

You would think Twitter is the most visited website, but it's not even close

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To read, watch or listen to the news this week, you might have thought that with all the talk about Twitter, it is the most visited website in the world.

It's far from it. It ranks at No. 20 on the ComScore ranking of the top 50 most visited websites. It averages 166 million daily active users,

compared to 229 million for Snapchat, 500 million for Instagram or 1.66 billion for the most popular social network, Facebook.

Verizon Media (which includes TechCrunch, the Huffington Post and AOL), Amazon, Apple, the Weather Channel and even PayPal get way more traffic than Twitter.

So why are we all talking about Twitter? You can thank President Donald Trump for putting Jack Dorsey's social platform on the front page, due to his heated war of words and deeds with the internet company.

It has an outsize influence that resonates far beyond the people who visit. "Twitter has a small user base of a few hundred million, but its reach is to billions, as the content is shared and embedded in [global media](#)," says Jeremiah Owyang, an analyst with Kaleido Insights.

To recap, Twitter put a "Get the Facts," warning label on a tweet by the president, which claimed mail-in ballots would produce election fraud. Trump responded the next day by signing an executive order which, by his own admission, will get tested by the courts. It directs the federal government to review its authority to strip internet companies of their legal protection from liability for content posted on their platforms.

On Friday, Twitter escalated it further, by blocking a Trump tweet that called Minneapolis rioters "thugs," and threatened to have them shot, saying it glorified violence. He responded by tweeting it again from the official Twitter White House account, where it also got blocked. (However, users are free to click through to get to the message after the initial block.)

Which brings us back again to Twitter. Trump wrote the exact same comment on Facebook, which let it stand without comment.

On Facebook the post received more than 235,000 likes, 51,000 comments and 61,000 shares as of Friday afternoon, vs. no social media love on Twitter, which doesn't allow comments or likes on a blocked post.

Yet the Trump tweet is what was reported on by every major news organization and then some.

"The reality is, we don't see his tweets," says Karen North, a professor of social media at the University of Southern California's Annenberg School of Communications. "Journalists do and report them. Twitter is a small, but incredibly influential and powerful network."

Facebook's size dwarfs Twitter, but because the social network is built around a circle of friends, it has an algorithm that limits your entire network from seeing a post. Instead it goes to just the people who comment and interact with you. On Twitter, North notes, the tweet is seen by the world, with no restrictions on audience size or registration.

Twitter was launched in 2007 at the South by Southwest conference in Austin as a way to bring text messages into the mainstream, offering users the ability to share their thoughts in 140 characters—which got increased to 280 characters in 2018.

"People see the website or hear about it, and their immediate reaction is, 'That's the stupidest idea I ever heard,'" Jack Dorsey, who co-founded the company with Ev Williams and Biz Stone, told U.S. TODAY in 2008. "I do not want to know that my brother is eating a hot dog."

Because at the time, many people were sharing what they ate for lunch, breakfast and dinner, and other mundane things. "It's really to stay in touch with those you care about," explained Dorsey. "And to make your world a little smaller."

Williams and Stone have moved on, but Dorsey (@jack) remains as CEO of Twitter, splitting his duties with another business, the Square financial services company, where he's also CEO.

Twitter went public in 2013, and has struggled to make much of a financial splash since, as its earnings (\$3 billion in 2019) are dwarfed by other social networks, from Facebook (\$70 billion in 2019) or Google's YouTube (\$15 billion in revenue.)

Michael Pachter, an analyst with Wedbush Securities, says Twitter should have been able to ride Trump's fascination and daily usage of the platform to greater heights over the last few years.

"They had this amazing opportunity to grow, but haven't exploited it," he says. "The stock is doing okay, but nowhere near where it should be, with all the free publicity they've gotten from Trump."

In other tech news this week

The latest new subscription service, HBO Max, debuted with an asterisk. The two most popular streaming platforms, Roku and Amazon, declined to offer it, making it available only to those primarily with an Apple TV, Google Chromecast streaming device, or recent models of Sony or Samsung smart TVs. Max is nominally a new service, selling for \$14.99, but subscribers to HBO Now upgrade for free, with the HBO library, plus programming from Warner Bros., DC Comics, Turner and Looney Tunes.

Google said some Googlers could return to work on July 6. However, the call is only for about 10% of the staff, who need to be in the office, growing to 30% in the fall. At the same time, Google is granting \$1,000 stipends for at home workers to invest in office furniture and is making the return to work voluntary.

AT&T said it would credit DirecTV subscribers who paid for sports subscriptions. This comes after the COVID-19 outbreak postponed or suspended sporting events across the globe.

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