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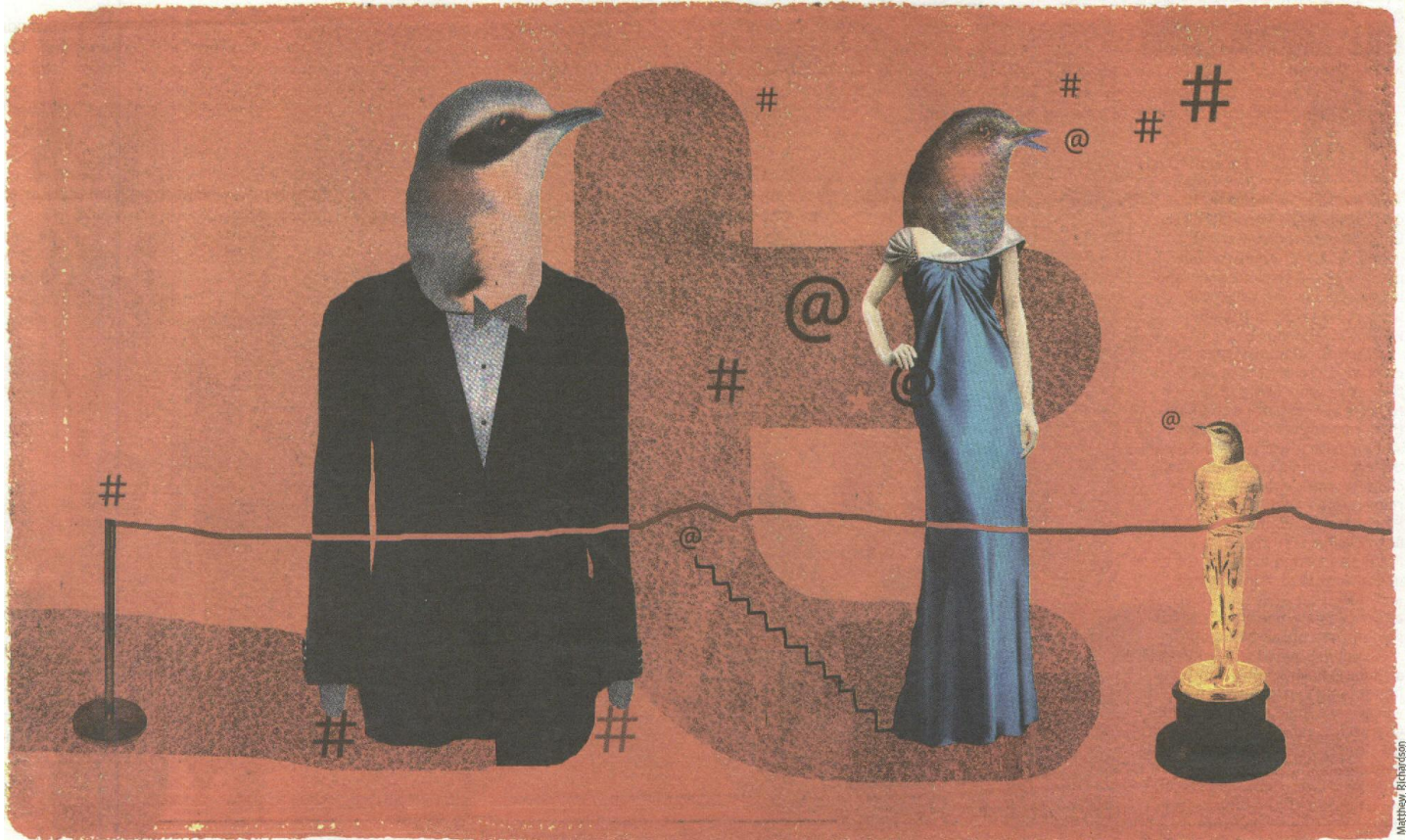
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And the Oscar for Best Tweet...

From Snarky Commentary to Network Strategy, a Social-Media Guide to Awards Night

BY KATHERINE ROSMAN AND RACHEL DODES

With a slate of small, arty movie nominees and a retro host without much buzz, this year's Academy Awards broadcast may not set any television ratings records. But it's poised for a shot at another title: It could be the biggest night yet for social media.

The awards show is working hard to pump up its social-media clout as it tries to leverage a growing phenomenon: More and more viewers are supplementing the experience of merely watching their favorite TV shows by joining in simultaneous running commentaries on Twitter and Facebook.

U.S. TV network ABC, which will broadcast the awards Sunday, will have two people tweeting about what is happening backstage, including Shira Lazar, a web-broadcast personality. The red-carpet hosts will be asking celebrities questions that viewers have posted to Twitter. Thirteen cameras will be stationed in the red-carpet

area and the theater, including one at the lobby bar and a backstage "Thank You Camera" where winners can extend their acceptance speeches. Video from these cameras won't be part of the TV broadcast, but will be streamed via ABC's website and free mobile app. A Twitter feed will let followers know in real-time who is appearing on which camera. The idea is to give people more access to live celebrity footage that they can chat about online.

During the broadcast, viewer tweets using the hashtags "#oscars," "#oscarbuzz" and "#celebratethemovies" will appear on the network's Oscar home page and on its Academy Awards app. Karin Gilford, ABC's senior vice president of digital media, says an outside company has been hired to monitor the tweets that will stream onto ABC's site, to weed out spam and offensive content.

Even snarky comments from viewers can be used to the network's benefit. "If everyone is going crazy about one event or moment of the telecast, we know what video

clips to post to the site," Ms. Gilford says.

Last year during the telecast, tweeters took to the web to discuss Oscar co-host James Franco dazed and uncommanding comportment. Joy Behar, the co-host of *The View*, tweeted about Mr. Franco and his co-host Anne Hathaway: "I'm surprised Anne Hathaway didn't get a hernia from carrying James Franco all night. #Oscars."

Last year's Oscar broadcast had 966,000 social-media comments, and overall, the social-media Oscar chatter was positive, according to Bluefin Labs, a social-media analytics company. During the Oscar telecast, 87% of all social-media comments were about the Academy Awards, and the third most frequently used term was "love" (after "#oscars" and "Oscars"). "Dress" was fifth. The vast majority of

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I'd Like to Thank My Twitter Followers...

measurable "social media mentions" are culled from Twitter because, unlike Facebook status updates, which often are visible only to a user's friends, most tweets are publicly posted.

Other big TV events have seen huge jumps in social-media activity lately. The Grammy Awards racked up 13 million social-media comments during the broadcast, up 2280% from last year, according to Bluefin Labs. (The show also had a surge in TV viewers, in part due to the death of Whitney Houston the day before the awards.)

Media executives say they don't yet have the data to directly measure the correlation between volume of social media mentions and actual viewership ratings. "But we do know that social media drives engagement and can help sustain viewers' interest in what they're watching," says Albert Cheng, executive vice president for digital media of the Walt Disney Co., which owns ABC.

For this year's Oscars, Twitter has lined up a group of TV and music personalities to tweet throughout the ceremony, including "Desperate Housewives" star Eva Longoria, "American Idol" host Randy Jackson and comedian Whitney Cummings, the star of NBC's "Whitney."

Suzu Soro, a blogger and comedian in Los Angeles, will live-tweet the Oscars from her feed @hotcomestodie. She says she appreciates the way that Twitter can level the playing field on a night when Hollywood celebrates its glamorous A-list. "It all goes back to Andy Warhol," Ms. Soro says, "when you live tweet, you're on stage too."

The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Science, which presents the awards, has a Facebook application that lets users pick which films and actors they expect to win. Much of the social-media planning is being overseen by Josh Spector, the Academy's managing director of digital media and marketing—a position created this summer.

Even the after-show party-scene glamour will be socially leveraged. Magazine Vanity Fair, which famously throws an Oscar party each year, will have a staffer tweeting from the party, and video footage of the celebration will go online nearly in real-time, says Chris Rovzar, Vanity Fair's digital editor.

He says the videos and tweeting will let readers experience the party without totally compromising the privacy of the A-list guest list. "It's a delicate balance of letting people know what is going on and not spoiling anybody's fun," he says.

Celebrity Tweeting

When the Academy announced the Oscar nominees last month, actor Albert Brooks, reacted on Twitter—not because he had been named a best supporting actor contender for "Drive," as many had expected, but because he hadn't.

"I got ROBBED. I don't mean the Oscars, I mean literally. My pants and shoes have been stolen," the 64-year-old actor wrote on the social-networking site. Later that day, he weighed in again: "And to the Academy: You don't like me. You really don't like me," he tweeted, inverting Sally Field's famous 1985 best-actress speech.

Mr. Brooks, who initially signed up for the social-networking service last May to promote his first novel, sends out missives almost every day on a variety of topics, ranging from windstorms in Los Angeles to the Republican presidential race. He hypes his work sparingly, if at all. Because he's in such frequent communication with his 233,000 followers, Mr. Brooks says he thought it would be "pretty weird" if he remained silent after getting snubbed by the Academy. "If you say nothing, it's like: Where are you? Did you die?" he says.

On Twitter, self-deprecation is in and self-promotion is out, for the best tweeters, anyway. Singled out here is a selection of some worth following, in many fields—from food to comedy, fashion to music. Twitter's highest-profile practitioners are increasingly using the free service not so much as an overt marketing tool but as a convenient way to explain themselves, to communicate openly with fans and to defend their positions without the filter of public relations representatives. If they can occasionally hype their careers—well, who is harmed?

Some of the Best

Comedy

Steve Martin, 2.3 million followers

@SteveMartinToGo Mr. Martin this week published a short book of his best tweets, "The Ten, Make That Nine, Habits of Very Organized People. Make That Ten." In it, he says of Twitter: "I thought tweeting might be a way to cultivate lines and ideas for my new banjo stage show. But all this tweet material turned out to be good for just one thing: tweeting."

Mr. Martin has tested the medium. He's tweeted interactive song parodies with his followers and posted an ongoing series of tweets from a jury-duty waiting room. ("Defendant's hair looking very Conan-y today. GUILTY.")

Once he accidentally tweeted "Steve Martin" while trying to search for his name. Embarrassed that millions would

know he was searching for mentions of himself, he made the most of it in a follow-up tweet: "Steve Martin oily muscles beach Speedo photo."

Joan Rivers, 890,000, @Joan_Rivers A heavy tweet rate ensures Ms. Rivers can deliver a steady stream of news-driven zingers without sacrificing mention of her TV and live appearances. Sample: "M.I.A is hosting a Grammy party. She'll be serving all of her favorite finger foods."

Richard Lewis, 68,000, @TheRichardLewis The actor and comedian posts angry complaints and one-liners that you just know he agonizes over before posting. Sample: "I'd go to sleep now but would hate to miss out on a bad experience."

Demetri Martin, 182,000, @DemetriMartin This feed is at its best when Mr. Martin extends his illustration-based comedy into the world of tweets. Sample: "(x) = A revolving door, from above."

Patton Oswalt, 633,000, @pattonoswalt An inside glimpse at the travels and trials of a fully booked actor/comedian. Sample: Wow. 23 years in comedy and I still have to spell-check "diarrhea."

Jonathan Katz, 11,000, @jonathan_katz The deadpan stand-up and movie comedian is not above using Twitter as a focus group for material. Sample: "My niece just turned seven and is starting to ask those embarrassing questions like "What does a guy like you make?"

-Don Steinberg

Books

Jennifer Weiner, 38,000, @jenniferweiner The best-selling chick-lit author tweets about her life, politics and ABC's "The Bachelor." "A safe Twitter feed is no fun for anybody," says Ms. Weiner. She likes when tweeters embrace their personalities and loathes when they write about mundane topics, like being on a dietary cleanse. "You have to remember you're playing to an audience," she says.

Although many writers gripe that Twitter is a vehicle for procrastination, Ms. Weiner says that tweeting has actually enhanced her writing abilities. "It lets us work on timing and word choice," says Ms. Weiner, who has a new novel coming out this summer. "It's about saying what we need to say, getting to the point."

Bret Easton Ellis, 236,000, @BretEastonEllis The "American Psycho" author tweets about movies and TV: "I hate to think of what Billy Wilder would make of Terrence Malick..." he wrote.



Buzz Bissinger, 26,000, @buzzbissinger The "Friday Night Lights" author might be the only famous person on Twitter who hasn't yet changed his avatar from the standard egg to an actual picture. He tweeted an explanation for his missing picture, in which he says he looks like an uptight "typical author": "Only thing missing tortoise shell glasses and pipe."

Fashion

Peter Som, 10,500, @Peter_Som The designer started tweeting in 2010 at the behest of his business partner, Elana Posner, who told him he had to join Twitter to build his brand. He quickly discovered that people didn't want to hear him talking about clothes all the time. Although his publicist often posts images of celebrities wearing Peter Som ensembles to their Twitter feed, the designer prefers tweeting about his love for cooking, "Downton Abbey" and "The Real Housewives of Atlanta." ("MAYYJOR drama!" he tweeted after a recent episode.) "I didn't realize people were that interested in what I have to say," says Mr. Som.

Bonnie Morrison, 4,100, @fiercegrandma The fashion publicist is known for snarky, humorous tweets about what people are wearing. "Of course Fergie has to style a relatively pretty dress with a slutty padded bra and earrings from Claire's," she wrote of the Black Eyed Peas singer's Grammy ensemble.

Isaac Mizrahi, 30,000, @IsaacMizrahi The designer, food and theater enthusiast tweets about some of his favorite things. After lamenting that he was too late to watch "RuPaul's Drag Race," a reality competition for transvestites on the Logo channel, he blamed himself: "Fashion waits for no one."

Music

Roseanne Cash, 41,000 @rosannecash "I notice The Boss doesn't need to wear a miter to sound like he owns the whole freaking world," the singer-songwriter tweeted during Bruce Springsteen's performance at the recent Grammy Awards. She was referring to hip-hop artist Nicki Minaj's appearance on the red carpet with a man dressed as the pope.

Taylor Swift, 11.2 million, @taylorswift13 Ms. Swift, known for her earnest country-pop crossover songs, tweets about her life: "My two new best friends!!!!," she wrote from the Grammys, posting a picture of herself holding two trophies. To be sure, Ms. Swift's Twitter feed isn't as funny as a parody @realtaylorswift (347,000 followers), in which "she" tweets mushy statements that could have emerged from a Tay-

lor Swift song, such as: "It's not you I'm rejecting, it's my heart I'm protecting."

Kanye West, 6.7 million, @kanyewest The controversial rapper doesn't tweet that often, but when he does, he unleashes a torrent of bizarre messages. His most recent bender took place on Jan. 5, in which he railed against consumerism, wrote about the need for education reform, and invoked Michael Jackson, Alexander McQueen and George Bernard Shaw. Sample: "We need scientist [sic] and top world designers to directly affect governments."

Nico Muhly, 10,000, @nicomuhly The young composer, who has collaborated with artists like Bjork, sends funny tweets about mundane topics. Sample: "I'm in that weird area of bed bath and beyond where it's discount Bonne Maman preserves and nut milks.."

FOOD

Mario Batali, 245,000, @Mariobatali Chef Batali first heard about Twitter a couple of years ago when he read about Ashton Kutcher posting photos of Demi Moore's "panty-clad bottom," he says. At the time, he thought Twitter was "an example of everything that was wrong with modern society," he says.

But after being persuaded to join by Arianna Huffington and Twitter CEO Dick Costolo—they were all at a dinner together at the CES conference in 2010—Mr. Batali found his groove. He answers dozens of cooking questions every day from people who use the #heymb tag. Sample: "I made chicken caccitore the other night I added baby bellas could one use wine to deglaze pan?" someone asked. "Yes!!" responded Mr. Batali.

"I realized I could become a quick-answer place for people that somehow don't know how to use Google," says Mr. Batali.

Anthony Bourdain, 733,000, @noreservations The renegade chef tweets mostly about food and traveling in his signature provocative style. Sample: Following the news that Paula Deen would be the spokesperson for a diabetes drug he wrote, "Thinking of getting into the leg-breaking business, so I can profitably sell crutches later."

Eric Ripert, 766,500 @ericripert The Le Bernardin chef tweets pictures of food, retweets the Dalai Lama. Sample: "AL Roker just called me: The Pepe Le pew of cooking?!?!? Al watch out the staircase is slippery today... You could break your leg...(:"



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