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Noted

Celebrities Leave A Void in Twitter

By AUSTIN CONSIDINE

CHARLIE SHEEN hasn't exactly built his "winning" reputation by keeping his thoughts to himself. So when he announced last week that he was quitting Twitter, the global media may have lost what had seemed like a bottom trough of premium material.

And Mr. Sheen wasn't alone. Just this month, Alec Baldwin and the British singer Lily Allen also made headlines by abandoning their personal Twitter accounts, at least for a while.

It raises the question: Are savvy celebrities deciding Twitter is becoming too much of a liability?

Celebrities have traditionally used handlers and publicists to protect them from fans and from themselves. But Twitter's ability to connect them directly to their audiences has made it the garbage dump of choice for their every opinion and non sequitur.

In other words, it's a public gaffe waiting to happen.

"Sharing so much often backfires and invites negative feedback, which is difficult for most celebrities to take in," Seth Meyers, a Los Angeles clinical psychologist who counts several celebrities among his patients, wrote in an e-mail. "They quit Twitter, or I think they need to quit for the sake of their career."

Mr. Sheen's Twitter account has been a cultural force of its own. He amassed nearly a million followers during his first days on Twitter in March 2011, and enlivened the tweeting world's vocabulary with hashtags like #winning and #tigerblood. His last tweet read, in typically obscure fashion: "Reach for the stars every



FROM LEFT, MARCIO SANCHEZ/ASSOCIATED PRESS, ETHAN MILLER/GETTY IMAGES, KEVIN SCANLON FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

SIGNING OFF Alec Baldwin, John Mayer and Charlie Sheen

Dogspeed cadre. c out." He has since said the account was not his idea.

Celebrities often quit because of a gaffe: Courtney Love quit several times, once after posting revealing pictures of herself. Following an ill-informed tweet about the Penn State scandal, Ash Kutcher handed "management" of his 11.5 million follower feed to Katalyst Network, a media company he co-founded, "as a secondary editorial measure," as he put it in a blog post.

But quit as they might, many celebrities leave Twitter only to find they can't stay away. For Mr. Baldwin and Ms. Allen, it was their second time quitting. (Mr. Baldwin gave no explanation, tweeting simply, "It's been fun." Ms. Allen's latest hiatus lasted only a few hours.) Nicki Minaj, Chris Brown, John Mayer, Miley Cyrus and many others have done likewise — with Mr. Mayer dictating that he came back "by popular demand."

The actor James Franco quit over corporate friction caused by some of his eccentric tweets. He later came back, reserving his tweets strictly for professional promotion.

"My thought was: 'This is my Twitter. I can do whatever I want,'" he told Politico in April 2011. "But certain companies I work with contacted me about what I was saying."

Dr. Meyers noted that life as a celebrity often creates narcissists, "drawn to Twitter" because they "need constant feedback from others to keep up their grandiose image of themselves."

That need creates a habit that's hard to kick.

"For some celebrities," he said, "they go back to Twitter because they need the attention and the audience."