Twitter without mean tweets? New feature 'prompts' discourage sending back nasty replies

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Could you imagine what late-night talk show host Jimmy Kimmel would do without possibly one of his most popular segments?

Twitter on Wednesday released an improved version of its "prompts"

feature discouraging users from sending "potentially harmful or offensive" replies, encouraging them to think twice before sending any mean tweets. Mean tweets like those seven-time Super Bowl champion Tom Brady read on Kimmel's show in January.

"Want to review this before Tweeting?" the prompt asks Twitter users about that not-so-nice tweet and presents three choices: send the tweet as is, edit it or delete it.

It's been quite the week for new features and acquisitions for Twitter. On Monday, the social media platform released for all users Twitter Spaces, its response to audio chat hit Clubhouse. On Tuesday, Twitter announced it acquired Scroll, a subscription service that removes ads from news sites.

The updated prompts feature comes after Twitter tested it last year, which led to fewer offensive replies. For instance,when users received a prompt, 34% of them changed their initial reply or did not reply at all. After being prompted once, users composed on average 11% fewer offensive replies in the future, Twitter said.

"These tests ultimately resulted in people sending less potentially offensive replies across the service, and improved behavior on Twitter," the company said, adding that the prompts tests allowed its algorithms to detect the difference between "potentially offensive language, sarcasm, and friendly banter."

In an effort to give users more control over what they see, Twitter introduced a feature last year allowing them to limit who can reply to their tweets. Users now have three options to choose who can reply to their tweets: everyone, only people they follow, or only people they mention in a tweet.

Tweets with limited replying are labeled and the reply icon is grayed out for users who can't reply, yet they still can view, retweet, retweet with a comment, share, and like those tweets.

To be sure, Twitter is aware that while the updated prompts feature may not entirely bring about the end of mean tweets (from trash-talking, say, between sports fans to the frequent bullying and harassment that occurs on the platform), the experiment shows that, if prompted, some users might reconsider what they say when composing that next tweet.

The prompts feature is being rolled out now to iOS and Android users with English language settings enabled.

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