Twitter Thread by sachinmonga

sachinmonga
@SachinMonga



Here's a theory that I think helps explain:

- How Instagram won the first attention war
- Why there will never be another mixed-format feed
- Why TikTok is so dominant
- Why Clubhouse has a huge advantage over Spaces
- How Spaces can still win, but why Fleets can't

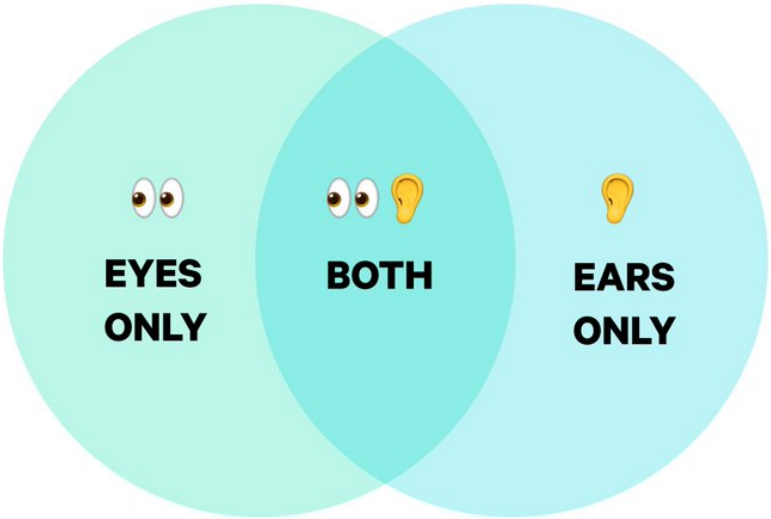
■...

■■ Smartphones unleashed 3 distinct attention wars.

Media apps ("social" or otherwise) can only *effectively* compete in 1, and must fight every other player in that particular arena for a finite pool of attention.

The battle lines were drawn by our sensory constraints.

Often we can look but not listen, other times we can listen but not look. And sometimes we can give our phones 100% of our sensory attention.



There can only be 1 or 2 winners du jour in each attention war because media is a supply-driven marketplace with crazy strong network effects.

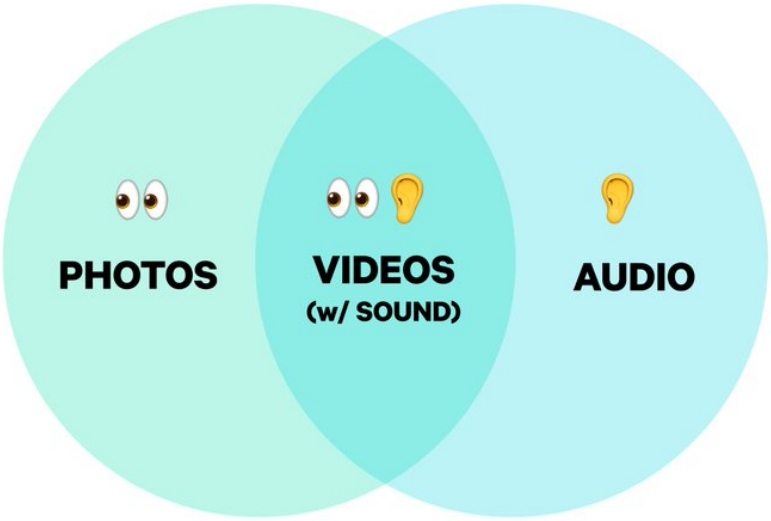
The best creators will invest in whatever platform offers the most attention to harvest into social capital.

In each war, there is 1 clearly dominant format — whatever is most engaging based on the sensory constraints.

If you can look but not listen, photos win.

If you can listen but not look, audio is the only format.

With no constraints, video wins.



If each war is winner-take-all and has one clearly superior format, then we'd expect the winner in each war to offer a feed that is 100% the best of that format.

■ When Instagram launched and started delivering high-quality full-bleed pictures (incl. from many pro photographers!), FB's legacy text-centric mixed-media feed was like a knife in a gun fight.

IG quickly became the most engaging place on our phones. Until the 2nd war began.

■ In the no-constraints heavyweight division, we'd expect the winning app to be 100% video and *really* take advantage of sound to further outgun any mixed-media competitor that can't assume your sound is on.

TikTok executed perfectly. You can't even use it without sound-on.

TikTok doesn't even pretend to be "social" media — while IG/FB force you to jump through hoops like making an account and adding friends, the For You Page is a straight dopamine IV-drip into your eyes and ears; the maximally engaging entertainment machine.

■ It's kind of surprising how long podcasts and music shared a weird duopoly on the third battleground?

Clubhouse is quickly building a supply of quality audio creators and becoming the most engaging option when you can only listen but not look.

Clubhouse's huge advantage over Twitter of course is that it's 100% audio, and can fully optimize for one war (like TikTok) instead of foolishly trying to fight two wars at once. A futile strategy!

Twitter has always been in the purely visual arena (in the attention wars, text+photos are closer than photos+videos).

They could carve out a modest (compared to IG) niche simply because text as a format selected for a very different type of successful creator.

This is why Fleets are so weird. I chose my Twitter graph based on the quality of their thoughts, not the quality of their sunset pics (no offense).

There are so many ways Twitter could make better use of that real estate. On that note:

Spaces could work if it turns out that (a) there's a lot of overlap between the best text & best audio creators (likely) and (b) they nail push notifs that bypass the feed entirely.

Listen-only is our default resting mode so push is especially powerful in this war.

At risk of playing armchair PM, if I were Twitter I'd turn the Fleets bar into the truly live (i.e. audio) layer of the "pulse of the planet" that their text feed always strived for, and definitely extend visibility beyond followers-only (bring a gun to a gun fight!).

Now that Twitter is shipping stuff, it could be an interesting battle. TikTok is leagues ahead in the heavyweight division but the other two arenas will be fun to watch.

Thank you for coming to my "Three Attention Wars" TED talk — I know you have many options for where to direct your eyeballs and hope these humble tweets were an okay use of your attention ■