Twitter Thread by Seth Abramson



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(THREAD) The main problem with that @DanDrezner piece in the Post is that it's an international politics prof writing about the field in which I'm a professor—communications. No one in communications would *ever* compare the blogosphere to either Twitter or Substack. Here's why.

1/ Back in the mid-aughts, I was a Koufax Award-nominated political blogger (I don't know what Drezner was doing then; I first heard of him about a year ago). So I was into the blogosphere pretty deep, as I also ran a second high-traffic blog that was focused on the art world.

2/ The "blogosphere" was an outgrowth of MySpace and LiveJournal, inasmuch as in the heady early days of the internet people suddenly realized that they could engage in private diaristic writing—a very specific subgenre of writing—in the public square, and it was suddenly "okay."

3/ So the blogosphere as such had *nothing* to do with journalism, which needless to say was in a different state just 15 years ago (note: unlike Drezner, I also teach writing and journalism at the university level, so this thread is squarely "in my area," unlike his Post piece).

4/ The blogosphere was a manifestation of the transformation of the public-private binary at the dawn of the internet—and *also* connected to the "creative writing" explosion (what I did a PhD on); in the aughts, creative writing was the fastest-growing discipline *in the world*.

5/ The idea of journalism being in a state of collapse was not present around 2003—at least not ubiquitously. Drezner, the international politics professor way out over his skiis in a history-of-the-internet discourse, anachronistically projects the events of today 15 years back.

6/ Beyond the transformation of the public-private binary, there was also, of course, in the mid-aughts, a print-to-online exodus that was *extremely* heady for all involved. Just as literary magazines and newspapers were headed online, so were "private" and "local" writers.

7/ As any who teach writing at the university level know, the first analysis in the history of any writing system is distinguishing between "long-form" and "short-form" writing. Drezner blithely analogizing long-form (blog) and short-form (tweet) writing systems is embarrassing.

8/ A someone with a minor in sociology, I was interested in the aughts in sociological studies of the early internet that focused on community-building; they revealed people who'd written privately/locally on their hobbies suddenly heading online to build communities of interest.

9/ The phenomenon of blogs acting as a serious external adjunct to news outlets—i.e. not connected to those outlets—began many years into the lifespan of the "blogosphere," in the late aughts. Apparently Drezner hails, he now indicates, from that late period of the blogosphere.

10/ When I was running The Nashua Advocate in the mid-aughts, getting up to 25,000 views daily, there wasn't yet much thought of being a serious adjunct to major-media news consumption. The idea was citizen journalism could pursue things media wasn't really touching much at all.

11/ Substack emerged three years ago, and was popularized last year. What spurred its growth was the *departure* of major-media figures from major-media operations *specifically* to provide readers with an *alternative* to major media.

I still find that problematic in many ways.

12/ As a curatorial journalist, I know as well as anyone that major media *can't* be abandoned—it *can't* be allowed to fail. That's why curatorial journalists do *more* work than anyone to try to augment and expand the audience for major media. Drezner derides this as "linking."

13/ Oddly, what those still in the thrall of major media like Drezner *want* non-major media types to do is merely "link." It's part of the now-dead dream that today's citizen journalists will be mere fanboys and fangirls of their favorite journalists. But that dream *is* dead.

14/ In fact, curatorial journalism, because it's a metamodernistic mode, seeks to execute both ends of a paradox at once: (1) *augment* major-media reporting by using it as a building block; (2) expose its *weaknesses* by showing how it's insufficiently horizontally integrated.

15/ To the late postmodernists of major media, for whom paradoxes are dangerous and binary dialectics comforting, curatorial journalism is only an attack—so it must be destroyed. That it hugely amplifies their work they simply choose to ignore altogether as an inconvenient fact.

16/ So when PROOF moved from books Drezner didn't read and a podcast he never listened to and disquisitions on metamodernism and curatorial journalism he lacked the expertise to understand to *Substack*, it did so for a very—profoundly—different reason than, say, Glenn Greenwald.

17/ Greenwald wants to destroy major media for personal reasons. He is minimally concerned, as an ethical matter, with the ruin that would cause. So yes, Greenwald does want to use long-form writing on Substack to destroy long-form social media. PROOF has nothing to do with that.

18/ *The* watch-word in metamodernism—and I'm a proud metamodernist—is "reconstruction." You reconstruct that which has been near-terminally deconstructed. PROOF is part of a movement to reinvigorate major-media journalism by beneficially amplifying, exploiting and critiquing it.

19/ At every turn, major media will send people who aren't metamodernists, or curatorial journalists, or even experts in mass communications, to distort, reject, and mislead about projects like mine here and at PROOF. I'm now in year 6 of it and I'm effing exhausted by the fight.

20/ To call what I do "linking" is to call what a professor of international politics does "watching CNN." The problem is that—by definition—folks like Drezner will always have a bigger megaphone to treat major media's death-rattle as music than those actually trying to save it.

PS/ I've no beef with any who say Drezner was a big deal in political communications journal articles in the late 2000s, at the tail end of the blogosphere. The world is huge—it's no surprise I didn't come across him then just as it's no surprise he sees gain in attacking me now.