Bluesky: Two Months Later

By Michael Pinto – December 20, 2024

Toward the latter half of October, X (formerly Twitter) announced that it would alter its Privacy Policy to allow user content to be involved with training AI. Following that announcement, there was a small but significant diaspora from the platform, countless users switching over to one of Twitter's competitors: Bluesky.

2. How We Use Information

Breaking down how we use the information we collect is not simple because of the way the systems that bring our services to you work. For example, the same piece of information may be used differently for different purposes to ultimately deliver a single service. We think it's most useful to describe the five main ways we use information and if you have questions that are not answered, you can always contact us. Here we go:

2.1 Operate, improve, and personalize our services.

We use the information we collect to provide and operate X products and services. We also use the information we collect to improve and personalize our products and services so that you have a better experience on X, including by showing you more relevant content and ads, suggesting people and topics to follow, enabling and helping you discover affiliates, third-party apps, and services. We may use the information we collect and publicly available information to help train our machine learning or artificial intelligence models for the purposes outlined in this policy.

That diaspora continued after the results of the United States Presidential Election with users quitting in droves and deactivating their X accounts. As of the time of this writing the platform has a total user base of around 25 million, (a number that continues to climb) and while that growth is impressive, it still pales in comparison to other social media platforms such as TikTok or Instagram.

I had made the switch back on October 17th after I heard the announcement, although I didn't delete my old Twitter account (and still haven't as of this writing). And now after nearly two months on the site I wanted to share a few observations regarding my experience.
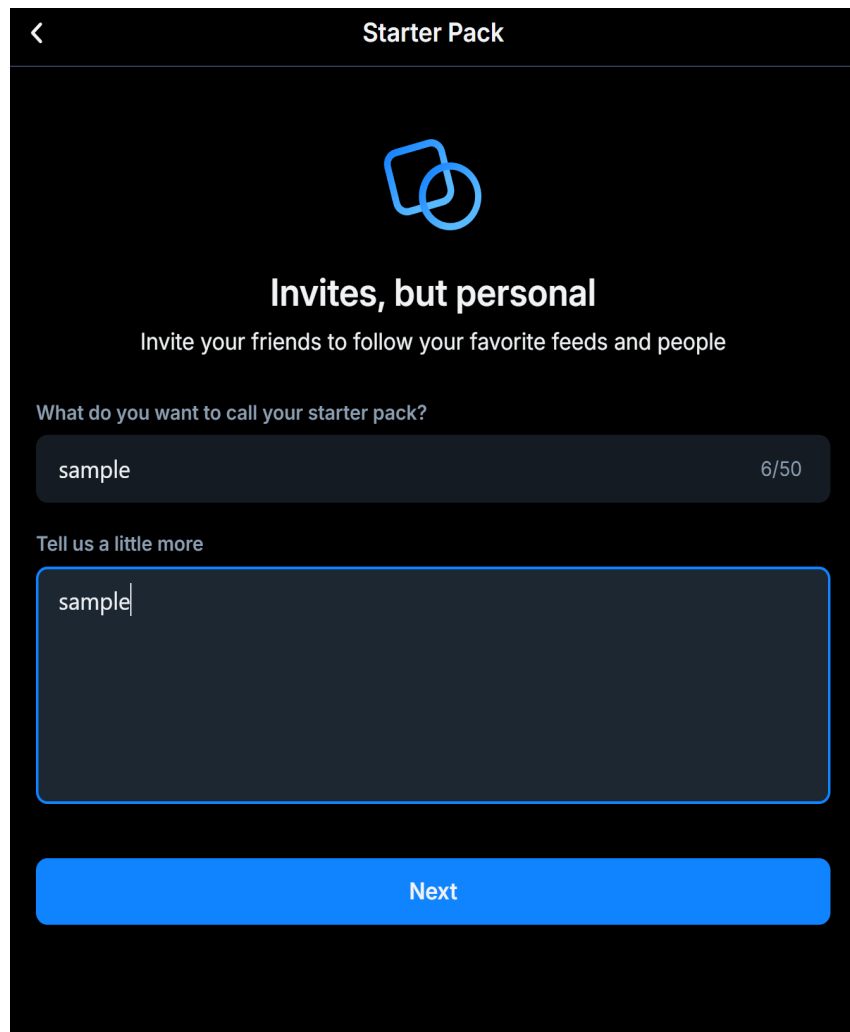
THE POSITIVES

The main selling point for me was that Bluesky, unlike most platforms, doesn't rely on algorithmic filtering of content – instead it relies solely on community engagement, meaning that interacting and networking with other users drives growth. The more you share and engage with other users, the better your chances of discovery, especially if users add you to a "Starter Pack" which is an entire list of users (up to a maximum of 150) that people can simply mass-follow with the click of a button. It's the simplest and easiest way to get your name out there and amass many followers in a short amount of time. After two months on the site, I managed to gain over 2,100 followers, a far cry from the 300 I gained after 11 years on X (as of this writing, that number had dropped to under 200, most likely people having left X for other platforms).

However, despite that large following, I find myself interacting with a centralized yet small group of users on a regular basis, and I find that post engagement is far better as well, being able to save multiple feeds as separate tabs (one for my mutual friends, one for game developers I follow, etc.) Some post feeds are generated by Bluesky itself, others can be created as lists that users can add to their profile.

Conversely, Bluesky also makes it easy to block unwanted users and prevent them from viewing your posts (something that X had also rolled back recently.)

Better still, the site is run and funded by a group of investors rather than a single entity, and the entire site is decentralized rather than one massive piece,

running off the [Atmosphere Protocol](#), so rather than being one giant platform, its an amalgamation of smaller platforms designed to become an even greater whole. This isn't unique, as platforms such as Mastodon

Because of this I find myself drawn to the site more than any other I've used in the past, and overall, it's a social media platform that feels… "social". I'm not interacting with bots whose names were picked out of a generator, or "Graphic Designers" solely engaging with me for the prospect of a commission, I am interacting with real people who share my interests, and that is something that social media has lost over the past decade with rampant engagement farming and AI. So, in that regard, Bluesky is a vast improvement over most social media of its kind.

THE NEGATIVES

Unfortunately, Bluesky is not without its faults.

Bluesky is not exactly a brand-new platform, having launched in 2021. However, since it is a decentralized network of mini-platforms as opposed to a larger centralized platform, instability is a major issue; in my first week or so it was quite clear that the Bluesky team were unprepared for the massive influx of users coming over from X – Internal Server errors were the norm and people were receiving "invalid handle" errors, meaning they would have to go into the site settings and re-register their own profiles in order to clear it.

Long periods of slowness also plagued the site as well, as feeds and profile pages would hang for several minutes due to the influx, though at the time of this writing the incidents have decreased overall, though they still exist and do crop up on occasion.

The other major issue is moderation. The Bluesky team states on its FAQ page that its three major tenets of moderation are automated filtering, manual admin actions and community labeling, however it seems that they lean more on that third tenet, one particular example is their hands-off approach in regard to journalist Jesse Singal. Luckily, as I mentioned in the positives section, the blocking and reporting system works, but it feels like Bluesky is more interested in letting their user base police themselves rather than step in.

THE TAKEAWAY

It appears, for the moment, that the pros outweigh the cons – I still find myself going back to the site repeatedly and, as I mentioned above, find myself far more engaged than any other social media platform. However, I've realized you get out what you put in; if you remain inactive and don't engage, then you'll just wind up isolated.

If your goal is to reach a broader audience, then Bluesky sadly won't deliver. Most of the popular accounts are well-established celebrities, influencers and high-profile streamers that have abandoned Twitter/X, and even with constant engagement it can be an uphill battle to gain a foothold.

However, if your goal is to establish a niche group of peers to exchange ideas without the blight of bad actors and bots, then Bluesky is as close to perfect as you can get. There's a myriad of options for users to tailor their own experience and safeguard themselves against undesirable elements, and barring a major controversy I don't think I'll be leaving the site anytime soon.