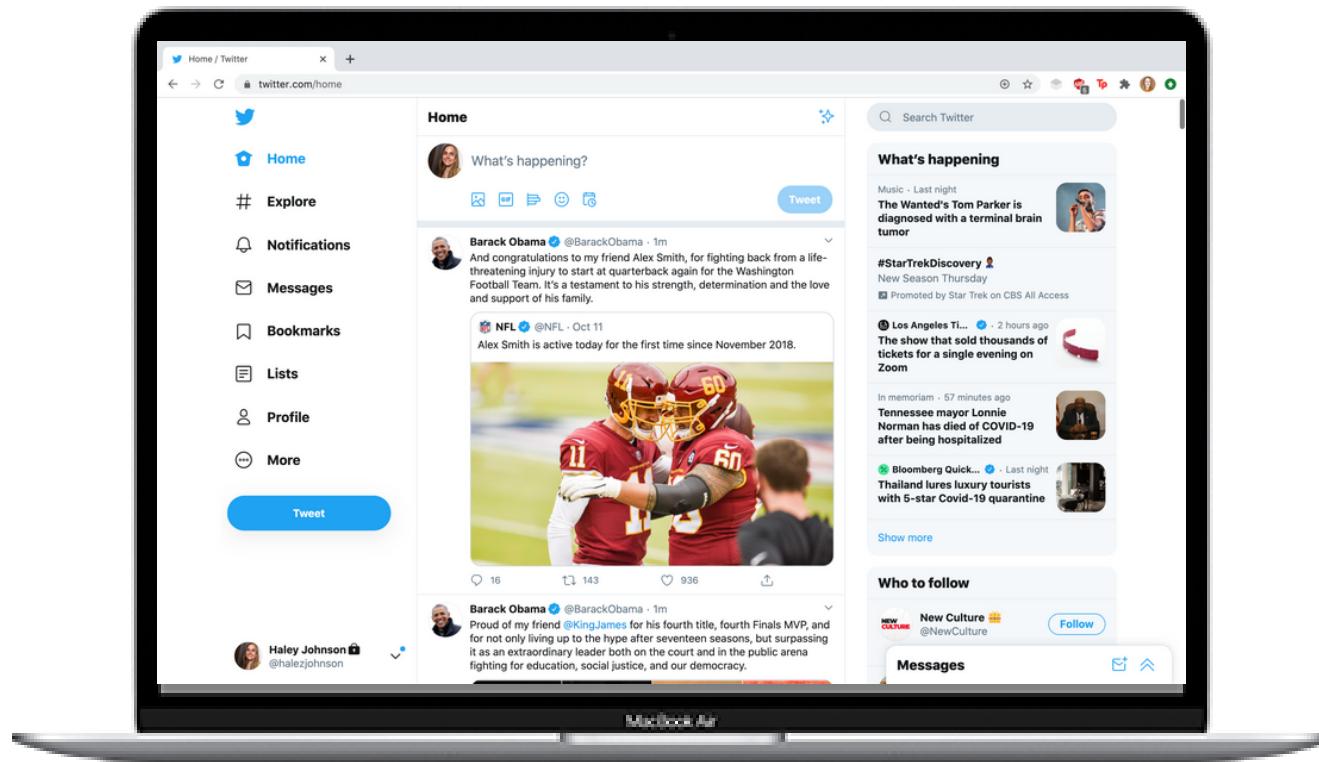
3

Major usability problem:  
important to fix, so should be  
given high priority

4

Usability catastrophe:  
imperative to fix this before  
product can be released

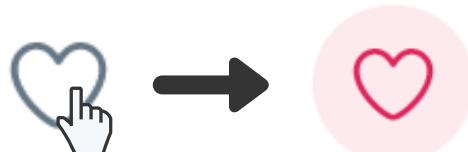
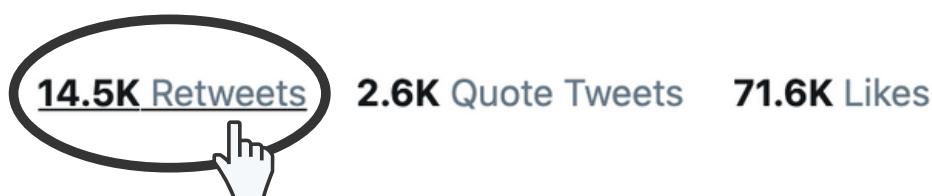
# NIELSEN'S 10 HEURISTICS



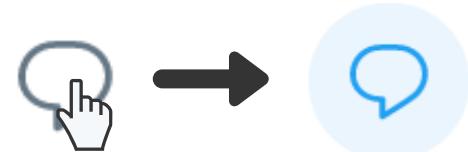
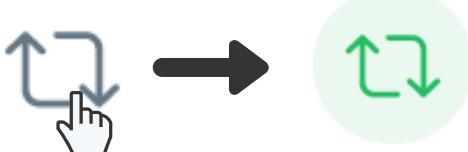
## FOR USER INTERFACE

# 01 VISIBILITY OF SYSTEM STATUS

Tweets are limited to 280 characters. The portion of the circle filled in with blue is equal to the percentage of available characters they've used.



Twitter provides feedback to indicate to users they successfully interacted with a post. Changing colors and underlined text confirm interactions. These changes are perceived as instantaneous by the user.



Here, the user has replied to a tweet, but blue coloring hasn't been applied. The like button is still colored.



**RECOMMENDATION:** Standardize coloring to ensure users know they've successfully interacted with a feature.

*The system should keep users informed with appropriate feedback*

**RATING: 1**  
COSMETIC PROBLEM ONLY

## 02 MATCH BETWEEN THE SYSTEM & REAL WORLD

The menu bar uses visual metaphors to match features with icons. The icons also signal the kind of actions associated with a feature. More frequently used features are near the top, making them easy for users to locate. The vertical orientation implies a hierarchy of tasks and guides new users to relevant actions.



**Skeeter Valentine**  
@slimmzilla2924

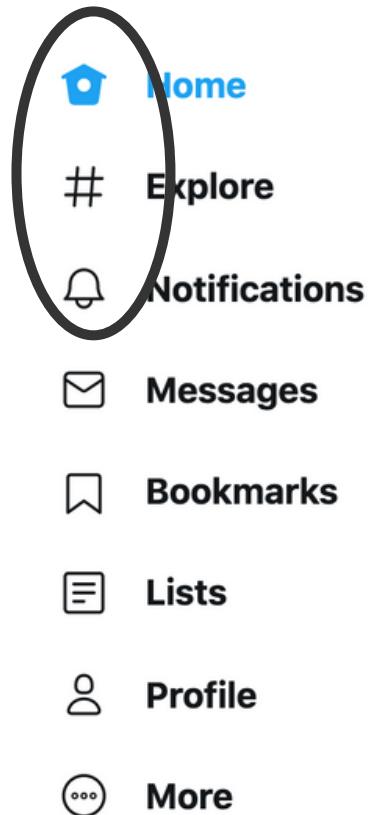
Vegans will look you dead in the eye and tell you cauliflower taste like ribs...

6:10 PM · Oct 9, 2020 · Twitter for Android

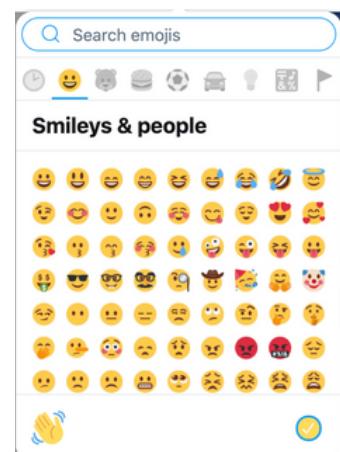
14.5K Retweets 2.6K Quote Tweets 71.5K Likes



Twitter supports conventional social media affordances such as liking, replying, and commenting. It conforms to industry standards.



Emojis simulate real world objects, emotional states, and concepts (Newman 2017b).



*The system should speak the users' language and follow real-world conventions*

**RATING: 0**  
NO USABILITY PROBLEM

# 03 USER CONTROL & FREEDOM

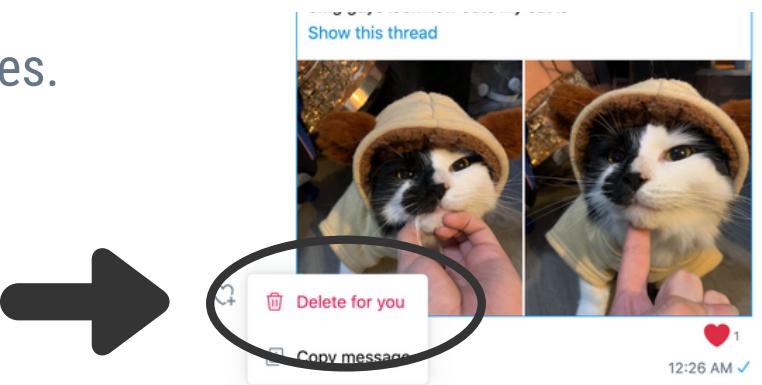
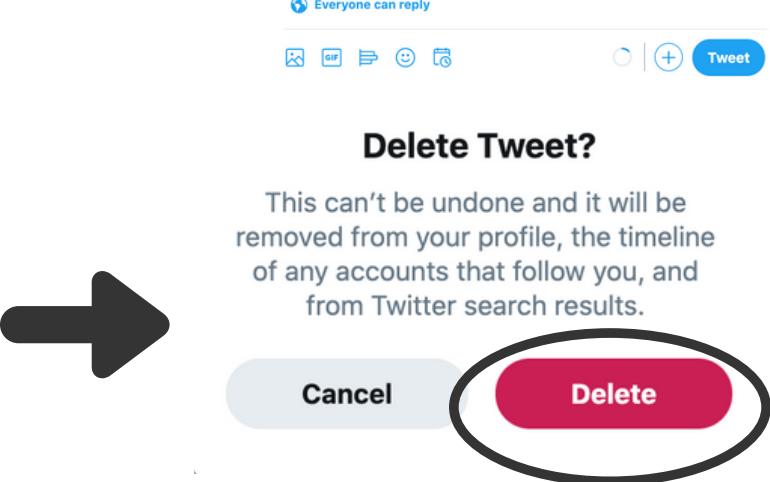
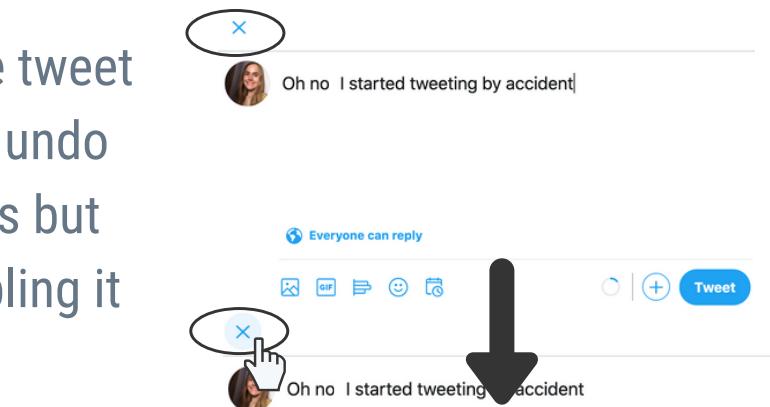
Users can easily navigate out of the tweet text editor window. Twitter supports undo and redo through keyboard shortcuts but does not have a button explicit enabling it in the Tweet text editor window.

**RECOMMENDATION:** Add icons to the bottom bar of the tweet text editor supporting undo and redo.

Tweets can be deleted by users anytime after publication.

Users cannot unsend direct messages.  
**RECOMMENDATION:** Implement an "unsend" feature that's temporarily available after the direct message confirmation dialogue.

*Users often choose systems functions by mistake and will need a clearly marked "emergency exit"*



**RATING: 2**  
MINOR USABILITY PROBLEM

# 04 CONSISTENCY & STANDARDS

The user interface of the mobile app closely mimics the desktop. Items are slightly reorganized to fit a mobile device, but are arranged in similar packages of affordances. Icons are associated with the same actions as on desktop.

The react button in direct messages is too similar to the like button. The two are not analogous, react supports more actions.

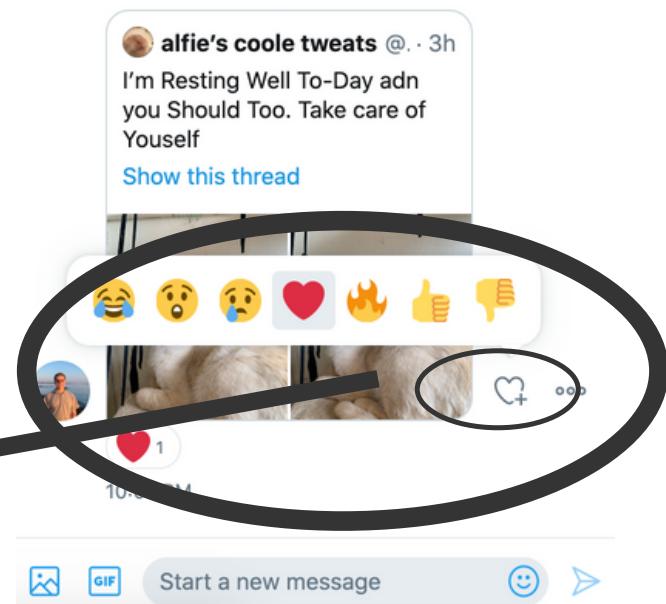
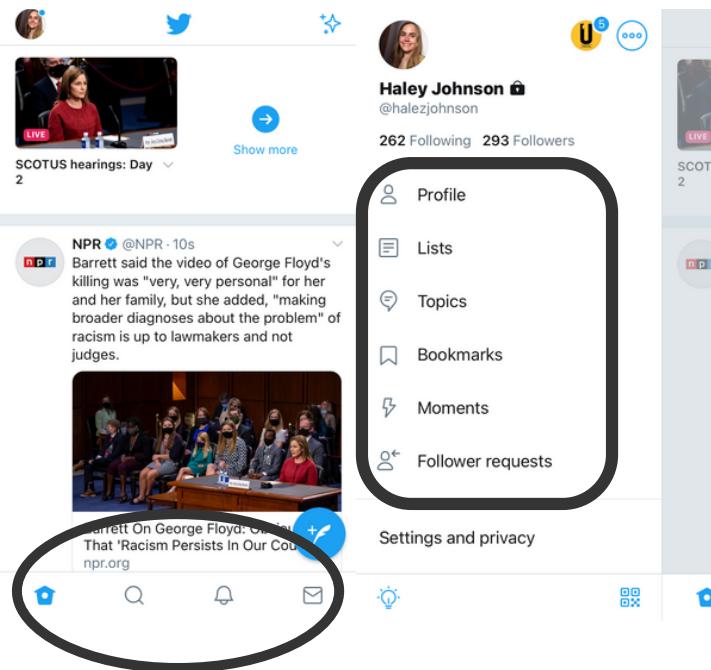
**RECOMMENDATION:** Make the "+" on the react button larger to ensure users see the difference.



>Show this thread

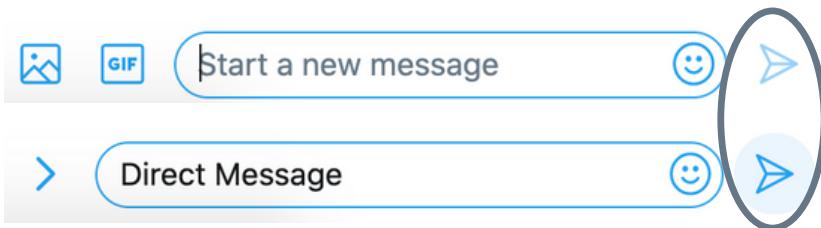


*Users should not have to wonder whether different words, situations, or actions mean the same thing*

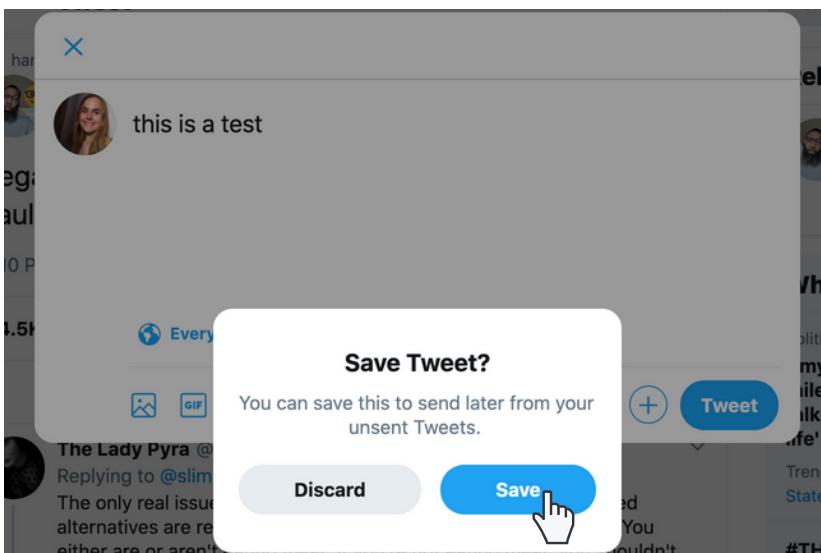


**RATING: 2**  
MINOR USABILITY PROBLEM

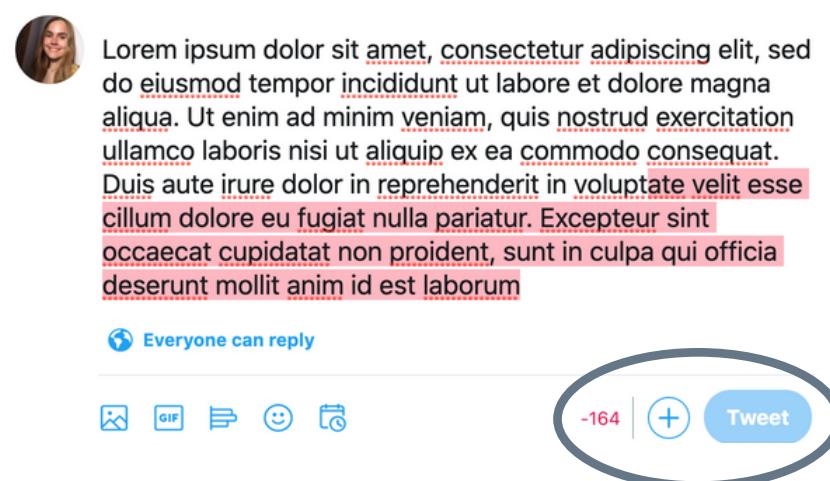
# 05 ERROR PREVENTION



Actions are greyed-out when they're unavailable to users. The text prompt clues the user to the kind of input the system expect.



The system sends a confirmation dialogue when the user attempts to exit the tweet text editor box. The home feed in the background is greyed-out when drafting a tweet.

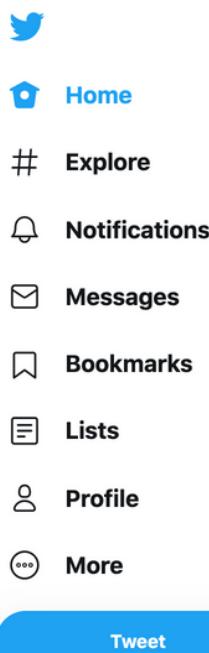


Red highlighted text alerts users that they've exceeded Twitter's 280 character limit. Red matches the users mental model for an error an alerts them to the negative character count.

*Even better than good error messages is careful that design that prevents them from occurring*

**RATING: 0**  
NO USABILITY PROBLEM

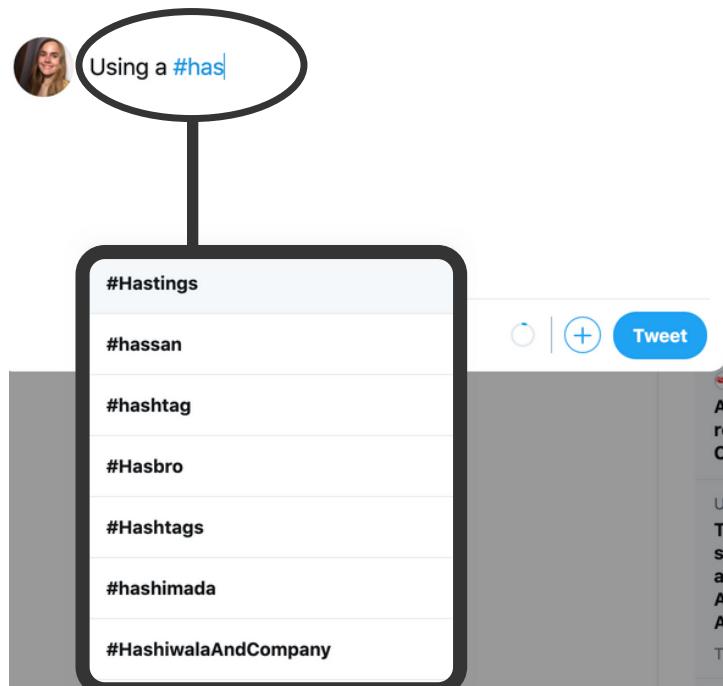
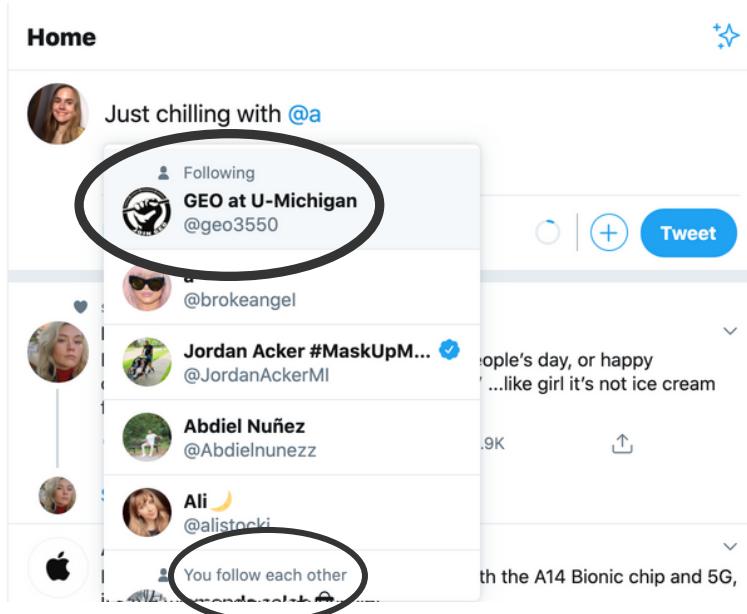
# 06 RECOGNITION OVER RECALL



**Tweet**

The menu bar helps users recognize available features rather than requiring users to recall them from memory. Icons serve as prompts to the user's mental model to aid recall (Newman 2017c).

Twitter generates suggested accounts and hashtags from a user's input. Textual queues like "Following" and "You follow each other" aid the user in recalling why those accounts may be relevant.



*Minimize the user's memory load by making objects, actions, and options visible*

**RATING: 2**  
MINOR USABILITY PROBLEM

# 07 EFFICIENCY & FLEXIBILITY OF USE



## Keyboard shortcuts

The following are a list of keyboard shortcuts to use on twitter.com

### Actions

- n = new Tweet
- l = like
- r = reply
- t = Retweet
- m = Direct Message
- u = mute account
- b = block account
- enter = open Tweet details
- o = expand photo
- / = search
- cmd-enter | ctrl-enter = send Tweet

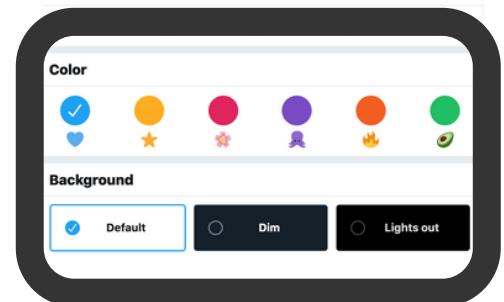
Twitter supports keyboard shortcuts accelerators (Newman 2017). Users can utilize shortcuts to navigate the site faster and more efficiently or simply rely on their mousepad and keyboard to interact with the site.

## Display

Manage your font size, color and background. These settings affect all the Twitter accounts on this browser.

 Twitter @Twitter · 10m  
At the heart of Twitter are short messages called Tweets — just like this one — which can include photos, videos, links, text, and #hashtags!

## Font size



The desktop display options give users the flexibility to customize their interface to match their aesthetic preferences.

Suggested topics help users personalize their explore page. Users can follow topics or rely on the platform to curate content.



## Bachelor Nation

All about the Bachelor franchise

[Follow](#)

## See more about this Topic

You'll see Tweets, people, events, and ads about this, and — just like accounts — the ones you follow appear on your profile.

*Accelerator may speed up the interaction for expert users*

**RATING: 0**  
NO USABILITY PROBLEM

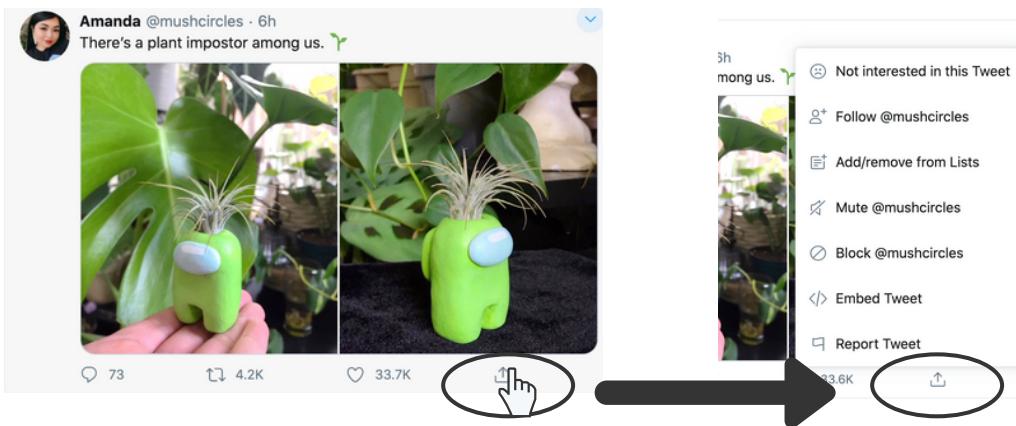
# 08 AESTHETIC & MINIMALIST DESIGN



In direct message, white space is used to guide users to the task of selecting a message. Less



relevant information (the contents of a DM) does not compete with more relevant information (the list of conversations to pick from).



Less common affordances are hidden but are still accessible from a Tweet.



Hiding additional replies reduces the signal to noise ratio. Users can easily scan replies and determine which threads are worth opening.

*Dialogues should not contain information which is irrelevant or rarely needed*

**RATING: 0**  
NO USABILITY PROBLEM

# 09 ERROR RECOVERY

## Sorry, that page doesn't exist!

Why not try a [search](#) to find something else?

**RECOMMENDATION:** Provide more information on what caused the error when possible.

The error message is not in technical language and easily understandable to the users. However, the message does not indicate if the tweet was deleted, or if it was a broken link or some other error.

### Bookmarks

@halezjohnson

You haven't added any Tweets to your Bookmarks yet

When you do, they'll show up here.

### Lists

@wormthecat

@wormthecat hasn't created any Lists

When they do, they'll show up here.

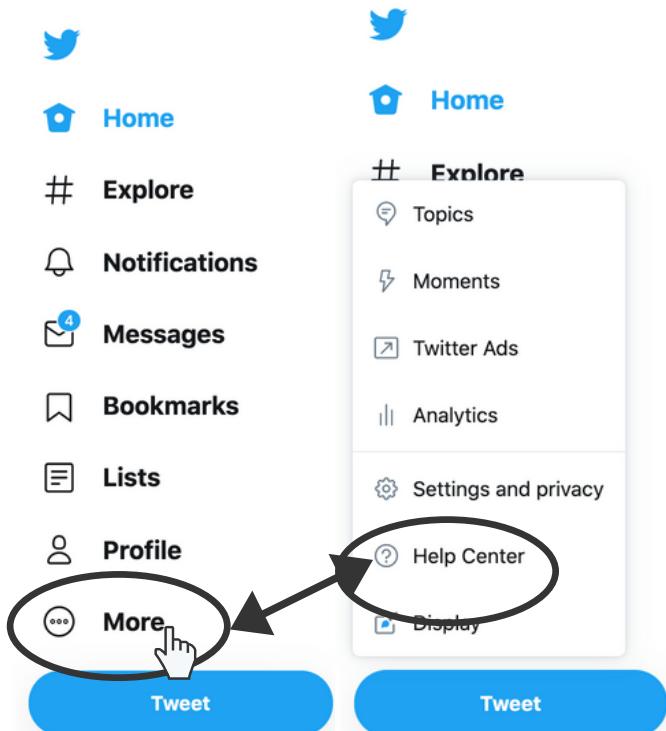
These error message suggest an alternative action – adding Tweets to Bookmarks and creating List – but give no information on how to achieve that. There is no link to an alternative action.

**RECOMMENDATION:** Provide users a link to their Twitter feed. This is consistent with other error message and directs them to where they can perform suggested actions.

*Error messages should be in plain language, precisely indicate the problem, and suggest a solution*

**RATING: 1**  
COSMETIC PROBLEM ONLY

# 10 HELP & DOCUMENTATION



The help center is easily accessible from a user's Twitter feed without being intrusive. The link is nested under "More" – this placement is logical and intuitive to users.

The help center menu is easy to scan. Users can quickly find relevant documentation.

- Using Twitter ^
- Tweets
- Adding content to your Tweet
- Search and trends
- Following and unfollowing
- Blocking and muting
- Direct Messages
- Twitter on your device
- Website and app integrations
- Using Periscope
- Twitter Voices

## How to post photos or GIFs on Twitter

view instructions for:

### To post a photo or GIF in a Tweet

1. From the Tweet compose box, click the **photo** icon to upload a photo or GIF from your computer.
2. **Tip:** Read about [how to include a video in your Tweet](#).
3. To search for and select a GIF from the GIF library, click the **GIF** icon .

**Note:** Animated GIFs can't be included in Tweets with multiple images. You can send only one GIF in a Tweet.

4. Once you choose a photo or GIF, the image will attach to your Tweet in full size. You can select up to 4 photos to Tweet at once.
5. Click **Tweet** to post.  
**Tip:** You can also [send photos and GIFs in Direct Messages](#).



Documentation clearly relates to common tasks and is presented as a list of easy to follow steps (Newman 2017a).

*Documentation should be easy to search, focused on a user's task, and list concrete steps*

**RATING: 0**  
NO USABILITY PROBLEM

# SCORE

Visibility of System Status	1 - Cosmetic Problem Only
Match Between The System & Real World	0 - I don't agree that this is a usability problem at all
User Control & Freedom	2 - Minor usability problem
Consistency & Standards	2 - Minor Usability Problem
Error Prevention	0 - I don't agree that this is a usability problem at all
Recognition Over Recall	0 - I don't agree that this is a usability problem at all
Flexibility & Efficiency	0 - I don't agree that this is a usability problem at all
Aesthetic & Minimalist Design	0 - I don't agree that this is a usability problem at all
Error Recovery	1 - Cosmetic Problem Only
Help & Documentation	0 - I don't agree that this is a usability problem at all

# CONCLUSION

Twitter uses affordances and feedback to facilitate conversation and collaboration on its platform. The platform excels at providing users with a flexible, aesthetically pleasing, experience. Twitter conforms to industry standards – key affordances such as like, share, comment, and direct message are supported. Likewise, changing colors and underlined text confirms that interactions with affordances were successful. Users can easily skim content categories to navigate through the platform. Adherence to industry standards and a heavy reliance on recall creates a seamless and effortless scrolling experience. The design puts Twitter's user generated content front and center to achieve their goal of facilitating conversation and collaboration.

However, Twitter can improve its interface by implementing small changes. An undo/redo button would help prevent errors while drafting tweets. Likewise, the platform should allow users to unsend direct message for a window of time after sending it. Updating the react icon in direct messages will reduce ambiguity and clarify what actions are available to users. Similarly, more specific and consistent error message will help users recover from errors and return to interacting with the platform.

# CONCLUSION

Twitter has no major usability problems. The recommendations given in this report a minor tweaks that should be easy for developers to implement and for users to adapt too.

Research from the Nielsen Norman Group has shown that one evaluator will find roughly 30% of usability problems (Nielsen 1994c). This report was completed by a single evaluator – thus it's possible that there are other violations of Nielsen's 10 Heuristics that went undetected. Twitter can uncover other usability considerations by performing more heuristic evaluations or by employing other user-experience research methods such as user interviews.

Finally, Twitter may benefit from using additional industry specific criteria in future evaluations. Researchers have identified security, connectivity, content management, and customization, among others, as relevant criteria (Quiñones et al 2020, 3). Looking at features relevant to the social media platforms can help Twitter evaluate themselves in relation to competitors. In a fast moving digital world, it's imperative that platforms continue to implement new and innovative features to engage with their audience and attract new users.

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