

Humans R Social Media Open Textbook Edition
Winter 2022

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*An Open Textbook Created with Students at the
University of Arizona*

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THE VOICES MEDIA LAB OF THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA
TUCSON



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Welcome to an evolving world, and an evolving “book.”

I began writing this book in 2017 with college students in mind. Since then, this text has expanded with years of teaching and collecting responses from students and with more media content. In 2020 we even began integrating student media pieces into this book through our iVoices Student Media Lab. Frankly, calling this a book has begun to feel awkward. If you are a college student, this means that a lot of the content in this book is like social media itself, created and interpreted by your peers using social networking sites like Snapchat, TikTok, Facebook, YouTube, LinkedIn, Reddit, Instagram, and more. It is drawn from the web, including blogs, videos, social media posts, and comments, on fixing cars, following a favorite band, exploring fashion, search engines, and maps that let you mark places. If visitors can weigh in or post their input for others to see, it’s social media, and this book may cover it.

A Note on Impermanence



Many books pretend permanence. This one is unusual in

acknowledging that books today – indeed any written information today – will not hold steady value for long. The value of this webbook is directly proportional to the human attention it can manage to sustain.

All informational content today, and particularly online content, is comprised of structures built on shifting foundations. Books, and especially online books, are like the New Jersey beaches I grew up on. On those beaches it is easy to forget that the sands beneath treasured the boardwalks and evening bingo games are [drifting](#) into the sea, to settle on ocean floors and other shores.

In the case of this book, the sands on which it is built are always shifting and changing; some of the channels that will suck them away fastest are already in view. First we will lose the hyperlinks, as one, then a few, then many links lead to disappeared pages; indeed I wouldn't be surprised if a link or two is already broken today on the first day of publication. Second, the platform on which this book is published could be compromised. (We hope not. As an Open Educational Resource drawn from open source development, Pressbooks has an advantage over other proprietary platforms. But things happen.) Third and last, this book's truths will be cast into doubt as new information emerges around situations about which I've written.

I will do my best to keep this book relevant through all of these shifts. And I hope readers will find my writing voice human enough to contact me and alert me when something has slipped out of place.

Acknowledgments

The above caveats notwithstanding, this book has value, and truths, and evidence of the interaction of people with people and with technologies and information. The University of Arizona's School of Information and College of Social and Behavioral Sciences were

the incubators for insights in this book, and students and graduate assistants in the eSociety class Social Media and Ourselves helped it grow. For audiovisual content, I am indebted to spectacular repositories offered via Creative Commons, Wikimedia Commons, Flickr, and Pixabay. I am indebted to open source developers of platforms like Pressbooks, and the University of Arizona Libraries for negotiating their use for faculty at UArizona. I am especially grateful to the Center for University Education and Scholarship, who have funded this book's migration to Pressbooks and its opening of authorship to students.

How to read this book

This “webbook” is currently hosted on Pressbooks. If it looks to you the way it does to me when I preview it, the menu – a stack of lines icon – at your upper left will drop down to show you the book's major Parts, which can then be expanded with a + sign to show you the chapters within each part. The arrows at the bottom also help you navigate to the next chapter.

Below is more information on Pressbooks if you need it.

<https://guide.pressbooks.com/chapter/what-is-a-webbook/>

You can learn the most about social media through this text if you perform, as you read, some critical self-reflection – that is, intense inward examination – of your own use of online social networking technologies. What do you do online, and why? Really? What makes that a good idea? Is it possible it's not a good idea? Why does that process look as it does? Can you envision it working differently? I invite you to critically engage with the content covered in this book. To examine social media critically, you will need to challenge your own beliefs and practices, as well as social norms, institutions, corporations, and governments.

To accustom you to the student content appearing in this book, here is an example of how a student participated in our iVoices Student Media Lab, analyzed social media appearing on their screens, and integrated their own conclusions:

Case Study: I Already Know You – Social Media, Society, and Surveillance

Student Content



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here:

<https://opentextbooks.library.arizona.edu/hrrsmwinter2022/?p=22#oembed-2>

It seems the more and more we put ourselves online, the more worried we become as a society over our information. From scary sayings such as “once online, it’s online forever” and other fearmongering absolutes, it seems we are teaching each other to fear the internet. A notion of “we know too little and they know too much” premediating online. Self imposed intimidation as I would call it.

However, the internet isn’t this cold, imposing force taught to us. In many ways, it can be more intimate than

the physical world. One such way is the layers of electronic intimacy as coined by Yang et al where individuals look through potential new partners' online social media accounts to garner a better understanding of who they are. Through this process individuals discover the other's interests and begin online conversations with a level of understanding that physical interaction would take multiple conversations to get too. In a sense, online platforms allow us to cut through superficial content such as "nice weather" and get straight to genuine conversations.

In both the physical and online world we have a multitude of identities. We have our academic, professional selves in which we treat each other conservatively. Our friendly selves in which we show our interests and passions more openly to a select number of individuals and so on and so forth. The only difference in this sharing of identities is that in the physical world, you can only show one at a time – online you can show them all off at once. LinkedIn = professional, FB = friendly, and so forth.

Speaking about celebrities, the online world has changed the way "normal" and public figures talk to one another. Coined by Graeme Turner, there has been a noticeable movement of celebrities trying to appear relatable and vice versa with individuals trying to portray themselves as grander than life itself – "the demotic turn in celebrity culture." Big names are being more responsive to fans and thus becoming more reachable and fans or those who don't necessarily carry the status of "famous" are becoming more bold in reaching out and behaving as if they do – some even achieving the status itself. Past, physical barriers of social status have been removed online. Anybody can reach out to

anybody online and possibly start a new relationship with them – the ultimate form of intimate opportunity.

So yes, I already know you and as such, I already think we could be good friends.

About the author

Bombastic!
Enthusiastic! (And possibly a caffeine addict...) Jacquie is a girl with a bubbly personality, wanting to learn all and do all if possible. She loves all things creative and has had experience with almost all forms of digital medium. She is a certified radio operator, a past news anchor, a self-made artist, and so much more!



Respond to this case study...This student's audio story describes her a connection online with a mentor whose livestreams taught her and other students artistic techniques, for free. The benefits to all the participants in this case are clear, but what are the potential benefits to the

“streamer” mentor? What traditional and historic roles does this kind of teaching continue or disrupt, and how?

about the questions in this ebook

About each chapter’s Core Concepts

This book contains a glossary of terms interspersed throughout the book and also listed at the bottom of specific chapters. However, memorization Please, think beyond the specific definitions given to the meanings of these concepts.

About each chapter’s Core Questions

There are also questions in each chapter that will help you process what you are learning and express yourselves.

A. Qualitative questions are asked first at the bottom of each section.

Some of our qualitative questions prompt you to consider situations and stories from your own experiences with technologies. Users make sense of technologies personally, ideologically, and culturally. This does *not* mean youth or any other users are “digital natives,” as there is no such thing as a digital native! But the sense you make of technologies in your own familial and cultural ways is a valuable form of knowledge that belongs to you. Honor it by thinking seriously about the questions asking you to reflect on your tech lives.

Other qualitative questions at the bottom of these chapters ask you to think imaginatively. In these scenarios, you have the power to manipulate the past, the future, or both. Think deeply about social media decisions, their impacts, and your potential power in these.

B. Multiple-choice questions are also asked in the bottom of each chapter. Use these to test how well you have comprehended what you’ve read.

about this edition of *Humans R Social Media*



The social media landscape changes so quickly, it's wise to question whether any book on the subject can remain relevant. One answer to this wise question is that any book or knowledge source remains relevant longer when it's dynamic, or embracing of continuous change. This Open Textbook edition of *Humans R Social Media* is a culmination of work by the [iVoices Student Media Lab](#), funded by the Center for University Education and Scholarship, the College of Social and Behavioral Sciences, and the iSchool at the University of Arizona. The goal of iVoices is to integrate student voices including narratives and media into instruction about technologies, and – beginning in Fall 2022 – to broaden our understandings of youth and new media experiences through research and scholarship. Students hold extraordinary knowledge and experiences in our social media-saturated world, as I learned when I began inviting student perspectives in the *Social Media and Ourselves* [podcast](#). Now, with iVoices running from 2020 through 2023, we are all in. Our student Media Lab workers help design assignments and train students in the large General Education course I teach, to produce media based on their experiences with technologies. Our team of iVoices interns training in Library and Information Science then carefully describes, tags, selects, and integrates student stories and

media into the textbook. This edition you are reading now is the product of this extraordinary collaborative effort.

I am thrilled to broaden this book to include more student stories and media, and just as thrilled that you are here to read and share it.



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here: <https://opentextbooks.library.arizona.edu/hrsmwinter2022/?p=22#oembed-3>

outtake: on Integrating STUDENT CONTENT in CURRICULA

Intern Experience with Student Content

Audio: “My Experience with a Social Media Cleanse” ...and a furry friend.



An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:

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Integrating hundreds of stories into a textbook can be a tedious process, but sometimes, student stories like this one grab your attention.

As part of the intern team in 2021, I was part of multiple phases of integration including tagging student media. I had been working for hours on tagging when I stumbled across this audio clip. Even though I love this story because it highlights how stepping away from social media can be as impactful as being on social media, it really made me smile for another reason. Most of the audio disruption we get is a result of static noise or technical difficulties. Imagine my laugh of surprise when I recognized the familiar sound of a cat purring! It made me so happy, I just had to share it with the other members of our team. It was such a special, endearing thing to find, we even made “cat purring” a tag in our tagging system.

~ Randi Baltzer, iVoices Intern, Spring 2021

*About the Author of this
audio*

Noe Becerra is a student at the University of Arizona. He is studying business and plans to one day run a business of his own. He enjoys Golfing and hanging out with his friends – and, presumably, his cat.



Enjoy *Humans R Social Media*.

Gratitude



THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA

Center for University
Education Scholarship

Many thanks to the University of Arizona iSchool, College of Social and Behavioral Sciences, and Center for University Education and Scholarship, along with Ellen Dubinsky of UA Libraries, Amy Song of Pressbooks, our partners at UA Digital Learning, and especially to Open Pedagogy specialist

Cheryl Cuillier of UA Libraries, for supporting this work and the project and labor behind it.

Tremendous thanks also to the media lab students Maria José Garcia, Lizette Arias, Gabe Stultz, Jacquie Kuru, and Kathryn Millar for sharing their skills with our classes; to our invaluable TAs Ally Fripp and Sam Winn; to students in our classes; and to our excellent team of interns who worked tirelessly to integrate these student stories, including Randi Baltzer, Mario Villa, Jasmine Torrez, Crystal Brannon, Kaitlin Butler, Molly Ingram, Jenn Jones, Paige Carlson, and especially team lead Emily Gammons.

My work in this book is dedicated to my son and daughter, whose navigation of social media today is a continuous inspiration; and to Andre Newman, a friend lost too soon. ~ Professor Diana Daly

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Introduction



A protest in Philadelphia in May 2020 over the killing of George Floyd and systematic racism in US history.

It's June 2020. The streets host surging protests against systematic racism in the US, and [polls](#) show a majority of Americans in favor of the Black Lives Matter movement at the protests' foundation. However, [social media metrics](#) show at least seven of the ten top trending posts on major social media platforms including Facebook and Twitter are highly critical of Black Lives Matter.

The mismatch seems unusual, except we don't need to look far back to see other serious misrepresentations of the social world on social networking platforms. Another example began in

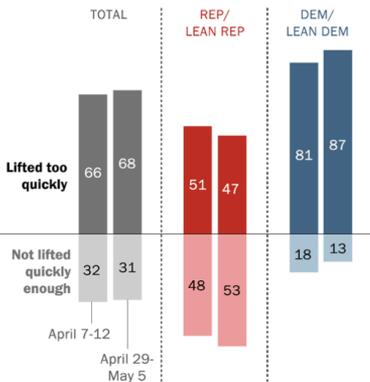


A misguided but widely spread Facebook poll drumming up conspiracy theories about George Floyd, who was killed by Minneapolis police in May 2020.

May 2020. [Polls](#) showed a majority of Americans trusting medical experts on coronavirus, agreeing with coronavirus-related restrictions, and in fear of going to work with the virus still spreading. Nonetheless, [posts](#) about government overreach and misinformation skeptical of the coronavirus threat were top trends on social media platforms including Twitter, Facebook, and even TikTok. Drummed up and networked through connecting with these posts, in the midst of lockdown people staged “Reopen protests” that are widely covered by the media (including [this author](#)).

Broad concern that states will lift public COVID-19 restrictions too quickly; divide between Republicans, Democrats grows

% who say their greater concern is that restrictions on public activity imposed by state governments in response to the coronavirus will be ...



Note: No answer responses not shown.
Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted April 29-May 5, 2020.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

<https://twitter.com/JoeTalkShow/status/1261041231976636416>

These mismatches signal important and often forgotten factors that distort social media’s image of public life in America. Social media are not simply mirrors of society. Social media platforms, content, and algorithms influence societies and societies influence them, in continuous cooperation and struggle.

Social media metrics and feeds today offer limitless data and indications of what society is expressing today, but the science on new media shows this data is systematically skewed. They may show us only what we want to see, over-represent the ideas of entities who pay more or game the system, under-represent social groundswells developing offline, and leave some people or ideas out altogether. While they may reflect some of what people are talking

about, social media insights can be more like funhouse mirrors than clear reflections.

While social media buzz does not simply mirror society, insights found on social media are not fully disconnected from real social life either. Understanding the nature and design behind the trends and even individual posts across social networking sites (SNS's) can have great value in understanding networked communication, including impacts of social networking on social life, and human social influences on SNS's. One goal of this book is to guide the reader and participant through these complex layers of understanding.



Social media can distort our understandings of society unless we understand its nature and design.

A relationship of mutual influence

How are we influenced by social media? How is social media influenced by us? And why have this book title represent humans as social media? The swirl of life immersed in social media begins and ends with ourselves as active human players in it. We produce social media content, we consume it, and we create and influence social media algorithms. Human practices and tendencies feed the systems that produce feeds for us in turn. In the end, our own careful human interpretation of these feeds will produce knowledge

about the mutual influence humans and social media have on one another.

The explosion of social networking and Web 2.0 sites since the early 2000s gives us an opportunity to examine how we do *everything* – relationships, work, social life, politics, government, and even life itself – through social media. This can tempt us to the overwhelming conclusion that the study of social media means the study of everything, everywhere. Luckily, we can always return to the basics, beginning with what social media are by definition.

What are social media, really?

Consider the terminology. The term *media* is the plural form of *medium*, which is anything through which impressions or force are transmitted to affect things on the other side. *Social* describes the kind of media we are talking about, because they relate to people interacting. The term social media usually refers to digital technologies that help people interact. So it's technically correct to write "Social media are [awesome, stupid, elemental, detrimental, whatever]." But it's also ok if you write "Social media is [changing the world, turning my friends into zombies, etc]" because the singular form is in common usage. I will use the term "social media" as both plural and singular in this book.

This is the thing about social media: it is grounded in how people talk and behave, not in rules set by any authorities. Almost any standards at work in social media can be changed by users if enough of us start pushing against those standards. We create social media. Tech developers respond to us as they create software apps, also known as software platforms. Then we tweak their apps, using them in ways that developers never planned because these unforeseen uses fit our lifestyles. Or we choose other apps that fit us better. And then those developers respond to us again.

And yes, social media does influence us too. But it can be surprising how much of what we do online was in practice in our society before social media became “a thing,” and how societal and cultural phenomena independent of technologies weave their ways into our online behaviors. Unpacking these influences requires explorations of history and theories in communication, sociology, anthropology, economics, and political science.

Case Study: What is Social Media?

Student Content

Social Media in Our Lives



An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:

<https://opentextbooks.library.arizona.edu/hrsmwinter2022/?p=27#h5p-55>

identity that they would rather not share with the rest of the world, instead choosing to tell a happy story with no ups or downs. In a way, society has made it almost

impossible for us to share the darkest parts of ourselves out of comfortability and for the portrayal of a perfect life.

My friend's social media page has slightly altered since those years. She no longer unfollows people so her followers to following ratio is a wide range. She began to incorporate more pictures of not only her but of the accomplishments she is making and some struggles she has been having, and pictures with her friends and family. She no longer focused on **the public** to give her the attention and validation she so desperately craved and instead made deeper connections and reached out to her family instead. She switched her account to private while originally she had it on public in an effort to gain more attention, reminding me of the saying **public by default, private by design**. While her Instagram page may not completely reveal everything about her and her personal life, she no longer hides behind this utopian persona of love and laughter and has begun to understand the power social media has in the decisions made about what we want people to think about us.

When I think about my own social media page, I would like to think that I am not tricking anybody about who I am and what my life is full of. But when you think deeply about it, it is impossible for anyone to online to know everything about you, unless of course you are recording everything you do and everything you are feeling 24/7, but even though who is to say you are not acting differently because you are on camera, or lying about how you are feeling out of discomfort and wanting to appear a certain way. Is it that the **affordances** of social media allow us to only share so much, or is it that society has hindered our ability to share everything about ourselves?

My generation has grown up with the rise of social media. It seems as though it is part of our genetics in

understanding how to use different apps or how to delete a comment we did not mean to post or even how to pretend like we did not see someone's message when in reality we just did not feel like responding at the time it was received. We did not read any instructions on how to send a Snapchat. Instead, we clicked some buttons and figured it out on our own. It is strange to think about how social media is such an important part of our lives, but it is even stranger to think about why we let it. Why do we have these desires to post our pictures on Facebook from our weekend in Mexico? Why do we Tweet that message about how we just dropped our phone on our face while lying down? Why do we keep our Snapchat streaks with people we last talked to three years ago?

Eh, it does not need to be that deep! As long as you are using it safely and having a good time, who cares what you post!" data-sheets-userformat="{2":8993,"3":{"1":0},"8":{"1":{"1":2,"2":0,"5":{"1":2,"2":0}},{"1":0,"2":0,"3":3},{"1":1,"2":0,"4":1}},"11":3,"12":0,"16":1}">On the outside, social media appears to be just another form of communication. We invest so much time in connecting with others across town, across the state, across the nation, even internationally. We post pictures that portray our daily lives whether it is the trips we go on or the people we spend time with. But social media, such as portrayed in the above story, is not always sunshine and rainbows. At least, not how it appears externally. Internally, most people have struggles and an **identity** that they would rather not share with the rest of the world, instead choosing to tell a happy story with no ups or downs. In a way, society has made it almost impossible for us to share the darkest parts of ourselves out of comfortability and for the portrayal of a perfect life.

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Eh, it does not need to be that deep! As long as you are using it safely and having a good time, who cares what you post!

About the author

Bella Villalpando was born and raised in the Bay Area in California. Currently she is a freshman at the University of Arizona double majoring in Care, Health & Society and Family Studies & Human Development. She is a drummer and is part of U of A's Pride of Arizona Marching Band



Respond to this case study... This student wrote about some of the ways a user might curate their public facing identity on social media. How do the unique features of each platform inform the way users present themselves? Has social media changed the way we present ourselves and interact in the “real” world? If so, how?

Is this digital? Is this even new?



Human behavior today can appear utterly transformed by digital technologies. When we look more closely, there are many moments today that echo behaviors of the past before digital technology played a key role. And there are many societal changes that have a variety of causes, some playing much larger roles than technology. Still, people love to claim that a technology has transformed society, perhaps because they benefit from the claim, or because it makes changing the world look easy with the proper tools. It isn't.

The impacts of social media in our world are complicated. Misunderstandings around these technological platforms and practices in our world are common outcomes of flawed thinking or **fallacies** about this new force in our lives. In this section, we will break down some of these fallacies behind simplistic and exaggerated claims about social media in our world.

Utopian and dystopian thinking are among the most fallacies in thinking around social media. We are all familiar with utopian visions of social media – as though entering the golden gates of social media means leaving behind all the troubled communication practices that came before. A **utopia** is an idealized or perfect

imaginary view of society. The utopian view sometimes imagines social media as a miracle disconnected from all prior human communication; other times, social media represents a more evolved social media world, where we have moved beyond all bias. The media theorist Clay Shirky [conjures](#) utopias as he describes social media's effects on how we organize, as though they might connect everyone in the world. He is a great speaker; when I listen to him I feel comforted by the humming machines watching over us, extending our powers with God-like equanimity.



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here: <https://opentextbooks.library.arizona.edu/hrrsmwinter2022/?p=27#oembed-1>

Conversely, it is also common to find social media use viewed as the [downfall of society](#) – a **dystopia**, or imagined society where everything is terrible. The increasing reliance of our society on social media for everyday communications looks nightmarish to some. Teens never look up from their phones. Computers make life-or-death decisions or at least remove humans from making them. Our brains are rewiring to cut out human emotions like compassion as we become robotically trained to pursue likes and connect with people we never see. Such dystopian thinking can make people jump to conclusions, and even deploy data and scientific research as hasty “proof” of their extreme conclusions, leading to **moral panics** or fears spread among many people about a threat to society at large.

Technological determinism is among the broadest fallacies around social media use. Technological determinism is the belief that technologies are fully responsible for grand shifts in our world, instead of acknowledging the more complicated interplay of forces

behind the phenomenon in question. While social media technologies have enormous effects on our lives, human cultural and societal factors are usually also at play. The following are two claims about social media that exemplify technological determinism and explanation of their more complicated realities.

Claim: Twitter “made” the Arab Spring

Misunderstandings about the **Arab Spring**, an explosion of protests against governments in the Middle East in 2011. Contrary to many [claims](#) in the media, Twitter was not responsible for the [Arab Spring](#). Twitter was an important tool there, but relationships sustained in face-to-face interaction, and old-fashioned protest in public spaces like Tahrir Square, were the foundations of the Arab Spring, as researcher Paulo Gerbaudo found and presented in his 2012 book [Tweets and the Streets](#). Zeynep Tufekci’s research in the Middle East and in activist movements with online components has also found that while speed and ease were benefits of organizing movements online, toppling regimes as protestors in the Arab Spring accomplished required substantial offline interaction including [countless cups of tea](#). Video footage from the Egyptian protests in media including the [song lyrics](#) and music video [#Jan2](#) reveal intensely organized physical encounters.



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Claim: Youth are addicted to social media, and this is a new

phenomenon

Today's North American teenagers choose to spend much more of their time with friends online, according to [Pew Research Center](#), while past generations socialized more in person. However, there are many factors responsible for this other than today's ubiquity of digital technologies. One factor is that [youth are not allowed to be out](#) as much as they once were. Today's youth deal with parents who hover more closely and give them less freedom in public spaces than their parents were given themselves, and [curfews and other restrictions](#) remind teens that they are unwelcome in public spaces. For her 2014 book [It's Complicated](#), danah boyd conducted qualitative research, including interviews with teens and observations of their homes and neighborhoods. She found that teens were responding through social media use to physical restrictions on their movement, pursuing social relationships in their homes, online.

To understand the human condition in a digital era, we must critically consider claims of human transformation by and revolution through digital technologies. In other words, it is important to study what social media are actually doing in our world, as opposed to human assumptions, hopes, and fears about them.

Rely on the science you understand

Scientific research is a crucial tool for understanding any phenomenon in our world, yet the scientific methodology behind many claims around social media is misleading or poorly understood by those spreading it. Here is an example: [claims](#) that social media is ruining people's brains are often based on [interpreted](#) neuroscience from entities like the UCLA Brain Mapping Center to support these arguments. Yet neuroscientific findings

require some understanding of neuroscience and a critical approach; without these, researchers have [found](#) that neuroscientific findings can be used to add support to any claim, regardless of truth. Many turn to neuroscience when they want to add weight to their beliefs about social media, but too often that weight comes at the cost of validity and accuracy.

It is important to learn the ways these media really impact how we communicate and behave, but we can achieve considerable new understanding by using observations and conversations or interviews as human research instruments – this is the practice of **qualitative inquiry** or qualitative research. We can ask ourselves and those in our lives how social media shapes our world, and pursue the answers through looking, listening, and carefully interpreting. What can we learn about this new world of communication by simply sharing our stories and impressions of our behavior with social media in our lives? When we collect these accounts and analyze across them for themes – that is, when we examine social media and ourselves using qualitative inquiry – we may not feel the need for neuroscience to confirm our new knowledge.

Infinite data, limited information bridges, and rare knowledge

Even if claims around today’s technological “revolution” may be overblown, our minds and information practices are certainly changing as we use social networking sites. Among the starkest of these changes is in how we deal with ways of knowing about our world, through concepts in the discipline of Information. To understand societal changes in which social media plays a role, it is best to first understand the concepts of data, information, and knowledge. Think of **data** as raw material in the world of ideas and information concepts: a list of millions of likes on Instagram.

A glimpse of a scene you see walking down the street but do not yet fully understand. **Information** is the bridge to making meaning from that data: a research article interpreting findings from a study, or a newspaper article making sense of observed phenomena such. **Knowledge** is what we should ideally do with information. We synthesize the information by considering it in our minds among all of our understandings of and experiences in the world, in order to truly *know* it as knowledge. The scene you saw on the street may be explained by the newspaper article you read. However, you may also realize from your own experience including conversations with friends around the topic that the newspaper article author presented a biased view of what you saw, or that you understand things about the scene now than the newspaper author did not.

The web allows us to take in limitless new data from many sources, and to seek out information to make sense of that data – although this will not always be *good* information. With so many streams of information coming in, we have trouble carefully forming knowledge, that deep sense of all we learn. Knowledge is both the most important and the most ignored stage of knowing in the digital age. In [this interview](#) for the podcast Hidden Brain, computer scientist Cal Newport describes **deep work**, or the act of sustained thinking and creation, as one of the few forms of human labor that computers cannot easily replace. Newport also discusses deep work in [this Ted Talk](#).

Digital systems such as computers present us with a lot of new data points, such as pulling keywords from Twitter posts. Computers can sometimes even transform these data points into knowledge, such as by combining keywords from Twitter posts into news stories automatically emailed to you. However, to process what publics express on Twitter in the most valuable ways, posts must be studied critically – are they bots? Are they deceptive? – and carefully – what is the history behind this trend? What are the unseen forces shaping it? Journalists and analysts and many other interpreting forces online can help us make sense of this data as information, but can we trust them? Is the information true, and

are their other ways of interpreting these findings that we should also seek to understand? Most importantly, what do we really *know* about this situation that can serve us moving forward? How can it be applied to more broadly explain phenomena in the world or predict interactions in our world?

Computers cannot create knowledge in the way it is conceptualized here, and they may never be capable of doing so. Humans can, but only if we just give ourselves time to think, study, question, and theorize. Knowledge requires processing across multiple sources of information to create new ideas.

In short, we are in an Information Age in which human knowledge is growing rarer, even as data and information proliferate. Your own knowledge must come through you. This is why in this book you will be asked to reflect on your own experiences, stories, and visions around social technologies. This will not only help you to understand how social media is impacting you; it will help shed light on a world that is often broadcast, yet little understood.

Case Study: What is Social Media?

Student Content

Social Media Can Be Dangerous



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<https://opentextbooks.library.arizona.edu/hrsmwinter2022/?p=27#h5p-56>

TASL: Music includes Melody 6 and Drums 4 from [iVoices Innovation Pack](#) by Gabe Stultz, iVoices Media Lab, CC-BY

Social media is certainly a recipe for disaster no matter who you ask. Many young adults invest multiple hours a day on social media, and little do they know is that although they could be having fun, social media takes a big hit on people's mental health.

Although I have many applications on my phone, text messaging is the one that gives me the most confusion. The main issue I experience is that I tend to judge how people write back to me in their response, trying to guess how they feel. For instance, using a certain amount of laughing emojis, I tend to believe I understand if someone actually thinks something is funny. In a text message, if someone sends one laughing emoji after a particular message, the sender likely believes that the person just sent the singular emoji to make the person not feel bad. In reality, I have a gut feeling that my friend does not necessarily think it was

funny, but instead just sending it, so he makes me feel better. Consequently, if numerous laughing emojis were sent back, I would conclude that he finds humor within the message. Instances like these cause me to go crazy because sometimes people don't express their emotions as much as others do. As a result, I usually go back and forth in my mind trying to guess how my people feel.

Due to the variety of ways to communicate on the internet, there have been numerous occasions where I decided to spend my high school weekends lying in bed. Social media has caused me to become even lazier than I already was throughout high school. Staying up late, texting, and snap chatting with my best friends, I continuously felt the need to stay in the house rather than getting up and going to meet my friends for dinner or watching a sports game. I would tend to go months without actually seeing my friends because of the way social media had affected my ability to keep in touch with people, making it seem as if they were in the same room as me. However, there are many benefits to this issue. I could keep in touch with many of my good friends who lived hours away from me due to FaceTime and other ways of live video talking. At times, I felt closer to the people further away and would see those people more in person rather than the ones who lived right around the corner.

Despite all the negative implications of social media, there are some positives that have benefited me throughout my life. I have a strong passion for basketball and hope to work within the basketball media at some point in my life. I have contacted many players in their direct messages for about two years now, doing live interviews on Instagram. This social media platform has allowed me to

continue networking for myself, which ultimately led to my first internship, which I received last winter. In addition, conducting interviews on Instagram allowed me to gain a larger audience, as other players would hop on the live streams to understand what I was trying to accomplish. Social media has also helped me realize what has been occurring in the sports world without watching television. Growing up, I watched SportsCenter every morning, but now all I need to do is scroll through Instagram, which will fill me in with everything I need to know. Overall, social media can be toxic, but people need to understand the benefits because the majority of our lives have benefited from modern-day technology.

About the author

Aidan Alpersdtein is from Baltimore, Maryland. At the time this was written, he was a freshman at the University of Arizona. He enjoys playing baseball and basketball. In his free time, he likes to watch the Baltimore Ravens and Orioles games. He looks forward to watching all of the U of A games while he's in Tucson.

Respond to this case study... Has social media helped you to pursue your own passions by connecting with new communities? Has it changed the way you form or maintain friendships? Explain how (if at all) social media has affected your network(s) and how different platforms support or encourage different kinds of relating.

fallacies

types of flawed thinking including utopian and dystopian ideas and technological determinism

utopia

an idealized or perfect imaginary view of society

dystopia

an imagined society where everything is terrible

technological determinism

the belief that technologies are fully responsible for grand shifts in our world, instead of acknowledging the more complicated interplay of forces behind the phenomenon in question

Arab Spring

an explosion of protests against governments in the Middle East in 2011

qualitative inquiry (or qualitative research)

using observations and conversations or interviews as human research instruments

data

raw material in the world of ideas and information
concepts: A list of millions of likes on Instagram, with little understanding yet applied

information

the bridge to making meaning from data, such as a research

article interpreting findings from a study, or a newspaper article making sense of observed phenomena

knowledge

the outcome of synthesizing information by considering it in our minds among all of our understandings of and experiences in the world

deep work

computer scientist Cal Newport's term for the very human act of sustained thinking and creation

Core Questions

A. Questions for qualitative thought:

1. Write about a phenomenon you experience that you feel is distorted by its representation in media including social media. How do you know what you know about this phenomenon? If you can find information sources to support your understanding of it, cite or otherwise refer to them, and explain. If not, envision what information source[s] you could create based on your knowledge of the phenomenon.
2. Create a concept map of data, information, and knowledge you would consider to respond to the

question above.

3. Consider a belief you encounter commonly that is rooted in one of the fallacies described in this chapter. Describe the belief and link to or cite an example of the flawed thinking, and identify the type of flawed thinking it is. Then, refute it.

B. Review: Which is the best answer?



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Related Content

Hear It: How Facebook is undermining 'Black Lives Matter

Listen to / read the transcript of this 27-minute episode of the podcast The Daily, "[How Facebook is undermining 'Black Lives Matter'](#)". Then consider: What were your experiences around the summer 2020 Black Lives Matter protests, online and offline? Identify examples of data and information sources about them you have been exposed to, and ultimately, how your own knowledge about the protests was formed. Finally, consolidate your knowledge of the summer 2020 Black Lives Matter movement into one "finding," or statement describing what you know about them.

Consider It: Online qualitative inquiry on the “Reopen” Protests

In April 2020, shortly after the threat of coronavirus transmission led to the shutdown of many US businesses, protests ensued. I was invited to use qualitative online research to help people understand the demands of “Reopen” protestors. Read this article and then consider these questions.

1. How did I perform this online qualitative inquiry? Describe the process in your own words based on what I wrote.
2. Write a summary of your knowledge today about the “Reopen” protests. Include what you learned from the article as well as other data and information sources and your knowledge and experiences. Consider especially truths you know about the world around these protests at this time that are not included in this article.
3. This article is information for you, but I wrote it based on my knowledge. Draw a concept map of the data and information that go into your knowledge of the “Reopen” protests today.

What are the ‘reopen’ protesters really saying?



Protesters in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, on April 20 call for the governor to lift restrictions meant to help combat the spread of the coronavirus.

[AP Photo/Matt Slocum](#)

[Diana Daly, University of Arizona](#)

The “anti-lockdown” and #Reopen protests in the U.S. have [powerful and secretive backers](#), but there are real Americans on the streets expressing their opinions.

As an [ethnographer](#) – someone who studies cultural participation – I’m interested in who those Americans are, and why they’re upset.

I spent the last week in what you might call an online road trip, studying 30 posts of protest footage from events

in 15 cities. I found some shared themes, which don't fit well with popular narratives about these protests.

Protesters object to handouts, but want work.

1. Poverty is taboo, but work is 'essential'

Despite the economic toll the lockdowns are [taking on America's poor](#), no protesters put their own poverty on display, such as posting signs asking for help.

Instead, they held signs with more general language, like "[Poverty Kills](#)," or expressed concerns like the restaurateur in Phoenix, Arizona, who told a passing videographer he was worried about his 121 "[suffering, devastated](#)" employees.

Their messages made clear that they didn't want to ask for a handout or charity – but they were asking to be allowed to work. Protesters across many states asserted their work – or even all work – was "essential."

In one video from an "Operation Gridlock" protest in Lansing, Michigan, where [activists planned to block traffic](#), a protester filmed out the window of his car when he drove past a sign saying "Give me work not money." The protester himself called out in approval, "[Give me work not money, I hear that!](#)"

A young man at an Olympia, Washington, event described work as a source not only of money but identity: "[I wanna go back to work!](#) That pride that you feel every day when you go home from work? That's like nothing that can ... be taken."

Protest signs in [Denver, Colorado](#), included the plaintive “I want my career back” and the entrepreneurial “Dogs Need Groomers.”



Outside the Missouri Capitol on April 21, some protesters wore masks – though others didn’t.

[AP Photo/Jeff Roberson](#)

2. The threat of the virus is serious

Despite alarming news reports that protesters were [ignoring social distancing](#), many of the protesters observed safety guidelines. Photos showed at least some people wearing masks. A [TikTok video](#) recruiting participants for Michigan’s Operation Gridlock encouraged protesters to be safe; [drone footage](#) shows that most participants [at the state capitol](#) stayed in their cars, away from other people.

Protesters’ signs didn’t really downplay the threat of the virus, but rather compared it with potential harm from the

lockdown. For instance, a sign in Denver was headed “[Trading Lives](#)” and featured a scale with virus deaths on one side, with unemployment, suicide and homelessness on the other.

Protesters in cars are, in general, observing social distancing guidelines.

3. Anti-science displays are on the fringe

There were protesters at several rallies who wore anti-vaccination T-shirts and held signs suggesting they don't trust public health experts and scientists.

But only one protest was dominated by that theme. At that one, on April 18 in Austin, Texas, hundreds of attendees chanted “[Fire Fauci!](#)” referring to Dr. Anthony Fauci, director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, who has been a frequent public face of the federal government's efforts to fight the virus. That was also the rally where [right-wing radio host Alex Jones, who runs a conspiracy-theory website](#), drove around in a truck [egging on attendees' chants through a megaphone](#).

At the other events, it appeared protesters had been expecting higher numbers of infections than actually happened. Rather than seeing that as evidence of the success of social distancing, they seemed to interpret this as saying the science was no longer valid. “[The models were wrong](#)” was on more than one sign, suggesting protesters had paid attention to the scientific models at first but had come to believe the disease's seriousness had been exaggerated.

Idahoans rally to fight the outbreak's effects in ways they have dealt with more familiar problems.

4. People want to fight the virus in familiar ways

Even when protesters acknowledged the threat of the virus, few of them were calling for medical experts to provide the solution. I saw none of the demonstrators calling for more widespread testing, for instance.

When they did express concern, protest signs coupled it with a desire to fight the contagion. In Boise, Idaho, one sign read "[Freedom over Fear](#)." In Denver, one said "[Don't let your mask be your muzzle](#)."

However, the protesters wanted to fight the virus in ways that were more familiar to them and, perhaps, more empowering: In Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, a giant green truck had "[Jesus is my vaccine](#)" scrawled on its side.

Some protesters demanded governments allow people to make their own decisions, and even displayed the pro-choice slogan "[My Body My Choice](#)." Others showed up with [guns](#). One man in Frankfort, Kentucky, [blew a shofar](#), a Jewish religious instrument made from a ram's horn blown at the start of a battle.



Armed protesters were among the crowd in Michigan on April 30.

[Jeff Kowalsky/AFP via Getty Images](#)

5. ‘Tyranny’ depends on who governs, not how

In many of the events across different states, protesters objected to what they called “tyranny,” and held up the [Revolution-era “Don’t Tread On Me” Gadsden flag](#) to symbolize their resistance to government rules. They were not objecting to President Donald Trump’s April 13 declaration that, as president, his “[authority is total](#)” over the nation.

Instead they were objecting to governors’ lockdown rules, which they highlighted as overreaching their power. Many protesters likened the government’s behavior to Nazis, with

protesters adding “Heil” before Democratic governors’ names.

No male governor was targeted as viciously and overtly as female Michigan Gov. Gretchen Whitmer. A widely circulated poster depicted her [dressed as Adolf Hitler, giving a Nazi salute beside a swastika](#). Other demonstrators talked about Whitmer as though she were mothering them instead of governing them, like one who insisted, [“We’re not her children!”](#)

Michigan protesters speak out about their concerns.

6. Race is a factor

One clearly visible theme in the #Reopen protests is [how white the attendees are](#) – but not just in terms of their own race. Their compassion also seemed limited to fellow white people. None that I saw were calling attention to the fact that the coronavirus doesn’t hit all populations equally: Blacks and other racial minorities had [less access to high-quality health care](#) before the outbreak, and as a result are less healthy and less able to fight off the virus when it strikes.

There was overt racism toward the Chinese, too, echoing words of the president and other political leaders, as on the Jefferson City, Missouri, sign that read [“Tyranny is spreading faster than the China virus.”](#)

There’s potential for a wider movement.

7. Divided and distanced, is it a movement?

Most protesters did not refer to these protests as a movement. I found just one video offering a vision that they could form one. In that livestream from Operation Gridlock, at one point the videographer shouted, “[merica!](#)”

Then, his unseen companion replied in a meditative tone about the potential he saw on that road: “Together we’re strong, divided we’re weak. That’s the establishment’s biggest fear, for the people to get together and not be divided. ... That’s what they fear the most. Because we have the power.” It was not clear if those people with the power included the much greater number of people across America who were sheltered in place.

[You need to understand the coronavirus pandemic, and we can help. [Read The Conversation’s newsletter.](#)]

[Diana Daly](#), Assistant Professor of Information, [University of Arizona](#)

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PART I
MAIN BODY

I. Identity

Identity, once an elusive concept, is now expressed constantly online.

We introduced this book with me. Now we move on to you – all of you, through whom culture passes and takes new shape. You are a huge part of social media – but what are the factors that come together to make you into you? **Identity** is an iteration of the self that links individuals with how they are perceived by others. Identity combines how you see yourself and how others see you, in an endless riff that becomes your positioning in publics and in the world.

Case Study: Growing up with social media

Student Content

Snap Map Scandal



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Being a kid in an era where technology is constantly available in a variety of forms is a fairly new concept. Even going back one generation to my parents, their childhood looked completely different and that is due to the lack of technology that they had when they were growing up. I wouldn't say that I have had an advantage or a disadvantage from growing up with technology, but once social came into the picture, everything changed.

Throughout my life, I have been a participant in a number of different forms of social media. My favorites have always been Snapchat and Instagram because these are the platforms that the majority of people my age use to connect and I love being able to keep up with what they are up to.

I remember when people my age started to get phones and would ask me for my number so they could text me after school. I didn't have a phone yet and frankly, I wasn't that interested in getting one. I didn't understand the appeal of texting someone when I could just go hang out with them in person. As I got older I started to participate in various different social media **platforms** and I quickly saw the draw. It was the quickest and easiest way to

connect with everyone my age whether or not I was friends with them. At first, I saw no flaws in the world of social media. To me, it seemed like a harmless way to get to know people. However, this opinion did not last long.

As I got older and older I realized that social media can take a real toll on mental health. I was spending countless hours a day scrolling through Instagram looking at people's perfectly staged pictures and comparing these pictures to myself. It made it really hard to feel confident in myself when everyone else looked perfect online. I started to feel like I needed to post pictures that other people would like rather than post pictures that I loved. Social media abruptly changed from a way of keeping up with friends, to a place where I felt I constantly needed to impress people. It got to the point where my **identity** on social media was being compromised because I was afraid to show my true self. Although I was in touch with my friends, I didn't feel like they were seeing the real me and I was not seeing their true self either.

Luckily these past few years people have been more open about talking about how social media can oftentimes only show people at their best. Once I heard people start to validate this idea that social media doesn't always show the real truth, it became easier for me to feel confident in what I was posting and care less about what other people were posting.

I have also had countless good experiences with social media. Being able to be social with my friends when I am not able to physically be with them has made it easy to stay close with them especially this past year with social distancing. Aside from the social aspect, I have been able to bring certain aspects of social media into my education. For

example, I was able to create a Tik Tok to make a fun and informative video for my physiology class. To me, this was much more engaging for myself and the class and ultimately allowed me to understand the content that I was learning on a deeper level. I also have loved social media for the social aspect

Taking into account the pros and cons of social media, I am still very grateful that I was able to have this resource while I was growing up. I think that my experience with social media will be a great asset for my future career because it has made me very familiar with many different types of technology. Social media taught me a lot of valuable tools and lessons that I will carry with me for the rest of my life.

About the Author

I am Ally Hendricks and I am 18 years old. I am currently a freshman at the University of Arizona and I am from El Dorado Hills, California.

Respond to this case study... In the sentence "It got to the point where my identity on social media was being compromised because I was afraid to show my true self," the author highlights one way the relative anonymity of social media can be harmful. How can staying anonymous (or limiting how much of yourself you share with the world) harm one's personal identity? How can it strengthen it?

Next step: Create a profile



Male and female identities are often the only options given to users building an online profile. This reinforces gender divisions and performances enacted on those sites, making people present themselves as more strictly male or female than they otherwise might.

Let's imagine that you were told that you must create a **profile** to continue reading this book or get a grade associated with it. Who would you be? I imagine many of you would reply, "Well I'm not sure yet. Who is the profile for?" The audiences or **publics** with you intend to interact shape your identity at any given time.

If the profile you are creating is simply for other students and instructors in the class you are taking, perhaps you'd craft the profile to reflect student teams or organizations you are part of; or perhaps you would keep it vague, if the student community on your campus feels large or impersonal. Compare that to the profile you might craft for a professional site, like LinkedIn, and you might see distinct differences. When students in my courses share LinkedIn profiles they often look very different from the same students' profiles in our Course Management System (CMS). On our CMS students upload small, fuzzy photos if they upload photos at all, whereas on LinkedIn those same students look directly at the camera, proudly wear suits, and boast of their accomplishments. In class, they want to blend in; but when applying for jobs, they want to stand out.

And now compare your student and professional profile to the profile you might use in online dating. Is it different? I imagine so! Perhaps the focus moves to looking attractive and inviting to attract those you are interested in.

Case Study: “Reptiles and Guns”

Student Content

Finding Community, Finding Identity



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<https://opentextbooks.library.arizona.edu/hrsmwinter2022/?p=36#h5p-58>

technological determinism that exists among young people today. People tend to be much more careful about what they post online and what they keep to themselves. With a crazy world around us and cancel culture in full force, some people feel that if they share their opinion online, they'll be ostracized by their peers. Along with opinions, people want to have a cool look on their social media in general, and won't post pictures of their stuffed animals but instead of their recent trip to Hawaii. It's amazing how obsessed with "likes" people tend to be online, and the desire for online validation by one's peers

has never been higher. People want to post good quality photos in order to maximize the activity on their post.

This concept goes hand in hand with online **privacy**. The ability to choose what people can and can't know about you from your online persona has changed the way social media is seen and used. A lot of people I know, myself included, take advantage of the privacy options given by various social media platforms. The most relevant examples I can think of, that seem to be used most frequently by my peers are the private story feature of Snapchat, and the private account feature of Instagram. Both of these features restrict who can see posted content on the user's account. In my experience, I have found that private accounts and stories are where people really share personal information, as the people following the accounts or being hand selected to be on the stories are close personal friends of the users (in most cases).

Project 1 has really made me reflect on privacy and what I want my online presence to say about me. I believe that it's best to keep a public social media account family friendly and more on the professional side, especially because it's possible that future employers will be looking into social media to run a virtual background check on a person. I do believe however, that private accounts are great because it's great to have a place to post fun things that may be more personal and not meant to be seen by a large audience.

data-sheets-userformat="{2":8993,"3":{"1":0},"8":{"1":{"1":2,"2":0,"5":{"1":2,"2":0}},"1":0,"2":0,"3":3,"1":1,"2":0,"4":1}},"11":3,"12":0,"16":11}>**Identity** is a very important concept in the social media world. Social media allows the users to share as much or as little as they want to about themselves and their life. Whether it be pictures and videos of a trip someone took or a tweet about someone's favorite sports team, it allows people to

show the world who they are, without having to show it in person. Some people like to share their hobbies and interests over social media, sometimes having sports clips of themselves or videos of themselves playing guitar. A perfect example is my roommate Shaun, who in middle school would post pictures of different reptiles and assortments of heavy military weaponry. This was out of the norm of what kids in the middle school age group would post about, thus leading to Shaun being made fun of by his peers and subsequently no longer posting things he was personally interested in. Reflecting on this story really made me realize how much someone's social media presence can affect their real life and tendencies. The people in the young adult age group now mostly only post about things they're doing with their friends or families, such as trips and adventures, along with more personal posts about people that are very important to them, such as anniversaries or birthdays.

There is not as much casual posting on social media as there once was, which really goes to show the **technological determinism** that exists among young people today. People tend to be much more careful about what they post online and what they keep to themselves. With a crazy world around us and cancel culture in full force, some people feel that if they share their opinion online, they'll be ostracized by their peers. Along with opinions, people want to have a cool look on their social media in general, and won't post pictures of their stuffed animals but instead of their recent trip to Hawaii. It's amazing how obsessed with "likes" people tend to be online, and the desire for online validation by one's peers

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About the Author

My name is Jack Doneux. I'm from San Diego, California. I love music producing, snowboarding, spending time with my friends, and partying. Avid dye player and drip enthusiast.



Respond to this case study... The author describes privacy settings as one tool users can employ to “choose what people can and can’t know” about their online persona. Is someone’s persona or identity the same in every context? When might it be beneficial to limit what other people see of your persona? When might it be detrimental?

You may find your self-presentation of your identity is limited or enhanced by what options or features the platform you use offers. These are **affordances**: cues in an environment that communicate how to interact with features or things in that environment and that can also communicate to others. A button affords being pushed; snapchat’s snap streaks afforded keeping a visible running count of two people’s interactions with one another. Affordances can also be expanded, as they often are by users in social media platforms. For example, many platforms that do not afford the claiming of gender identities other than *male* or *female* find users exploiting creative ways to express gender fluidity.

Of course, users of social media are not always seeking to express

their most “realistic” selves. Some platforms are desirable to users because they afford fantasy filters or the trappings of other identities. Video game avatars offer compelling examples of profiles that embody other lives and beings. But does that mean you don’t spend much time designing that avatar, since it’s “not you?” Of course not; it has become standard in the gaming industry to charge significant sums for downloadable content to customize your avatar or “skin” – because your avatar is you, for one or more gaming publics. And that avatar and profile will influence how people treat you in-game; they constitute your in-game identity.

Below: “Outsourcing” the labor of expressing yourself online to other types of identities is common...and complicated.



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Who are you? Offline? Online? Across modalities?

Like the concept of information, identity is a notion that used to be amorphous and philosophical. You couldn’t easily set “identity” apart from the human to whom the identity belonged. Today, though, humans try to project every unseen aspect of our lives onto the binary-minded digital world. And that means the formerly shapeless concept of identity has to take shape, and if we want it to represent us online, we have to know what we want and put it out there.

As a human, you don’t just have one identity, or even one online

identity and also one offline identity. Our legal world and policies from platforms [like Facebook](#) may limit people into having one identity, but in life, both online and offline, we play many roles and thus have many identities.

Two theorists have given us important tools to understand these identity roles, although both theorists began writing about these roles before the internet drew so many of us to craft identities online.

Backtrack to the 1950s. Social roles in North America were rigid. Then the sociologist Erving Goffman put forward a whole new way of looking at identity in his 1956 book, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (see overview in the video embedded below). Goffman wrote that we are all actors on a “**social stage**,” who play particular roles to create our identities and that these roles change as we interact with different people and situations. He also wrote that our selves can only really be understood when we look at all of the roles we play.

Then the cultural critic and feminist theorist Judith Butler advanced and honed the notion of identity roles in her 1990 book *Gender Trouble* (overview in the video embedded below), focusing on the roles that define gender. Butler’s theories introduced the notion that gender itself is our playing of roles like “boy,” “girl,” “man,” and “woman,” rather than these being “natural” or connected to our biologies. Butler’s concept of **performativity** says that roles like gender are only constructed through our performances of them; they would not exist without our acting them into existence.

If these theories have truth in them – and I believe they do – what does this mean for our identities online? Well, our online identities offer some additional evidence that gender and other social roles are constructed. Many early internet adopters were thrilled at the possibilities of expressing themselves without being defined by their bodies. But what we have learned from maturing of the internet – aided by Goffman’s and Butler’s theories – is that humans’ “selves” have never existed only in or on our bodies. We perform our selves into existence. And so when we perform

ourselves into being online, we carry much of that same old offline, embodied baggage with us



Cindy Sherman is a performance artist who poses in different roles or personae (personas), drawing attention to the different selves that can be performed by one person.

Context collapse

What if the profile I asked you to create above would be seen on multiple social media sites? What if you learned the profile would be associated with both your dating *and* your LinkedIn profiles? And also visible to your network where you connect with family? If this idea makes you feel uncomfortable, you are experiencing the threat of context collapse. **Context collapse** is when the different contexts or worlds you associate with overlap or become mixed together. Friends snicker at an embarrassing comment your mother makes in

reply to your photo online. A job recruiter sees an Instagram photo of you partying and decides not to recruit you.

Political views expressed online can lead to particularly fraught situations. White supremacists preparing to demonstrate in Charlottesville, Virginia in August 2017 discovered this when [AirBnB canceled demonstrators' Charlottesville reservations](#) after being alerted to the demonstrators' intentions. After the demonstrations, [a campaign on Twitter to identify and publicly shame protestors](#) led to problems for some protestors, who were prepared to promote white supremacy when surrounded by sympathizers but not prepared to defend these views before broader network contacts.

Context collapse is a constant danger as our online identities proliferate. In her research, new media scholar danah boyd found that teens develop strategies for dealing with context collapse, including using coded language to communicate. It is also common practice for people to try to keep their social media accounts separate and hide some details or even entire accounts from specific people and publics (as we'll discuss in more detail in Chapter 3).

What keeps us using platforms even when our interactions feel uncomfortable or compromising? Well, **network effects**, which means that the more the platform is used – the more often we go there to interact with family, or friends, or customers, or all of these – the more valuable it becomes.

When my 'professor' and 'mother' roles overlap



I deal with context collapse too. As a professor of social media, I encourage my students to embrace their online experiences as part of their real worlds; in this professor role, I recognize the value in online interactions. And then I head home from class to find my teenaged son or daughter has been on social media for hours. I freak out. *Enough screen time!* I shout. *I don't care what you're doing on there!*

It feels hypocritical that I behave so differently in these two roles. So why do I do it? I ask myself this a lot, but I only have tentative answers; they have to do with what I perceive as distinct responsibilities in each role I play. When I teach, I don't want my students to shut me out; I know from experience that they are only willing to examine their online interactions in my class when they feel comfortable I'm not judging them. But my job as a mother is not to help my son understand his online life. My job is to keep him safe and healthy, and when he spends too much time in virtual worlds, his safety and health slip out of my control.

Why context collapse is more extreme online

You could say I am getting off easy with my own professor–mother context collapse. My mother role is mostly an offline role, so context collapse between my mother and professor roles online is not frequent, and it doesn't last forever online. Whatever roles you feel the need to keep distinct in your life, it is likely their online expressions that you worry about the most. There are **four key affordances of online communication** that danah boyd emphasizes are far more pronounced than they would be offline ([It's Complicated](#), pg. 11). They are:

- persistence: online content and expressions can last for a very long time
- **visibility**: many audiences and publics may be able to see what you post over time
- **spreadability**: it's nearly effortless to share content posted online
- **searchability**: content posted online can be searched for

The four affordances identified by boyd raise the stakes of online context collapse and communication in general. When we consider who controls our data, and what we agree to when we agree to use their services, it can be especially chilling to realize how easily what we express online might become *visible* to unintended audiences. They may *spread* this information to other publics, who will be able to search and find it easily. Finally, this threat will *persist* for a very long time.

Core Concepts and Questions

Core Concepts

identity

identity is an iteration of the self that links individuals with how they are perceived by others

"social stage"

sociologist Erving Goffman wrote in his 1956 book *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* that we are all actors on a “social stage,” who play particular roles to create our identities, and that these roles change as we interact with different people and situations. Our selves can only really be understood when we look at all of the roles we play

performativity

in her 1990 book *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler’s concept of performativity says that roles like gender are only

constructed through our performances of them; they would not exist without our acting them into existence

context collapse

context collapse is when the different contexts or worlds you associate with overlap or become mixed together

network effects in platforms

a concept meaning that the more the platform is used, the more valuable it is – because the more likely it is where we go to interact with family, or friends, or customers, or all of these. A shorthand definition is “the more, the merrier”

affordances

signals or cues in an environment that communicate how to interact with features or things in that environment

four key affordances of online communication

there are four affordances of online communication that danah boyd emphasizes are far more pronounced than in offline communication (It's Complicated, pg. 11). They are: persistence (online content and expressions can last for a

very long time), visibility (many audiences and publics may be able to see what you post over time), spreadability (it's nearly effortless to share content posted online), and searchability (content posted online can be searched for)

...AND don't forget that each of the 4 affordances of networked communication is a core concept and glossary term!

Core Questions

A. Questions for qualitative thought:

1. In what ways have a social media platform's affordances on how you can present your identity felt restrictive to you? If you were in charge, how would you rewrite them?
2. Write about an example of context collapse you have seen or experienced online. Who were the intended publics, or audiences, or each presentation of self involved? How did the situation end up?

3. Consider one or more aspects of yourself that do not feel like they have places to be expressed online. What is happening with these aspects of yourself that cannot be expressed online? How does it feel? Envision and describe or map out a platform where this type of expression can be shared.

B. Review: Which is the best answer?



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Scholarly Sources on Identity (cited in APA):

boyd, d. (2013). White flight in networked publics. How race and class shaped American teen engagement with MySpace and Facebook. In L. Nakamura & PA Chow-White (Eds.), *Race after the internet*, 203-222. [Find in Google Scholar](#)

Pitcan, M., Marwick, A. E., & boyd, d. (2018). Performing a vanilla self: Respectability politics, social class, and the digital world. *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, 23(3), 163-179. [Find in Google Scholar](#)

About these sources: Racial and cultural identities are expressed online through everything from choice of platform to user language choices. These articles use interviews and observation of online environments to unpack how such choices culminate in cultural coding of online spaces and performances.

Related Content

Read it: Internet Society's Understanding Your Online Identity



The organization Internet Society, or internetsociety.org, was founded in 1992 to manage and guide technical and social standards for internet use. Today they are “a global cause-driven organization ...dedicated to ensuring that the Internet stays open, transparent and defined by you.”

Online identity can be viewed through many lenses. The internet society has dived deeply into online identity through the lens of technical infrastructure, and found that not only public policy, but public education is essential in managing identity-related data collection and privacy online.

Click here to open the short reading “[Understanding Your Online Identity](#)” by InternetSociety.org, then highlight the passages you find useful. Be sure you understand the terms below.

Term	Definition	Example
Identity	The complete set of characteristics that define you	Name, nicknames, birth date and any other unique characteristics that combined make you who you are
Identifier (according to InternetSociety.org)	A way of referring to a set of characteristics	Your email address (myID@me.com) or user name (RaulB) or an account number (7633)
Partial Identity (according to InternetSociety.org)	A subset of the characteristics that make up your identity	Demographic information about you or any purchase history is stored in your account at a website
Profile (according to InternetSociety.org)	Information collected by others about your actions and characteristics. (See also chapter definition.)	A search you conducted for “discount shoes” or a list of websites visited

Persona
(according to
InternetSociety.org)

A partial identity
created by you to
represent yourself
in a specific
situation

A social network
account or your
online blog

Hear It: “Timelessness” from the Social Media and Ourselves podcast



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<https://opentextbooks.library.arizona.edu/hrsmwinter2022/?p=36#oembed-2>

Listen to / read the [transcript](#) of this second episode of the

podcast *Social Media and Ourselves*, “Timelessness.” Then consider: What were or are your past “selves” captured on social media? If they can still be found online, are you comfortable with that? If not, imagine you had the power to right this situation from the tech side. How would you change things. Envision making changes not only so that these past selves no longer haunt you online, but so that the shame of a past self online does not affect so many younger people in the future.

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2. Old to New Media

Social media have evolved through human cultural practices along with technological affordances.

may we have your attention: first social media experiences

Student Content, Fall 2020

At what age should a child have social media?

When we use our phones out in public just to avoid conversing with other people we are not only being very anti-social, but we are practicing **civil inattention**. Everyone always says it's teens who use their phones the most, and maybe that's true, but why is that the case? Is it because we have more social media accounts or more followers? Or is it because we choose to use our phones to distract us from the real world? And what age is too young for a social media presence? I interviewed a Freshman at The University of Arizona to share her first experiences

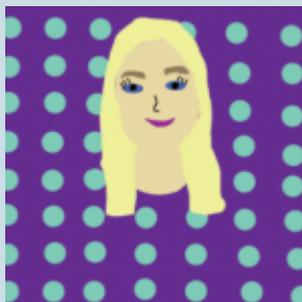
with social media, and got her take on how young is too young.

Amara (a pseudonym) is 18 years old and has an iPhone just like every other college student her age, but the difference between her, and many other of these students is that she didn't even have a phone until she was 16 in her Sophomore year of high school because her parents were very strict about phones and didn't want their only child active on social media at such a young age. This was difficult for Amara for a few reasons, the first being she couldn't contact her parents after school when they needed to pick her up, she couldn't talk to her friends outside of school, and she always felt very out of the loop.

Amara got to have the childhood experiences her classmates never would. She played outside and did normal kids' stuff. This is why I believe that parents should wait as long as possible to get their kids phones because kids should enjoy their childhood while it lasts, and then enjoy all the good of social media when they are old enough to appreciate it.

About the Author

May Otzen is a student at the University of Arizona. She spends her days watching Netflix and using various social media apps like Instagram, TikTok, and Snapchat. She loves spending time with her friends and playing with her cat, Bruce.



*Respond to this case study... What age would you consider too young for a social media presence? What, if anything, makes social media more “distracting” for young people compared to other age groups? Describe any unique benefits social media *could* offer, and describe what policy or platform changes might need to happen to make these benefits possible.*

It is important to understand the relationships between older media and social media. By older media, I mean the industry-produced form of mass communication available in the US before digital social media became a thing, such as television, radio, newspapers, books, magazines, etc.

Older media can be referred to by other names, such as traditional media. And then there are subcategories of older media: broadcast media are one subcategory of older media, including television and radio, that communicates from one source to many viewers at once. Print media are a paper-based subcategory of older media such as newspapers, books, and magazines, that many users access individually.

Media convergence

New digital media devices inherit many qualities and functions of older media and forms of communication.



Mobile Phone Evolution: The shapes of mobile phones have evolved over time to become less similar to older analog phones.

Here's an example: When your phone camera snaps a digital photo, it probably makes [this sound](#) or something like it. That sound is the sound of a shutter opening and closing. It is a sound that analog (non-digital) cameras have to make in order to function.

Digital cameras don't have shutters; they function through chips that sense light coming into the lens. So why do so many digital cameras make that shutter sound? Because developers wanted your device to signal to you that the photo was taken, and that sound has become associated with picture taking in our society. Media

scholar Henry Jenkins calls this type of blending of old and new media "technological convergence." (Convergence just means coming together while moving through time.) Technological convergence is one of [several types of media convergence](#) that Jenkins writes are crucial to understanding our media world today.

Our technologies are full of convergences with older, traditional media helping us make sense of new media. Some signs of technological convergence go away over time as we become more comfortable with technologies. For example, mobile phones were once shaped more like analog phones, which helped people feel more comfortable calling and talking on them. However, as they gained more entertainment-related affordances, they began to appear more like remote control devices.

The history of communicating with many at once

Traditional media can be limiting when viewed as the only influence on new social media. Think of a famous athlete's Facebook post seen and raucously responded to by thousands of people. Would that have been possible through traditional media like a paper newspaper or radio broadcast? No. But now imagine it in this ancient amphitheater in Syria (below). That athlete could have shouted an insult at an opponent, and gotten roars of approval and disapproval from the crowd. Spectators may even have gotten into fights with one another. Those types of interactions have a long social history.



The Bosra panno in Syria: This amphitheater from the ancient Roman empire afforded viewership by a large crowd that also interacted with one another.

Humans can communicate to broad and distant audiences using many other means outside of print or broadcast media. These include:

- Vocalization and voice amplification
- Staging for visibility
- Oversize objects
- Movement and dance repertoires

- Songs and repetition

Some of these means of communication are very old. But the smartest developers and users of new media let every possible means of communication and visibility inspire their designs and practices.

It is important to recognize that when we use media, we communicate and spread our ways of interacting with these media, not just the content delivered by the media. Theorist Marshall McLuhan referred to this with the phrase, “The medium is the message.”

When developers consider new features, they have to consider what is present in the cultures that will interact with those media. If a feature relies upon brand new methods of interaction, it increases the likelihood that those media will confuse users. See one interesting way people are looking at new gestures developed in the digital age [here](#).

A millennial shift: Web 2.0 as user contributions

It is with traditional media in mind that New York University Journalism professor Jay Rosen wrote [The People Formerly Known as the Audience](#) in 2006. He claimed that these people were taking over the media by using social media, and that his statement was their “collective manifesto.” He claimed the people were speaking out to resist “being at the receiving end of a media system that ran one way, in a broadcasting pattern, with high entry fees and a few firms competing to speak.”

Today’s media exist in a different era from the turn of the millennium. Rosen reminds us that broadcasters used to refer to viewers as “eyeballs.” Think about what that metaphor means. An eyeball has only two powers: To look, and to look away. There are plenty of media content creators who still only care about whether

or not people are looking. But far more now allow users to “take part, debate, create, communicate, [and] share.” It increases their viewership, for one thing. And whereas the traditional media model involved advertising to the individual, the new model involves persuading the individual to advertise your product to their contacts.

The term Web 2.0 refers to sites that afford user contributions, such as likes and votes. O’Reilly Media coined the term Web 2.0 in 2004; [you can read about that here](#). They were referring to social media sites popping up all over the web at that time. These new sites were different than the static sites of the 1990s and 2000s, the “Web 1.0” era. Web 1.0 sites would provide information or maybe some entertainment, but would not allow user contributions. You might say they were designed for eyeballs only – although creative users found ways to connect on Web 1.0, as we will learn when we learn about the Zapatistas in Chapter 5.

Web 2.0 sites that emerged in the early 2000s offered new capabilities, or affordances, to users. With Web 2.0 affordances, users can weigh in with likes and votes. They can comment or write their own posts. They can upload content, like images and videos. They can connect with others, and offer their own profiles and content to connect to.

Tools of change: Online cultures

The result of Web 2.0 is sites that are shaped by user cultures. Culture is a concept encompassing all the norms, values, and related behaviors that people who have interacted in a social group over time agree on and perpetuate. Think about the Web 2.0-enabled social media spaces you frequent. Perhaps when you spend time on Tumblr, you see that people talk about their emotions, and you talk about your own. Meanwhile, in League of Legends chat you don’t talk about your emotions because you know you will get attacked if

you do. On Facebook and LinkedIn, you might wear a high-buttoned shirt, as you have seen is the norm; but you might appear in a robe on Snapchat, or a bikini on Instagram. Culture encompasses how users talk to each other, present themselves for one another, and take cues from and influence each other as they collectively decide what's in and what's out.

Software platform developers do influence culture in their user designs. For example, Facebook has its own shirt buttoned up rather high, with its plain white background and limitations on user customization of profiles. Online cultures do take some cues from developers, and users are restricted or guided by their affordances. But users have a lot of agency as they develop and share cultures within these sites.

Case Study: Generations on Social Media

Student Content

My relationship with technology

memes and internet culture that they do?"\n\nHe shrugged \nYou have a good point. I think you're probably correct, but we will know with time.\n\n\nThis is a conversation I think about a lot when I reflect upon my childhood and my years so far as a young adult. Unlike my parents, I grew up with technology around me. I was a baby

who watched The Wiggles on television, and played Tetris on my dad's old blackberry. It evolved into playing Webkinz and Club Penguin, and the kids at school were suddenly talking about making Twitter accounts at grade 5. Twitter was something I wasn't allowed to have back then. I had an iPod and I played games on it where I gave people cool hairstyles or took care of pet dragons. These are all memories I look upon very fondly.

Then my relationship with technology changed around middle school. I downloaded the social media platform Instagram alongside all my peers and I was playing around with it, posting pictures of my pets. Soon enough, **microcelebrities** that I would watch on youtube started joining the platform, and soon I was scrolling through posts of these people who I idolized and realized: my body doesn't look like that.

Soon, while trying to grow my photography account, I was getting sucked into this vortex of people's **selfies** where they didn't have any acne, unlike me; or their bikini pictures where their stomach was completely flat, unlike mine.

I didn't realize the effect this was having on me until high-school where I will admit that I grew resentful of the way my body looks. It took a couple of photography classes for me to realize: most of this, if not all, was due to the magical powers of Adobe Photoshop. I unfollowed all of these Instagram models and instead pushed myself to follow more photography accounts that didn't make me hate my body.

It took a while for my relationship with social media to heal after that. However, my relationship with technology itself was flourishing. I was learning and creating art through Adobe Photoshop and a DSLR camera. I was using the photography studio at my school daily, and pushing out photos that I was extremely proud of.

Around the time I went into college was when my social

media healed enough to start being more active there. Instead of Instagram, which I post on rarely, I chose a more casual platform to me: Twitch. I started, and still continue to, stream every Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday night. I met a few online friends through that platform that I love to play, stream, and converse with. Some live a state over, and some live all away across the world in Japan. I look forward to every Tuesday through Thursday, excited to play Stardew Valley, Uno, Valorant, Call of Duty: Cold War, or any other game that I want to play then; either on my own or with my newfound friends. This schedule has given me something to look forward to and a social life that is fulfilling during the Covid Pandemic. In the very end, I would say my relationship with tech is rapidly expanding, with learning new things about stream equipment and how to apply them to make my stream more fun for both me and my viewers. I also realize that I am not obligated to join every social media platform and that is perfectly okay. This newfound casualty of Twitch as my main social media platform, alongside all the friends I found through there warm my heart and make me feel less alone. I finally feel like I belong in the digital world." data-bbox="177 116 812 640"/>

data-sheets-userformat="{\"2\":8961,\"3\":{\"1\":0},\"11\":3,\"12\":0,\"16\":11}>“Do you think that the generational gap will be smaller between this generation and the next?” I asked my boyfriend, who sat beside me at the table, scrolling through TikTok. We were showing each other our favorite TikToks that we found since the last time we saw each other, which is something we always look forward to.

“What do you mean?”, He glanced up at me from his phone, raising an eyebrow.

“I mean we grew up with technology that our parents didn’t and I feel like that made the generational gap wider, don’t you think?”

He paused for a moment and contemplated the concept, “Maybe.”

I gave him my theory, “I mean ever since we were born we are adapting consistently and incorporating new technologies into our everyday lives.” I say, “Do you think that means that we will continue to adapt to the technologies our children will have and we can experience the same **memes** and internet culture that they do?”

He shrugged “You have a good point. I think you’re probably correct, but we will know with time.”

This is a conversation I think about a lot when I reflect upon my childhood and my years so far as a young adult. Unlike my parents, I grew up with technology around me. I was a baby who watched The Wiggles on television and played Tetris on my dad’s old blackberry. It evolved into playing Webkinz and Club Penguin, and the kids at school were suddenly talking about making Twitter accounts at grade 5. Twitter was something I wasn’t allowed to have back then. I had an iPod and I played games on it where I gave people cool hairstyles or took care of pet dragons. These are all memories I look upon very fondly.

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About the Author

This piece was written by Jaden Fernandez, Student Contributor

Respond to this case study... How has your relationship with social media changed over time? Consider both how you have changed on a personal level and how the technology itself has evolved. Have you swapped platforms? Developed new habits? Found or left communities?

Dominating today: The platform economy

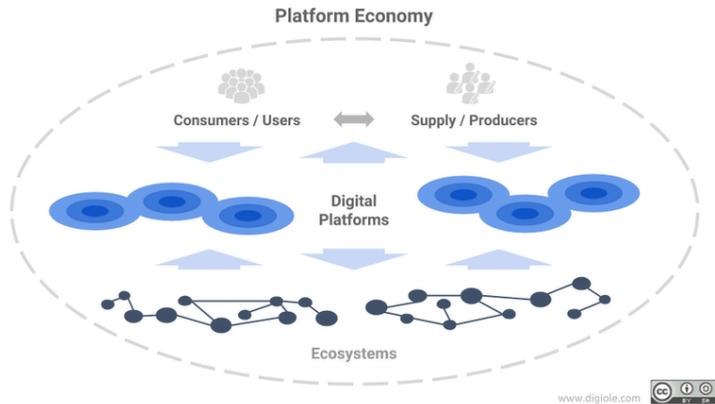
...we are in the middle of a contest to define the contours of what we call the “platform society”: a global conglomerate of all kinds of platforms, which interdependencies are structured by a common set of mechanisms.”

– José Van Dijck and Thomas Poell, [Social Media and the Transformation of Public Space](#). Social Media + Society, July-December 2015: 1.

Human-to-human connection is what social media is supposed to be about. This belief, this *hope*, was an impetus for this book when I began writing it in 2016. Historically, human-to-human connection was also what the internet itself reached for, at least in the dreams of its creators. This Web 1.0 or the “read-only” web as it would later be called was quite limited in its reach compared to today. And yet...that potentially infinite web of networks was still a wonder, and a site of international connections and information wars (as you’ll see in Chapter 5 with the Zapatistas).

Then what happened? Well on the surface, the web simply became more social. By the early 2000s with Web 2.0 and the “read/write web,” great excitement and euphoria surrounded the participatory cultures that blossomed on Web 2.0 sites. The wonder of the web refracted across our lives, as we marveled at how easily we could connect with one another. This world of connections broadened our human imaginations and expectations in irreversible ways. And many were overjoyed when, by 2009, all this human connection grew teeth – which is to say viability in the form of real currency exchange – with the “sharing economy” that enabled regular folk to share services and goods with one another. Platforms that began as tiny businesses with few assets gained tremendous value as the places to go to socialize online, with family, with customers, with friends, with influencers. The more real or potential network connections we had who used a platform, the more certain we became that we had to use it too. In the platform

economy, the more, the merrier. These **network effects** continue to drive audiences to platforms at dizzying rates, rapidly [eclipsing](#) product pipelines and business models that dominated in times past.



Behind the visible connections, all this sociality also marked the beginning of voracious – yet invisible – intermediaries. We were giddily giving up our data in exchange for the peer-to-peer exchange of services, a backroom exchange with implications few would recognize for nearly another decade.

And today? Welcome to the “platform society,” in which we are connected to one another, but only through platforms that derive immense power from and over our human connections.

What are platforms?

I define a **platform** as follows:

Platform: An ecosystem that connects people and companies while retaining control over the terms of these connections and ownership of connection byproducts such as data.

Google, Apple, Facebook, and Amazon: These are the major platforms that [José Van Dijck](#) argues have defined how society and both public and private life function today. These platforms reach deeply into human lives worldwide, with their publicly understood purposes forming only a fraction of their activities and profits. And rippling from these big four platforms are smaller ones, which emulate their models in various ways. These platforms and their stakeholders transform not just what we buy and enjoy but what we need to live and thrive: how we educate, how we govern and are governed, and how we structure our societies.

The impact of globally operating platforms on local and state economies and cultures is immense, as they force all societal actors—including the mass media, civil society organizations, and state institutions—to reconsider and recalibrate their position in public space. (Van Dijck and Poell, 1.)

Platforms have a profound effect on how societal life is organized. Airbnb has changed not just the hospitality sector, but also neighborhood dynamics and social life. Uber has not only affected the taxi industry; it has affected the construction of roads and public transportation services. We do not yet vote through platforms, yet they have had irreversible effects on our elections. Today almost every sector of public life has become platformized: Higher Education. News and Journalism. Fitness and Health. Hospitality. Transportation. And in these platforms, transactions that are visible to consumers are undergirded by other transactions in which consumers become unwitting producers, their data a form of currency that subsidizes the transactions they chose to engage in in the first place.

Future directions in the online world

With so much human activity and cultural expression enabled in Web 2.0, what is Web 3.0? Look this up on the web and you will find no shortage of responses. There is no consensus – no agreement among experts or among users. We don't even know if we are already using Web 3.0, because it is hard to know where Web 2.0 ends.

Surely one valuable perspective on the present and the future of the internet would come from Tim Berners-Lee, who invented the internet in 1989. (It was released to the public in the 1990s; [read more of that history here.](#))

Today Tim Berners-Lee has a new mission – to make sure we really are connected by the internet. He describes what drove him to pursue this mission this way:

“Now people feel very disempowered, because the end result is that they're telling their computer who their friends are, and who's in the photographs, and planning things and designing things – and those plans and designs and friendships are sucked up and held by these social networks. And they're not really social networks, they're silos.”

The data you create as you move across online spaces is often controlled and owned by those spaces. Berners-Lee is now working to develop new methods of linking data across virtual space without relying upon governments, corporations, or the many others with an interest in controlling that data. You can read more about this new mission in [this TechCrunch article.](#)

“Right now we have the worst of both worlds, in which people not only cannot control their data, but also can't really use it,” Berners-Lee said in the project's announcement last year. “Our goal is to develop a web architecture that gives users ownership over their data.”

Case Study: Old vs. New Media

Student Content, Fall 2021

My journey with technology



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<https://opentextbooks.library.arizona.edu/hrsmwinter2022/?p=46#h5p-59>

TASL: Music includes Melody 6 and Drums 3 from [iVoices Innovation Pack](#) by Gabe Stultz, iVoices Media Lab, CC-BY.

Technology has always fascinated me. It is incredible how quickly I can look up anything I want to with just a quick Google search. It has certainly made research for school-related things much easier. My mom always lets me know how good I have it; how she had to go to the library and read a book to find **information** I can access in only a few seconds. I'm not sure if I could survive without the internet. How else would I have translated my Spanish homework or

looked up how to solve a math problem I'm stuck on. It's difficult for me to imagine my life without technology. The first thing I do when I get up in the morning is to check my phone; to check my school email, definitely not to scroll through Instagram and watch YouTube. During the summer of 2020 I got a job at a family-owned BBQ restaurant called Word of Mouth Grill as a cashier, server, and sometimes as a cook. I made an amazing potato salad if I do say so myself. The restaurant has an Instagram account where they post aesthetically pleasing pictures of the food they serve. Word of Mouth is an hour and a half away from U of A and I can't just pop down to visit very often. Yet I must suffer because every day I see pictures of their food. It's like I can smell the pulled pork through the screen.

In all seriousness though, my life would be so much different without technology and social media. I would have to check a physical newspaper to find out what's going on in the world instead of simply clicking the apple news app. I feel like I would be uninformed if that were the case. Additionally, I would have fewer news sources to choose from. I would have to subscribe to numerous papers just so I can fact-check them with the other ones I read. Sounds a bit too tedious to me.

I also find the link between video games and socializing compelling. Yes, you hear about people being able to communicate through things like Snapchat, Facebook, and other social media **platforms**, but people often forget that video games are another way of communicating. I've met some great friends from being randomly put into Destiny PvP lobbies and I still play and talk with them to this day. Though I sometimes get paired with 10-year-old who think they are better at the game than me... Unfortunately, they

are sometimes. I don't mention it that often because it hurts my ego. Video games have also allowed me to keep in contact with my younger sister. We log on to Minecraft and play together for hours even though we are an hour and a half away from each other. Games are often painted by the media as bad for your health and addictive. While that may be true in some cases, I've experienced the positive effects of gaming. Sure, I've procrastinated on homework so I can play one more game more than a few times, but I feel that the positive effects of video games greatly outweigh the negatives. Video games have helped me escape the world and clear my mind when I'm feeling stressed or down and have certainly helped me stay in contact with my friends.

I'm still not sure what I want to do with my life yet, but I am sure that I want to explore the wonders of technology more. I believe that we can do so much good with technology and social media if we focus on building the world up instead of trying to use it for selfish purposes.



About the Author

Hi, my name is Tyler Amberg and my pronouns are she/her. I was born and raised in Tempe, Arizona. I love playing lacrosse and skiing. Well, when I have access to snow that is, it's a bit difficult in the desert. I love movies, old and new, and will binge-watch them for hours with my little sister; who is also my best friend.

Respond to this case study... What affordances do you take for granted? How would your day-to-day life change if a technology you relied upon was no longer available? What might you substitute or repurpose to fill that need?

Core Concepts and Questions

Core Concepts

broadcast media

one subcategory of older media, including television and radio, that communicates from one source to many viewers

print media

a subcategory of older paper-based media such as newspapers, books, and magazines, that many users access individually

technological convergence

blending of old and new media. For example, cellular phones were once shaped more like analog (non-digital) phones

Web 2.0

sites that afford user contributions, such as likes and votes

culture

a concept encompassing all the norms, values, and related behaviors that people who have interacted in a social group over time agree on and perpetuate

net neutrality

a shorthand name for a key set of features that have made the internet what it is today

platform

an ecosystem that connects people and companies while retaining control over the terms of these connections and ownership of connection byproducts such as data

network effects

the more a platform is used, the more likely that platform is where we go to interact with family, or friends, or customers, or all of these. In other words, in the platform economy, the more, the merrier

Core Questions

A. Questions for qualitative thought

1. What are examples of qualities that digital media have inherited from traditional media other than those discussed here? Try to think of some that don't make the new media work better.
2. Can you give an example of a site that allows you to create and share? And then of one that still treats you like little more than “eyeballs”? Explain.
3. Do you think you are part of “the people formerly known as the audience?” Is it still possible to feel that you are only an audience (not a participant) in the age of social media? Or are there different terms we should use now?
4. Try to conceptualize a platform that you use. Make it a place, familiar or imaginary. How is it organized? Who is there? How are they behaving?

B. Review: Which is the best answer?



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Related Content

Hear It: Air Facebook

Platforms can be difficult to understand and conceptualize. Humor can help; so can illustration, and imagination. Here is how I imagine one platform that's been significant in my life, but that I find it difficult to leave due to network effects.



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Open Media and Resources - An OpenStax Book

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3. Privacy and Publics

Online norms around privacy are dynamic, and stakes are high.

When you use social media, who are you communicating with? And who else is paying attention? This chapter is about producing, consuming, and controlling online content. It's also about the data, cultural norms, and terms of service that you create, accept, and influence.

Not “the public” – They’re publics, and they’re networked

Let's go back to that amphitheater in Chapter 2. We envisioned an athlete on the ground, spewing insults about her opponent. ([Yes, there were women athletes and gladiators in Ancient Rome.](#)) I imagine the athlete shouting, “I say before the public that my opponent has the [stench of a lowlife latrine.](#)” And we have a mass of spectators roaring in approval, disapproval, excitement, laughter.



Statue of
woman
gladiator
performing
for one or
more publics
in Ancient
Rome

That mass of spectators is a **public**. The definition of a public is complicated (see danah boyd, [It's Complicated](#) pp 8-9). But for simplicity's sake I define a public as "people paying sustained attention to the same thing at the same time."

When the gladiator calls the mass of spectators "the public" it

deepens the effect of her insult to suggest that “everyone in the world” is watching. Although it is imaginary, “**the public**” is a powerful idea or “construct” that people refer to when they want to add emphasis to the effects of one-to-many speech. But really, there is no “the public.” There is never a moment when everyone in the world is paying sustained attention to the same thing at the same time. There only are various publics, overlapping each other, with one person potentially sharing in or with many different publics.

If you use social media, you interact with many publics that are connected to one another through you and likely through many others. Publics that intersect and connect online are “**networked publics**” (pg. 8.) In the terminology of social network analysis, whenever an individual connects two networked publics (or any two entities, such as two other people), that connector is called a **bridge**. Think about the publics you form a bridge between. How are you uniquely placed to spread information across multiple publics by forming bridges between and among them?

Bridging information between publics can be exciting, and controversial. Networked publics really work each other up, forming opinions, practices, and norms together. And they occasionally get in fights in the stands, clubbing each other with ancient Roman hot dogs and Syrian tabouleh.

Different Cultural Publics

Student Content, Fall 2020

Social Media Based on Culture



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I was born in Chile and recently just moved to the United States five years ago. Being from somewhere else really expands your knowledge on everything since you are surrounded by specific communities.

I have had the amazing experience of being able to understand and put myself in someone else's shoes when it comes to social media. The fact that I am foreign gives me the opportunity to look at social media in a different way. What really surprised me when I moved to the United States is that people here were more attached to their phones and their Instagram pages, or Snapchat or other apps.

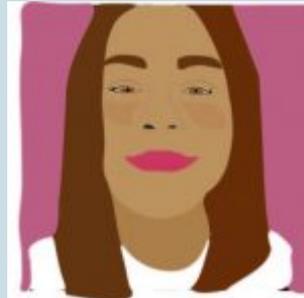
I grew up with people posting things on their social media that were simple and showed what their real interests were. Now individuals spend hours and hours checking what they are going to post, concerned about what others will say instead of just being themselves.

Something else that I have noticed about social media here is that cyberbullying is a much bigger thing than in a Hispanic country. That is the reason why people worry too much about what they are posting and what others will think of them when they see who they really are and what their real interests are. However, people should not be afraid of what others say and then they would have a better experience when it comes to technology. People could see all your real talents and maybe one day you could be recognized for that.

Even though people have different backgrounds and perspectives on things when it comes to life and publishing it on social media, at the end of the day we are all trying to show others who we are.

About the Author

Sofia Diaz is a first year student at the University of Arizona. She spends her time walking and napping with her beloved dog, Boss.



Privacy Norms in Online Publics

It is important to understand networked publics because they help us understand that the dichotomy of private vs public is an oversimplification of social relationships. When you post on social media, even if you post “publicly,” you probably envision certain people or publics as your audience.

Controlling the privacy of social media posts is much more complex than controlling the privacy of offline communication.

- On social media, as boyd notes, what you post is **public by default, private by design** ([It's Complicated](#), p. 61).
- Face-to-face, you can generally see who is paying attention and choose whether to speak to them, making your communications **private by default, public by design**. Note this is flipped from how it is on social media.

While popular media claim younger generations do not care about privacy, there is a great deal of evidence that youth care a lot about privacy and are developing norms to strategically protect it. Norms take time. There are norms that societies have developed over many centuries of face-to-face communication. These offline norms have long helped members of these societies get along with each other, and negotiate and protect their privacy. Let's study one of these offline norms: civil inattention.

Civil inattention

It's time to imagine an awkward face-to-face scenario, together. You're in an eatery, which is bustling with people. You're engaged in a conversation with two friends – and suddenly a passing stranger stops to lean over you and tries to join in your conversation. Another person from the next table over is also blatantly staring at you and

your friends talking. You weren't even talking to these people, and now they're in your business!



Crowd at Katz's Deli in NYC: Social situations like these would be impossible to navigate without the norm of civil inattention

That scenario is unlikely to happen in real life, because of a social norm sociologist Erving Goffman named **civil inattention**. In crowded spaces, civil inattention is the common understanding – by you and by others in that society – that you don't get in other people's business. You may acknowledge that you are sharing the space with them through small interactions, such as holding the door for the person behind you, making eye contact, and nodding or smiling. But you don't stare, or listen in, or join in without an invitation.

So is civil inattention also an online norm? Well, that may depend on who we are and which publics we interact with online.

The online world is young, and norms in our networked publics are still being decided. Online norms are also dynamic, which means they are based on a changing set of deciders, including software developers and evolving publics of users. It could be that the most effective forms of privacy protection online will be based on social and cultural norms as we develop these.

But once we figure out what works in the online world in terms of privacy, we will have to articulate it – and then fight for it, because our data is immensely profitable for developers of the platforms we use.

Navigating the ties and threats of networked publics

Student Content, Fall 2020



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Ibrahim Sadi's Story

My knowledge and understanding of social media are much more different than a lot of people I know and my friends. Growing up as a kid I always wanted to have a social media platform, but when you get older you realize the beneficial things and negative things that could happen to yourself being on social media. For a younger kid like I was, I had Facebook at a young age, I'm sure many kids did as well. Being an Arab and coming from Jordan makes me much different than most people I know, especially on social media.

There have been times on social media, people have tried to put me down for being Arab or making disrespectful comments to me on a social media platform as well. People do this because they think they're funny but the person being made fun of is being bullied, it's hard sticking up for yourself when 20 other kids are laughing at you, and you're the only person that you have. The good for me on social media was talking with my family, sharing cool memories with good friends, and getting jobs off social media as well!

What makes social media unique for me is the interests I have and bringing my family more business as well. My family has a local business and during a time like this, it's very hard to make money as a local owner because of the business loss during COVID. Without having social media, I wouldn't have been able to get extra customers to help support my Fathers local business, I wouldn't have been able to get more people to apply to father business either. The interests I have for social media could be all kinds of things, like watching UFC which is my favorite hobby to do when I have nothing better to do. Learning cool recipes to cook for my family and me, watching all kinds of national sports like football, basketball, and soccer.

Another reason why using social media so unique for me is because of Job opportunities, without social media I wouldn't have the job I have today. Being able to "share"- this is my GL it wouldn't work by trying to make it a GL term. your interest in jobs and share your thoughts through social media to your friends and family is also why social media so unique Job opportunities are so important for our generation especially because everything nowadays is almost based on technology. For example, students right now are going through a pandemic we have never been in

and we are using the app “zoom” to do basic home school.

About the Author

Ibrahim Sadi is a second year student at the University of Arizona.



When publics fixate, attack, troll, and bully

The term **cyberbullying** received a great deal of attention as the internet reached widespread adoption, and it is entangled moral panics that caused and used it. As parents and educators in the early 2000s struggled to recognize the longstanding issue of bullying in online discourse, they sometimes conflated bullying with all online interaction. Meanwhile, many of the cases the media labeled cyberbullying are not actually **bullying**, which is a real phenomenon with specific criteria: aggressive behavior, imbalance of power, repeated over time. (These criteria were laid out by Swedish psychologist Dan Owleus; an excellent analysis of cyberbullying in the context of these is in boyd's fifth chapter of [It's Complicated](#).)

Still, some online interactions are toxic with cruelty, whether or not we can scientifically see them as bullying. Another term in popular use to describe online attacks is trolling, perhaps derived from the frequent placement of trolls' comments below the content, like fairytale trolls lurking below bridges.

- Individuals troll. Some seem to lash out individually from personal loneliness or trauma, as with a [Twitter troll to whom celebrity Sarah Silverman recently responded with surprising compassion](#).
- Mobs also troll. [A distinctly frightening modern scourge](#) is when critical networked publics and trolls attack in a coordinated effort, or mob. More visible examples of online troll mobs include hateful vitriol directed at a [13-year-old musician's Youtube explorations](#), at a [black actress in a sequel to a white male film](#), and at a [columnist who is proud to call herself fat](#) – but trolls attack less visible people incessantly as well.
- Not all are affected equally by trolling. While attacks do plague some men online – and specifically men of color – online hatred is directed more often and more viciously at women. Women of color are particularly vulnerable. [Many online spaces with widespread usership such as Reddit have cultures of sexism and bigotry](#) – and while there is [evidence of efforts to combat toxic online cultures](#), many of these sites have a long way to go.

John Suler wrote in the early days of the internet about the **online disinhibition effect**, exploring the psychology behind behaviors that people engage in online but not in person; he noted while some disinhibition is benign, much of it is toxic. [More recent research connects online trolling to narcissism](#). As we perform before online publics, we enter an arena of unleashed and invisible audiences.

Why privacy is such a tangled issue online

Privacy is a notion relating to self-determination that is too complicated to be reduced to one simple idea. Privacy can be defined in many ways – and so can invasion of privacy and its potential consequences. This is one of the reasons software companies' Terms of Service or TOS are never adequate protections for users of their services. How do we demand protection of privacy when it is so multilayered and impossible to define?

Consider these two passages by Daniel Solove in his article, "[Why Privacy Matters Even if you have Nothing to Hide](#)."

Privacy... is too complex a concept to be reduced to a singular essence. It is a plurality of different things that do not share any one element but nevertheless bear a resemblance to one another. For example, privacy can be invaded by the disclosure of your deepest secrets. It might also be invaded if you're watched by a peeping Tom, even if no secrets are ever revealed.

Privacy, in other words, involves so many things that it is impossible to reduce them all to one simple idea. And we need not do so.

I agree with Solove that privacy is too complicated to be reduced to one simple idea. But often we are still called on to present a simplified definition of our privacy – for example, we have to justify why it is wrong to give companies such rampant uses of our data.

Case Study: Observation, Awareness, and fear

Student Content

Samantha Clayton's Social Media Experience



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Social media has become a very popular place that people

go on for a variety of reasons. Whether it be a reason to go on for the latest gossip, daily news, to post your fresh new haircut, a good laugh, or even to get up to date on the latest trends. Although, in my opinion, I'm terrified of social media and I really don't believe a lot of people are. When I first joined the world of social media, I was endlessly tweeting random ideas I had, silly pictures of my friends, and too many memes. Even though I wasn't tweeting anything to personally attack or offend anyone I had learned, the more I used social media, and the older I got, it's a huge risk to be active on a social media account nowadays. People will find absolutely anything to be offended by and you will never hear the end of it if you do offend someone in any possible way.

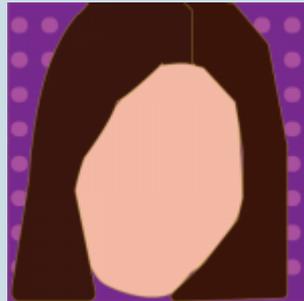
I like to call myself an observer. I hardly post on social media, but I actively use it. I don't necessarily like, share someone's post, retweet, comment, etc. on any posts on social media platform, I just sit back and watch. I feel as if it's better that way because people are constantly looking for a fight on social media. I can't lie, I do post on social media but it's a rare occurrence when I do. What I do post and what I only will post is photos of me/friends/family with no caption or an emoji as a caption and use my platform to spread awareness or touch base on something serious like the Black Lives Matter Movement, justice for George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and the other Black lives that have been taken away by the police.

My perspective on social media is literal fear. People I don't even know are in my direct messages constantly. It ranges from people saying they know where I live (basically blackmail), old men asking me to have sex with them for money, and hackers trying to get me to share my

passwords. These occurrences have also made me afraid to post on social media, but the block button has been my best friend and has solved a lot of these problems I have faced on social media. I'm not sure if any other women, or even men have experienced this issue or if the people attacking me in my direct messages are even real. I like to think it's just a robot of some sort but I'm still reading those scary words when I go on any of my social media accounts. (It mostly happens on Instagram). Social media should never have to be a place where people are afraid to go on to speak their mind (only if it isn't offensive or bullying), be able to share photos without having some predator after you, etc. Hence exactly why I like to call myself an observer due to the many problems I have faced just by going on different social media apps.

About the Author

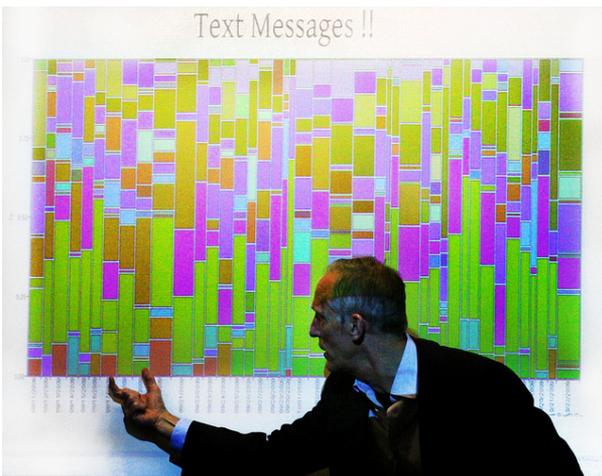
Samantha Clayton is a sister, future teacher, activist, women's rights advocate, and she loves cats!



Respond to this case study...This writer's fears are grounded in personal, challenging experiences online. What does a case like this illustrate about the potential consequences of social media use? What are ways to control or resist the

negative outcomes this writer has experienced, beyond not posting?

The value of human data



*Data mining:
Users
generate
immense
value online,
but do not
usually profit
from it.*

We are learning the hard way that we must fight for our privacy online. As an early leader in the social media platform market, Facebook set very poor standards for the protection of user privacy because access to personally identifiable user data was immensely

[profitable](#) for the company. Before Facebook, it was standard for users of online sites to use avatars and craft usernames that didn't connect to details of their offline lives.

Still, countless online sites permit or encourage users to create online identities apart from their face-to-face identities. Many of today's younger internet users choose platforms with higher standards for privacy, limiting the publics that their posts reach and the periods of time that posts last. Youth frequently have "finsta" accounts – "fake" Instagrams that they share with nosy family and acquaintances, while only good friends and in-the-know publics have access to their "real" Instagrams. Practices like these force developers to offer users more control over [user privacy](#) and the [reach of their posts](#), at the risk of losing users to competitors.

Users shape platforms and platforms shape user behavior. And social and cultural norms shape both user behavior *and* software platforms.

Core Concepts and Questions

Core Concepts

a public

people paying sustained attention to the same thing at the same time

the public

a construct; an idea of “everyone, everywhere” that people imagine, and refer to when they want to add emphasis to the effects of one-to-many speech

networked publics

these are sets of people paying sustained attention to the same thing at the same time that intersect and connect online

bridge

In the terminology of social network analysis, whenever an individual connects two networked publics (or any two entities, such as two other people), that connector is called a bridge

public by default, private by design and private by default, public by design

the first is a phrase used by danah boyd to emphasize the work required to control the privacy of social media posts – the opposite of face to face communication, which is private by default, public by design. (It’s Complicated, p. 61)

civil inattention

the common understanding in crowded spaces that you don’t may politely acknowledge others, but you do not get in their business

cyberbullying

a term entangled in moral panics that caused and used it as parents and educators in the early 2000s struggled to recognize the longstanding issue of bullying in online discourse

bullying

a real phenomenon with specific criteria: aggressive behavior, imbalance of power, repeated over time. Defined by Dan Olweus

online disinhibition effect

the psychological theory that people behave online in ways they would not in person. For more information see Suler, J. (2004). The Online Disinhibition Effect. *Cyberpsychology & behavior : the impact of the Internet, multimedia and virtual reality on behavior and society*, 7 3, 321-6

dynamic

based on a changing set of deciders, including software developers and the evolving practices of publics of users

privacy

a notion relating to self-determination that is too complicated to be reduced to one simple idea

cancel culture

a collective attack built upon the practice of using social media to call people out for perceived wrongs

Core Questions

A. Questions for qualitative thought

1. Consider at least one recent post you wrote on the last three social media platforms you used. What publics were you intending to reach with those posts? What language use, visual displays, and other strategies did you use to gain the attention of those publics? If you were facing those publics face to face, how might your self-presentation have differed?
2. Consider something you have seen online that did not seem to be intended for you in particular to see it. What factors were responsible for its visibility to you? Then consider something you have posted on social media that was seen or commented on by someone you did not have in mind as its audience. How did that situation resolve, and what lessons did you learn from it?
3. Imagine you are one of the people in charge of a new online world. Your job is to define the communication norms and policies for everyone invited into that world. Which are the key norms you implement? And how do you present them to people so that they will follow them?

B. Review: Which is the best answer?



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Related Content

Consider It: Cancel or Callout Culture

Cancel Culture: What value does it have? What limits must it have?



A mural by the artist Banksy serves as a vivid visual representation of Cancel Culture and the real economic and identity-level threats it poses.

A POPULAR TOPIC AT THE TIME OF THIS WRITING IS CANCEL CULTURE OR CALLOUT CULTURE, A COLLECTIVE

ATTACK BUILT UPON THE PRACTICE OF USING SOCIAL MEDIA TO CALL PEOPLE OUT FOR PERCEIVED WRONGS. CANCEL CULTURE IS ARGUABLY LINKED TO POSITIVE SOCIAL CHANGE, AS SPENCER KORNHABER ASSERTS IN THE ARTICLE LINKED BELOW FROM THE ATLANTIC. YET AS JOHN RONSON SHOWS IN THE NYTIMES ARTICLE LINKED BELOW, CANCEL CULTURE IS ALSO LINKED TO DEVASTATING LOSSES OF EMPLOYMENT AND IDENTITY, AND IS SOMETIMES DIRECTED AT PEOPLE WHO HAD LITTLE ELSE OF VALUE IN THEIR LIVES.

CANCEL CULTURE IS NOT GOOD OR BAD. THIS IS NOT A PROMPT TO DECIDE WHETHER IT IS POSITIVE OR NEGATIVE. READ THE TWO ARTICLES BELOW AND CONSIDER: HOW SHOULD CANCEL CULTURE OR A BETTER VERSION OF IT LOOK, AND WHERE SHOULD IT END, IF IT HAS VALUE IN YOUR SOCIETY OR CULTURE? IF YOU FIND IT IS NOT VALUABLE, THEN WHEN MIGHT IT BE VALUABLE TO USE NETWORKED PUBLICS' ATTENTION TO STOP PEOPLE FROM DOING HARM ONLINE?

How One Stupid Tweet Blew Up Justine Sacco's Life from the New York Times

It's Not Callout Culture. It's Accountability from the Atlantic

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4. Algorithms

Invisible, Irreversible, and Infinite

Nearly any software platform you use performs its work based on algorithms, which enable it to make rapid decisions and respond predictably to stimuli. An **algorithm** is a step-by-step set of instructions for getting something done, whether that something is making a decision, solving a problem, or getting from point A to point B (or point Z). In this chapter, we will look into how computing algorithms work, who tends to create them, and how that affects their outcomes. We will also consider whether certain algorithms should be used at all.

Case Study: (Anti-)Social Media Algorithms

Student Content, Fall 2020

Social Media During School

Growing up in the age of technology there was something really compelling to me about *not* joining a lot of the mainstream social media platforms. The only platforms I used were the ones with substantial barriers, or barrier SMP's, as I like to call them, like YouTube, which basically is

the type of media where it is hard for small start-up users to maintain a healthy and large channel. On IG or TikTok, the same is much easier, which is proved by the fact that a whole lot of your friends will maintain their social media presence on IG rather than YouTube. Honestly, I can't tell you why, I just felt that I couldn't be trusted if I had something like Instagram or TikTok on my phone; I would use it whenever I had the slightest whim.

I feel like in the last year of high school I was this non-participating observer of the effects of social media use in school (especially in my group of friends). There was this very odd escapism about it. When we stopped talking to each other to just stare down into our phones, it seemed to me that the hyperbolic technological deterministic line of kids' brains being trashed because of their phones had some weight to it.

Commonly enough, it'd always be Instagram or TikTok. Almost never anything else. The reason I think this is so is because of the fact that these two social media platforms have a really high hookability and the media pieces were very short.

Hookability refers to the ease at which one can go from one piece of media to the next, on the same platform. It is not an affordability, as it has nothing to do with how people communicate, and it has everything to do with addictivity. If paired up with the right algorithms, a high hookability measure can make almost anyone addicted to the platform. Hookability measures, say, the ease to go from one video on YouTube to the next.

But the problem with IG and tiktok was that, despite the high hookability, the media pieces were of a much shorter

duration. So instead of just watching one five-minute YouTube video, you have to go through nearly ten times as many tiktoks or scroll through quite a few more IG posts. The addictive nature of the media platform is reduced by this, as you'd get fatigued quicker. So the fatigue combats the high hookability to reduce overall addictivity.

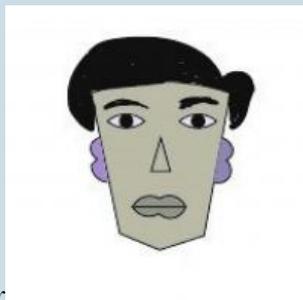
This idea of branchability exists too, and again depends on the algorithm, and the greater the branching choices, the better audience retention. But it's tricky with shorter media items. More choice will lead to more fatigue, so that could be a negative effect, but also if you don't have enough choices then how are you going to keep them watching? You can't have them searching for the next video every time, can you?

It seems like there exists a problem of optimization with constraints. To get the maximum amount of people addicted, which as you could imagine would be the *only* aim for platforms (as they'd get more profits), they have to consider a plethora of variables, which is in no sense easy.

And the amazing thing here is that in school, we have an option to do something better! Many a times we find ourselves really fatigued but we just keep scrolling through, because of our inertia, and though we'd much rather do something else, we don't *have* any other feasible thing to do, so we just stick to doing what we were doing. But in school, we look up from our phones and see our friends, so this inertia is much, much easier to break than if you were sitting all alone at home and were bored as frick.

I think it's important to say that I haven't done any rigorous research on this, but I feel like it really makes

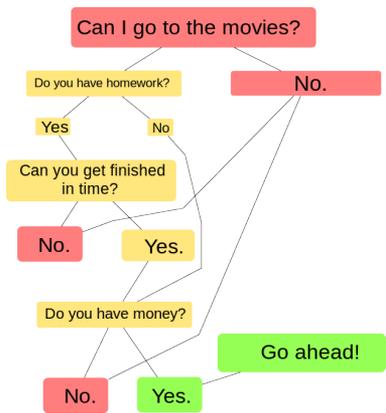
sense and I see these patterns in nearly all the social groups that I'm in.



About the Author

Omar is a freshman at UofA. On a sunny day, he likes to stay inside and eat mac n cheese with chicken nuggets. A not very well-known fact is that he graduated high school. But of course he did.

Respond to this case study...This writer used the research practice of observation to break down types of online spaces and practices. What are the benefits and challenges of drawing your knowledge about social media platforms from your own research? Demonstrate by studying the types of social media in your world.



Algorithms: They can all be reduced to simple steps, which computers need in order to follow them.

Humans make computers what they are.

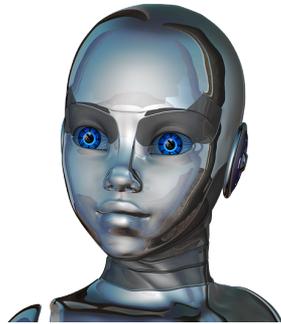
Most platforms have many algorithms at work at once, which can make the work they do seem so complex it's almost magical. But all functions of digital devices can be reduced to simple steps if needed. The steps have to be simple because computers interpret

instructions very literally.

Computers don't know anything unless someone has already given them instructions that are explicit, with every step fully explained. Humans, on the other hand, can figure things out if you skip steps, and can make sense of tacit instructions. But give a computer instructions that skip steps or include tacit steps, and the computer will either stop working or get the process wrong without human intervention.

Here's an example of the human cooperation that goes into the giving and following of instructions, demonstrated with a robot.

As an instructor, I can say to human students on the first day of class, "Let's go around the room. Tell us who you are and where you're from." Easy for humans, right? But imagine I try that in a mixed human/robot classroom, and all goes swimmingly with the first two [human] students. But then the



Feefee the robot: Having a computer for a brain makes a robot dependent upon very exact instructions. Human students are more forgiving.

third student, a robot with a computer for a brain, says, "I don't understand." It seems my instructions were not clear enough. Now imagine another [human] student named Lila tells the robot helpfully, "Well first just tell us your name." The robot still does not understand. Finally, Lila says, "What is your name?"

That works; the robot has been programmed with an algorithm instructing it to respond to "What is your name?" with the words, "My name is Feefee," which the robot now says. Then Lila continues helping the robot by saying, "Now tell us where you're from, Feefee." Again the robot doesn't get it. At this point, though, Lila has figured out what works in getting answers from this robot, so Lila says, "Where are you from?" This works; the robot has been programmed to respond to "Where are you from?" with the sentence, "I am from Neptune."

In the above example, human intelligence was responsible for the robot's successes and failures. The robot arrived with a few communication algorithms, programmed by its human developers. Feefee had not been taught enough to converse very naturally, however. Then Lila, a human, figured out how to get the right responses out of Feefee by modifying her human behavior to better

match behavior Feefee had learned to respond to. Later, the students might all run home and say, “A robot participated in class today! It was amazing!” They might not even acknowledge the human participation that day, which the robot fully depended on.

Two reasons computers seem so smart today

What computers can do these days is amazing, for **two main reasons**. The first is cooperation from human software developers. The second is cooperation on the part of users.

First, computers seem so intelligent today because human software developers help one another teach computers. Apps that seem groundbreaking may simply include a lot of instructions.

This is possible because developers have coded many, many algorithms, which they share and reuse on sites like [Github](#). The more a developer is able to copy the basic steps others have already written for computers to follow, the more that developer can then focus on building new code that teaches computers new tricks. The most influential people known as “creators” or “inventors” in the tech world may be better described as [“tweakers”](#) who improved and added to other people’s code for their “creations” and “inventions.”

The second reason computers seem so smart today is because users are teaching them. Algorithms are increasingly designed to “learn” from human input. New algorithms automatically plug input into new programs, then automatically run those programs. This sequence of automated learning and application is called artificial

```
1 /* This line basically imports the "stdio" header file, part of
2  * the standard library. It provides input and output functionality
3  * to the program.
4  */
5 #include <stdio.h>
6
7 /*
8  * Function (method) declaration. This outputs "Hello, world" to
9  * standard output when invoked.
10 */
11 void sayHello() {
12     // printf() in C outputs the specified text (with optional
13     // formatting options) when invoked.
14     printf("Hello, world!");
15 }
16
17 /*
18  * This is a "main function". The compiled program will run the code
19  * defined here.
20 */
21 void main() {
22     // Invoke the sayHello() function.
23     sayHello();
24 }
```

Source code of a simple computer program:
This code written in the C programming language will display the “Hello, world!” message.

intelligence (AI). AI essentially means teaching computers to teach themselves directly from their human users.

If only humans were always good teachers.

Teaching machines the best and worst about ourselves



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online

here: <https://opentextbooks.library.arizona.edu/hrmswinter2022/?p=64#oembed-1>

In 2016, Microsoft introduced Tay, an AI online robot they branded as a young female. Their intention was for Tay to learn to communicate from internet users who conversed with her on Twitter – and learn she did. Within a few hours, Tay’s social media posts were so infected with violence, racism, sexism, and other bigotry that [Microsoft had to take her down and apologize](#).

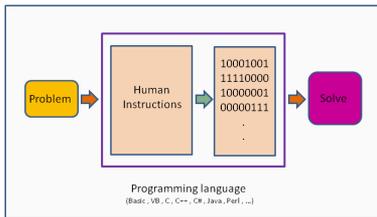
Microsoft had previously launched [Xiaolce](#), an AI whose behavior remained far less offensive than TAY, on Chinese sites including the microblog Weibo. However, the Chinese sites Xiaolce learned from were heavily censored. The English-language Twitter was far less censored, and rife with trolls networked and ready to coordinate attacks. [Developers and users who were paying attention already knew Twitter was full of hate](#).

Tay was an embarrassment for Microsoft in the eyes of many commentators. How could they not have predicted and protected her from bad human teachers? Why didn’t Tay’s human programmers teach her what not to say? It certainly involved a lack of research, since bots like [@oliviatasters](#) have been more successful

and even benefited from a shared [list of banned words](#) that could easily be added to their algorithms.

In addition to these oversights, Tay’s failure may also have been caused by a lack of diversity in Microsoft’s programmers and team leaders.

Programming and bias



Programming languages: Basic, C++, and Java are just a few of these. All translate human instructions into algorithms, which are instructions computers can understand.

Humans are at the heart of any computer program. Algorithms for computers to follow are all written in programming languages, which translate instructions from human language into the [computing language of binary numerals, 0's and 1's](#).

Algorithms and programs are selective and reflect personal decision-making. There are usually different ways they could have been written.

Computer programming languages like Python, C++, and Java are written in source code. Writing programs, sometimes just called “coding,” is an intermediary step between human language and the binary language that computers understand. Learning programming languages takes time and dedication. To learn to be a computer programmer, you either have to feel driven to teach yourself on your own equipment, or you have to be taught to program – and this is still not common in US schools.

Because computer programmers are self-selected this way, and because many people think of the typical tech geeks as white and male (as suggested by the Google Image search to the right), people who end up learning computer programming in the US are more likely to be white than any other race, and are more likely to identify as male than any other gender.



*A Google search for “tech geek”:
The many images of young white male “tech geeks” help explain why youth who are not white or male may feel out of place teaching themselves to code.*

How can computers carry bias?

Many people think computers and algorithms are neutral – racism and sexism are not programmers’ problems. In the case of Tay’s programmers, this false belief enabled more hate speech online and led to the embarrassment of their employer. Human-crafted computer programs mediate nearly everything humans do today, and human responses are involved in many of those tasks. Considering the near-infinite extent to which algorithms and their activities are replicated, the presence of human **biases** is a devastating threat to computer-dependent societies in general and to those targeted or harmed by those biases in particular.



Google Glass was considered by some to be an example of a poor decision by a homogenous workforce.

Problems like these are rampant in the tech industry because there is a damaging belief in US (and some other) societies that the development of computer technologies is antisocial, and that some kinds of people are better at it than others. As a result of this bias in tech industries and computing, there are not enough kinds of people working on tech development teams: not enough women, not enough people who are not white, not enough people who remember to think of children, not enough people who think socially.

Remember Google Glass? You may not; that product failed because few people wanted interaction with a computer to come between themselves and eye contact with humans and the world. People who fit the definition of “tech nerd” fell within this small demographic, but the sentiment was not shared by the broader community of technology users. Critics labeled the unfortunate people who did purchase the product as “glassholes.”

Case study: microcelebrity in the age of algorithms

Student Content

affordances of social media, our society has turned to using the platform for more selfish reasons- such as the fame granted when going viral. There are some noticeable pros and cons that are intertwined with media **spreadability**. This term highlights how media is continually spread and then passed on to others, continuing the chain. At this point, almost everyone has had **exposure** through the media. In terms of spreadability, exposure happens much more quickly. One second a video is posted and the next, it could have thousands of views. This was the case with now famous influencer, Emma Chamberlain. Currently, Emma Chamberlain has accumulated an astounding total of nearly ten million subscribers and counting. At only 19, she has established a huge platform for herself and when she started as a young high school girl nearly three years ago, I can guarantee she had no idea what was in store for her in terms of success. As of now, she has won three awards for her Youtube career: a People's Choice Award, a Shorty Award, and lastly, a Teen Choice Award. Her breakout Youtube fame allowed her to then write her own book, create a podcast, and even make and sell merchandise. All of this success due to a few viral videos that skyrocketed a young girl's career. How did her videos spread so quickly? Was her content really that appealing to her audience? Did she face any backlash? What type of content tends to go viral? Chelsea Galvin is here to give her insight on these types of questions we all have. Emma Chamberlain was just an ordinary girl from Belmont, California. Who else is a teenage girl from Belmont, California? My roommate Chelsea Galvin. She was a primary witness in Emma Chamberlain's claim to fame. Both girls are from the same

hometown, attended the same high school, and had the same classes.

Chelsea is no stranger to the realm of social media. She uses popular apps such as Instagram, TikTok, and Snapchat (her favorite as of now). She is familiar with the various different **Algorithms** that appear on her Explorer and "for you" pages. She typically watches videos about house decor, food, and videos of friends just having fun.

She believes that Emma Chamberlain's content was relevant for teen girls today. Her content is "different from mainstream media and what we usually see on YouTube" and is associated with certain algorithms that relate to young teens today. Ultimately, Emma Chamberlain became so well known for her unstaged and realistic content that she is now easily recognizable by so many people.

Although having a presence in the media may seem extremely desirable, there are always obstacles and hardships that must be overcome. Cancel culture. Currently, this is a big part of having a media presence. Individuals must always be aware about what they post in order to avoid upsetting others, whether it is intentional or not.

As Chelsea describes it, "a lot of attention brings a lot of people just wanting to hate or ruin things for people" and I totally agree. We are all human and we all make mistakes but when those mistakes resurface online due to spreadability and a face in the media, those select individuals have a harder time than those who are not in the spotlight.

Ultimately anyone's content can spread and go viral, it is just a matter of time and good, relatable videos- like Emma Chamberlain posts. Both Chelsea and I believe that it is important to be educated on this topic, especially in times like this where social media plays a large role in our daily lives. We have both seen the more

obstructive side of social media when content goes viral and we agree that it's vital to be prepared for the outcome. It was a joy to chat with Chelsea and learn more about our perspectives on the media and what content is specific to our two feeds. I learned so much from her and her story and it really helped me conceptualize the term spreadability and how it occurs in reality." data-sheets-

userformat="{\"2\":8993,\"3\":{\"1\":0},\"8\":{\"1\":{\"1\":2,\"2\":0,\"5\":{\"1\":2,\"2\":0}},{\"1\":0,\"2\":0,\"3\":3},{\"1\":1,\"2\":0,\"4\":1}}},\"11\":3,\"12\":0,\"16\":11}>Gangnam Style. Nyan Cat. The Renegade. “Say So” Dance. The woman with super-glued hair. Baby Franklin. What do all of these infamous pop culture references or stars have in common? They all went viral online.

Viral. Meaning that millions of people saw this content and reposted or shared it with their friends, their families, and even the media. At some point in our lives, I am sure we have all pondered about how life would be if we were famous. Newfound fame- countless fans and followers, brand deals, being recognized in public. It all sounds great, right? Well, maybe not.

With the new surge of upcoming apps such as TikTok, along with Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter, and many other platforms, come more opportunities for different content and creators to spread. Our society is now so deeply rooted in the media with the ultimate hope to reap the benefit of being seen. Social media was primarily created to provide an outlet for friends and families to keep connected. While this is still one of the many **affordances** of social media, our society has turned to using the platform for more selfish reasons- such as the fame granted when going viral.

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Emma Chamberlain was just an ordinary girl from Belmont, California. Who else is a teenage girl from Belmont, California? My roommate C. She was a primary witness in Emma Chamberlain's claim to fame. Both girls are from the same hometown, attended the same high school, and had the same classes.

C is no stranger to the realm of social media. She uses popular apps such as Instagram, TikTok, and Snapchat (her favorite as of now). She is familiar with the various different **Algorithms** that appear on her explorer and “for you” pages. She typically watches videos about house decor, food, and videos of friends just having fun.

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As C describes it, “a lot of attention brings a lot of people just wanting to hate or ruin things for people” and I totally agree. We are all human and we all make mistakes but when those mistakes resurface online due to spreadability and a face in the media, those select individuals have a harder time than those who are not in the spotlight.

Ultimately anyone’s content can spread and go viral, it is just a matter of time and good, relatable videos – like Emma Chamberlain posts. Both C and I believe that it is important to be educated on this topic, especially in times like this where social media plays a large role in our daily lives. We have both seen the more obstructive side of social media

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It was a joy to chat with my roommate and learn more about our perspectives on the media and what content is specific to our two feeds. I learned so much from her and her story and it really helped me conceptualize the term spreadability and how it occurs in reality.

About the author

Lily was born and raised in Southern California, or more specifically, Pasadena, California. Her whole life she has been in the same area and absolutely loves the opportunities given to her while living in LA



County. She has grown up with two brothers and two amazing dogs. Her favorite hobbies include exploring new cities, taking photos, trying new restaurants, going to the beach, and spending quality time with her loved ones. Currently, Lily is living in Tucson to further her education at the University of Arizona where she is studying Communication. She hopes to pursue event planning or advertising.

Respond to this case study... how might a creator change their

content to affect a platform's algorithm? How can creators and users learn more about the algorithms affecting them? How might platforms benefit from sharing more information about their algorithms? Why might they want to keep some things hidden from users?

Code: Debugging the Gender Gap

Created in 2015, the film [Code: Debugging the Gender Gap](#) encapsulates many of the biases in the history of the computing industry as well as their implications. Women have always been part of the US computing industry, and [today that industry would collapse without engineers from diverse cultures](#). Yet there is widespread evidence that women and racial minorities have always been made to feel that they did not belong in the industry. [And the numbers of engineers and others in tech development show](#) a serious problem in Silicon Valley with racial and ethnic diversity, resulting in [terrible tech decisions](#) that spread racial and ethnic bias under the guise of tech neutrality. Google has made some headway in achieving a more diverse workforce, but not without [backlash founded on bad science](#).

Below is the trailer for the film. The film is available through most University Libraries and outlets that rent

and sell feature films, and through [Finish Line Features](#).

Exacerbating Bias in Algorithms: The Three I's

In its early years, the internet was viewed as a utopia, an ideal world that would permit a completely free flow of all available information to everyone, equally. John Perry Barlow's 1996 [Declaration of the Independence of Cyberspace](#) represents this utopian vision, in which the internet liberates users from all biases and [even from their own bodies](#) (at which human biases are so often directed). Barlow's utopian vision does not match the internet of today. Our social norms and inequalities accompany us across all the media and sites we use, and worsened in a climate where information value is determined by marketability and profit, as Sociologist Zeynep Tufekci explains in [this Ted Talk](#).

Because algorithms are built on human cooperation with computing programs, human selectivity and human flaws are embedded within algorithms. Humans as users carry our own biases, and today there is particular concern that algorithms pick up and spread these biases to many, many others. They even make us more biased by hiding results that the algorithm calculates we may not like. When we get our news and information from social media, invisible algorithms consider our own biases and those of friends in our social networks to determine which new posts and stories to show us in search results and news feeds. The result for each user can be called their echo chamber or as [author Eli Pariser](#) describes it, a **filter bubble** in which we only see news and information we like and agree with, leading to political polarization.

Although algorithms can generate very sophisticated recommendations, algorithms do *not* make sophisticated decisions. When humans make poor decisions, they can rely on themselves or on other humans to recognize and reverse the error; at the very least, a human decision-maker can be held responsible. Human decision-making often takes time and critical reflection to implement, such as the writing of an approved ordinance into law. When algorithms are used in place of human decision-making, I describe what ensues as **The three I's**: Algorithms' decisions become *invisible*, *irreversible*, and *infinite*. Most social media platforms and many organizations using algorithms will not share how their algorithms work; for this lack of transparency, they are known as **black box algorithms**.

Exposing Invisible Algorithms: Pro Publica

Journalists at Pro Publica are educating the public on what algorithms can do by explaining and testing black box algorithms. This work is particularly valuable because most algorithmic bias is hard to detect for small groups or individual human users. Studies like ProPublica's presented in the "Breaking the Black Box" series (below) have been based on groups systematically testing algorithms from different machines, locations, and users. Using investigative journalism, Pro Publica has also [found](#) that algorithms used by law enforcement are significantly more likely to label African Americans

as High Risk for reoffending and white Americans as Low Risk.

Fighting Unjust Algorithms

Algorithms are laden with errors. Some of these errors can be traced to the biases of those who developed them, as when a facial recognition system meant for global implementation is only trained using [data sets](#) from a limited population (say, predominantly white or male). Algorithms can become problematic when they are hacked by groups of users, like Microsoft's Tay was. Algorithms are also grounded in the values of those who shape them, and these values may reward some involved while disenfranchising others.

Despite their flaws, algorithms are increasingly used in heavily consequential ways. They predict how likely a person is to commit a crime or default on a bank loan based on a given data set. They can target users with messages on social media that are customized to fit their interests, their voting preferences, or their fears. They can identify who is in photos online or in recordings of offline spaces.

Confronting the landscape of increasing algorithmic control is activism to limit the control of algorithms over human lives. Below, read about the work of the Algorithmic Justice League and other activists promoting bans on facial recognition. And consider: What roles might algorithms play in your life that may deserve more attention, scrutiny, and even activism?

The Algorithmic Justice League vs facial recognition tech in Boston

MIT Computer Scientist and “Poet of Code” Joy Buolamwini heads the Algorithmic Justice League, an organization making remarkable headway into fighting facial recognition technologies, whose work she explains in the first video below. On June 9th, 2020, Buolamwini and other computer scientists presented alongside citizens at Boston City Council meeting in support of a proposed ordinance banning facial recognition in public spaces in the city. Held and shared by live stream during COVID-19, footage of this meeting offers a remarkable look at the value of human advocacy in shaping the future of social technologies. The second video below should be cued to the beginning of Buolamwini’s testimony half an hour in. Boston’s City Council subsequently [voted unanimously](#) to ban facial recognition technologies by the city.



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Core Concepts and Questions

Core Concepts

algorithm

a step-by-step set of instructions for getting something done to serve humans, whether that something is making a decision, solving a problem, or getting from point A to point B (or point Z)

why computers seem so smart today

cooperation from human software developers, and cooperation on the part of users

biases

assumptions about a person, culture, or population

filter bubble

a term coined by Eli Pariser, also called an echo chamber. A phenomenon in which we only see news and information we like and agree with, leading to political polarization

black box algorithms

the term used when processes created for computer-based decision-making is not shared with or made clear to outsiders

The three I's

algorithms' decisions can become *invisible*, *irreversible*, and *infinite*

Core Questions

A. Questions for qualitative thought

1. Write and/or draw an algorithm (or your best try at one) to perform an activity you wish you could

automate. Doing the dishes? Taking an English test?
It's up to you.

2. Often there are spaces online that make one feel like an outsider, or like an insider. Study an online space that makes you feel like one of these – how is that outsider or insider status being communicated to you, or to others?
3. Consider the history of how you learned whatever you know about computing. This could mean how you came to understand key terms, searching online simple programs, coding, etc. Then, reinvent that history if you'd learned all you wish you knew about computing at the times and in the ways you feel you should have learned them.

B. Review: Let's test how well you've been programmed. (Mark the best answers.)



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Hear It: Electronic Freedom Foundation’s “Algorithms for a Just Future”

<https://player.simplecast.com/72c98d21-5c9a-44fa-ae90-c2adcd4d6766?dark=false>

EPISODE SUMMARY

The United States already has laws against redlining, but companies can still use other data to advertise goods and services to you—which can have big implications for the prices you see.

EPISODE NOTES

One of the supposed promises of AI was that it would be able to take the bias out of human decisions, and maybe even lead to more equity in society. But the reality is that the errors of the past are embedded in the data of today, keeping prejudice and discrimination in. Pair that with surveillance capitalism, and what you get are algorithms that impact the way consumers are treated, from how much they pay for things, to what kinds of ads they are shown, to if a bank will even lend them money. But it doesn’t have to be that way, because the same techniques that prey on people can lift them up. Vinhcent Le from the Greenlining

Institute joins Cindy and Danny to talk about how AI can be used to make things easier for people who need a break. In this episode you'll learn about:

- Redlining—the pernicious system that denies historically marginalized people access to loans and financial services—and how modern civil rights laws have attempted to ban this practice.
- How the vast amount of our data collected through modern technology, especially browsing the Web, is often used to target consumers for products, and in effect recreates the illegal practice of redlining.
- The weaknesses of the consent-based models for safeguarding consumer privacy, which often mean that people are unknowingly waving away their privacy whenever they agree to a website's terms of service.
- How the United States currently has an insufficient patchwork of state laws that guard different types of data, and how a federal privacy law is needed to set a floor for basic privacy protections.
- How we might reimagine machine learning as a tool that actively helps us root out and combat bias in consumer-facing financial services and pricing, rather than exacerbating those problems.
- The importance of transparency in the algorithms that make decisions about our lives.
- How we might create technology to help consumers better understand the government services available to them.

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Read it: Do social media algorithms erode our ability to make decisions freely? The jury is out



Charles Deluvio/Unsplash, [CC BY-SA](#)

[Lewis Mitchell](#) and [James Bagrow](#), [University of Vermont](#)

Social media algorithms, artificial intelligence, and our own genetics are among the factors influencing us beyond our awareness. This raises an ancient question: do we have control over our own lives? This article is part of The Conversation's [series on the science of free will](#).

Have you ever watched a video or movie because YouTube or Netflix recommended it to you? Or added a friend on Facebook from the list of “people you may know”?

And how does Twitter decide which tweets to show you at the top of your feed?

These platforms are driven by algorithms, which rank and recommend content for us based on our data.

As Woodrow Hartzog, a professor of law and computer science at Northeastern University, Boston, [explains](#):

If you want to know when social media companies are trying to manipulate you into disclosing information or engaging more, the answer is always.

So if we are making decisions based on what's shown to us by these algorithms, what does that mean for our ability to make decisions freely?

What we see is tailored for us

An algorithm is a digital recipe: a list of rules for achieving an outcome, using a set of ingredients. Usually, for tech companies, that outcome is to make money by convincing us to buy something or keeping us scrolling in order to show us more advertisements.

The ingredients used are the data we provide through our actions online – knowingly or otherwise. Every time you like a post, watch a video, or buy something, you provide data that can be used to make predictions about your next move.

These algorithms can influence us, even if we're not aware of it. As the New York Times' [Rabbit Hole podcast](#) explores, YouTube's recommendation algorithms can drive viewers to [increasingly extreme content](#), potentially leading to online radicalisation.

Facebook's News Feed algorithm ranks content to keep us engaged on the platform. It can produce a phenomenon called "[emotional contagion](#)", in which seeing positive posts leads us to write positive posts ourselves, and seeing

negative posts means we're more likely to craft negative posts – though this study was [controversial](#) partially because the effect sizes were small.

Also, so-called “[dark patterns](#)” are designed to trick us into sharing more, or [spending more](#) on websites like Amazon. These are tricks of website design such as hiding the unsubscribe button, or showing how many people are buying the product you're looking at *right now*. They subconsciously nudge you towards actions the site would like you to take.

You are being profiled

Cambridge Analytica, the company involved in the largest known Facebook data leak to date, claimed to be able to [profile your psychology](#) based on your “likes”. These profiles could then be used to target you with political advertising.

“Cookies” are small pieces of data which track us across websites. They are records of actions you've taken online (such as links clicked and pages visited) that are stored in the browser. When they are combined with data from multiple sources including from large-scale hacks, this is known as “[data enrichment](#)”. It can link our personal data like email addresses to other information such as our education level.

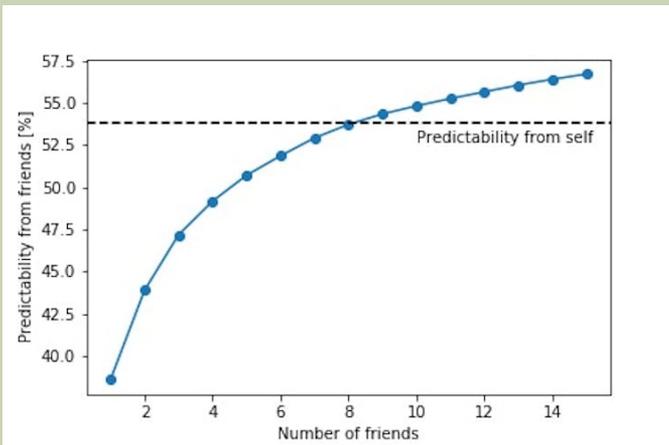
These data are regularly used by tech companies like Amazon, Facebook, and others to build profiles of us and predict our future behaviour.

You are being predicted

So, how much of your behaviour can be predicted by algorithms based on your data?

Our research, [published in Nature Human Behaviour last year](#), explored this question by looking at how much information about you is contained in the posts your friends make on social media.

Using data from Twitter, we estimated how predictable peoples' tweets were, using only the data from their friends. We found data from eight or nine friends was enough to be able to predict someone's tweets just as well as if we had downloaded them directly (well over 50% accuracy, see graph below). Indeed, 95% of the potential predictive accuracy that a machine learning algorithm might achieve is obtainable *just* from friends' data.



Average predictability from your circle of closest friends (blue line). A value of 50% means getting the next word right half of the time – no mean feat as most people have a vocabulary of around 5,000 words. The curve shows how much an AI algorithm can predict about you from your friends’ data. Roughly 8-9 friends are enough to predict your future posts as accurately as if the algorithm had access to your own data (dashed line).

Bagrow, Liu, & Mitchell (2019)

Our results mean that even if you [#DeleteFacebook](#) (which trended after the [Cambridge Analytica scandal in 2018](#)), you may still be able to be profiled, due to the social ties that remain. And that’s before we consider the things about Facebook that make it so [difficult to delete](#) anyway.

We also found it’s possible to build profiles of *non-users* – so-called “[shadow profiles](#)” – based on their contacts who are on the platform. Even if you have never used Facebook, if your friends do, there is the possibility a shadow profile could be built of you.

On social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter, privacy is no longer tied to the individual, but to the network as a whole.

No more free will? Not quite

But all hope is not lost. If you do delete your account, the information contained in your social ties with friends grows stale over time. We found predictability gradually declines to a low level, so your privacy and anonymity will eventually return.

While it may seem like algorithms are eroding our ability to think for ourselves, it's not necessarily the case. The evidence on the effectiveness of psychological profiling to influence voters [is thin](#).

Most importantly, when it comes to the role of people versus algorithms in things like spreading (mis)information, people are just as important. On Facebook, the extent of your exposure to diverse points of view is more closely related [to your social groupings](#) than to the way News Feed presents you with content. And on Twitter, while “fake news” may spread faster than facts, it is [primarily people who spread it](#), rather than bots.

Of course, content creators exploit social media platforms' algorithms to promote content, on [YouTube](#), [Reddit](#) and other platforms, not just the other way round.

At the end of the day, underneath all the algorithms are people. And we influence the algorithms just as much as they may influence us.

[Lewis Mitchell](#), Senior Lecturer in Applied Mathematics and [James Bagrow](#), Associate Professor, Mathematics & Statistics, [University of Vermont](#)

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5. Equity

This is a special chapter devoted to a selection of activist causes to improve the lives of women. We look closely at two online movements outside of the US, one in each hemisphere. Both integrate the global and the local; both work to liberate women from systematic violence. Then we look at a few movements in the US.

But first let's briefly broaden our lens to online activism in general.



Passionate public protests: Many protests for women's rights use the publics of the web to expose private worlds of violence, enacted behind closed doors and silenced with shame.

In the following chapter, we will discuss five strategies evident in creative online activist movements today, including speed, visuals, performances, inclusiveness, and masked leadership. These five strategies can be found in many gender-focused online movements as well. But from my perspective, what is salient – what stands out

– about women’s movements are the ways the internet is used to enable public conversation around topics previously kept private. Social media in particular affords **exposure**, the affordance of social media to draw matters society guards as private into the public sphere.

People who identify as “men” and people who identify as “women” have lived in the same neighborhoods and households across cultures and time periods. This quality makes gender relationships and activism distinct among activist movements. Issues that arise between groups of different ethnicities, races, and classes are often clearly expressed out in the open; but gender issues are not expressed as openly. Because men and women co-exist so closely in every community, issues between people of different gender identities tend to leak out in whispers and remain more hidden.

Women as a gender identity: A disclaimer

In order to look closely at two important online movements for women, I have had to exclude many other movements, moments, and identities from this chapter. The premise of the chapter admittedly works against complex understandings of gender, by presenting “women” as a fixed identity group. My goal in chapters 5 and 6 is to give you a selection of histories, tools, and examples to help you understand online activist movements.

As [the Wikipedia page on gender](#) reflects, a deep understanding of gender and sexuality must also consider where the boundaries between genders come from and what is left unspoken when we rely on binary gender categories. Movements for the rights of transgender women have evolved within, alongside, and sometimes in response to movements by cisgender women, but these histories are often collapsed into a single narrative. I encourage you to explore and analyze these complex histories with the tools we will discuss in chapters 5 and 6.

Saudi women: Online and driving change

Saudi Arabian laws and culture [enforce](#) a system of **male guardianship** over women, whereby every woman must get the approval of a male guardian for decisions about her body and life including passport applications, travel, and marriage. Online activism helps women who are resisting the system of male guardianship to connect with fellow activists, read the climate for what they are asking, and connect with specific publics who may support their causes.

#savedinaali

Like campaigns for other identity groups, many social media campaigns for women are branded as leaderless or have masked leadership. A particular feature of social media campaigns for women is the naming of the campaign after a woman who has been persecuted, even though she is not organizing the campaign. Sadly, due to the violence women face that leads to these campaigns, the woman the campaign is named after is often one whose persecution has already ensued.

One example is the campaign to [#savedinaali](#). Dina Ali fled Saudi Arabia but was detained in the Philippines and returned to her family, whom she said would kill her. It is unknown if Dina Ali is severely injured or even alive, but organizers started the [#savedinaali](#) campaign to help her and women in similar situations, and draw attention to the human rights abuses of Saudi women. Raising awareness around the situations of particular imprisoned women may lighten the punishment inflicted on them – though it does not guarantee safety or survival.

Recognizing the small beginnings of large media

campaigns

Activist movements that become large usually began as small, local efforts for change. This is especially true around women's rights; whispers about a case or pattern of abuse first spread locally, then grow into regional or global social movements once it's clear that the abuse is systematic. Take for example the extensive Human Rights Watch campaign (also linked above) to end Male Guardianship in Saudi Arabia. It was many small campaigns like the one to save Dina Ali that led Human Rights Watch to produce a 2016 report entitled [Boxed In: Women and Saudi Arabia's Male Guardianship System](#). The campaign uses the hashtag #TogetherToEndMaleGuardianship along with video and other content.

Human Rights Watch (HRW) is a large, global organization, but small movements gave them key examples and networks on which to build a larger campaign. HRW's decision to focus on Twitter as a platform required the organization to monitor smaller movements for evidence that Saudis would use and respond to Twitter hashtags for activism. Those small movements provided the core of the larger networks HRW would use in their campaign.

One prior online network example for campaigns for Saudi women is the campaign to allow them to drive. Women have been putting themselves on the front lines and driving - and celebrating this civil disobedience online. In 2011-2013 the hashtag #W2drive (women to drive) was used by Saudi activists to gather a public interested in women's right to drive, as did the account @SaudiWomenSpring on Facebook.

Social Media and the Right to Vote

Student Content, Fall 2020

My Perspective and Experience with Social Media

I have come a long way with social media. I have encountered the negatives, as well as the positives that come with using social media. In my personal experience, I have always been involved with the use of social media, especially at a very young age. Being exposed at a very young age to so much criticism and opinions all on different platforms in my opinion is a factor of shaping who you are and how your views on certain topics are made. I am positive that with my generation, while growing up in an age where we were the internet generation also known as Generation Z, that we all had experiences with how social media influenced us at a young age.

Which is why I wanted to touch upon the political side of how the internet allows and influences us in many ways, while also giving everyone a platform to voice our opinions to each other. Many of those times that I have seen result in arguments caused by a disagreement in the comment section of a post. In today's time, the internet is filled with

hateful comments towards one another about having opposite opinions. Today you see grown adults shaming young adults for the decision they made in the comments of the post.

In my experience during election time, I find that I see lots of advertisements, and political campaigning that takes place, and inevitably consumes a lot of what people see and hear surrounding the election. I found this organization this past year amidst the fact that the year 2020 is the year of the most recent election. I began to see lots of my own peers finding themselves conflicted and even considering not voting in the 2020 election. Quite honestly, I found myself in the same position. This is the first time I am able to vote in a presidential election. I should have been excited to exercise my fifteenth amendment right, but I was not solely because of the hateful opinions on social media. I felt that I was going to be judged by people for who I voted for and ultimately felt discouraged. I later began looking into different organizations whom I supported and saw how patriotic they were about voting and especially because I am Native American our voice, in my opinion, is suppressed. I began to see things in a new light and later made my mind up about actually going out and voting. I then began to advocate for all voices to have a say in how we vote and how our vote counts, the difference it makes when people do vote.

I find that these types of organizations are truly helpful for those such as myself that really focus on influencing positivity on social media. Social media can be extremely toxic to your mental health and I think overthinking things such as what I did can really affect certain outcomes. If I had not looked into organizations that I like and follow I

would not have gotten the courage to really be proud of having the right to vote.

Also by this author: Rock the Vote!



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About the Author

Trinity is a sophomore majoring in Journalism with an emphasis in Digital Journalism. Minorng in Information Science and Esociety.



Respond to this case study... This writer argues that her

generation (perhaps your generation as well) was influenced from a young age by the ubiquity of the Internet and social media technologies. Drawing on your knowledge from this course, our readings, and your own experiences, describe your own position on this claim.

Meming of hashtags and more

The use of any hashtag can expand and complicate the spread of a message across a global audience, particularly if the meme flips to become sarcastic or changes direction.

Hashtags relating to Saudi women's rights led to numerous memes, but most just added force to the movement. #TogetherToEndMaleGuardianship was of course translated – you might also say, imitated or memed – into Arabic, and it is that tag which Arabic-speaking social media users began spreading prolifically. #StopEnslavingSaudiWomen is another tag channeling similar publics. Like #HandsUpDontShoot in the Black Lives Matter movement, it is a phrase speaking directly to an oppressing force, telling them to change their behavior.

However, there is some evidence of the spread of misinformation through hashtags related to Saudi women. For example, [a story](#) about Saudi male scientists declaring women “not human” started out on a satirical website, but it spread to other publics – including some who believed it was true, and others who found it useful in spreading fear of Islam. As this example shows, hashtags are easy

targets for **appropriation** – use for a different cultural purpose than originally intended.

How social media can help women’s causes in particular

To understand women’s online movements, including those for Saudi women and women in the Americas (in the next section), it is important to consider relationship communication. First, let’s consider who Saudi women can and cannot speak to and when or where those conversations take place. In traditional Saudi society, women have limited face to face contact; they rarely gather or communicate with people beyond their immediate family, and external communications may be under constant surveillance. This limits the communication of women activists with those who are geographically close to them and to moments of low surveillance.

However, communities devoted to women’s activism can interact online on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Snapchat, and other social media platforms. So the most important affordance of social media for women’s movements is this: movement organizers can orchestrate gatherings and strategies through the use of social media. An example of this is the campaign #women2drive, which Saudi women have been pushing for several years to challenge male guardianship incrementally by focusing on the right to drive.



women2drive is a campaign in Saudi Arabia that counteracts the prohibition of women in public spaces through online, networked publics

Another affordance of social media for women's movements is this: social media can extend and deepen communication among activists, transforming short or casual encounters into opportunities for a more profound exchange of ideas. Social media can allow people who will be gathering in person to get a sense before the event of what others are thinking. It

also allows people to continue sharing their "[staircase thoughts](#)" after they leave the meeting (think of the old TV series Columbo, where the detective seems to be leaving the suspect alone but then turns around just before going downstairs and says: "Oh, there's just one more thing..."). Staircase thoughts are sometimes considered simply wit that we thought of too late. But l'esprit de l'escalier or "wit of the staircase" as French philosopher Denis Diderot called it, can deepen communication, especially in activist movements that involve covert communications.

A third affordance: Social media gathers and focuses global publics. The web is chaos! But social objects like hashtags cut across the chaos to connect publics focused on certain topics, at times despite great geographic dispersal and distance. Publics drawn to pay attention to online activism include people who are not necessarily organizers of an activist movement but who are paying attention to activist causes.



Staircase thoughts over mobile phones can deepen communication that was cut short or monitored in person.

Some of the publics gathered by social media include large

organizations with resources to support movements, leading to a fourth affordance in creating a global movement: Social media connects activists with their publics. Saudi women can feel the support of women activists across the globe with the hashtag #suffrage, and I imagine that is important at moments when the national culture seems to be changing too slowly. Connecting with supportive publics can also lead to organizational and financial support.

The publics gathered through hashtags around Saudi women's rights and specifically the push to end male guardianship in that country demonstrate how publics can build on and connect to one another, through hashtags among other tools. Saudi women have pushed to end male guardianship in the past, and the gathering of publics by these early movements led to the taking up of the cause by larger organizations.

Demonstrations online and across the Americas against gender violence



Ni Una Menos, Vivas Las Queremos

Ni Una Menos, Vivas Las Queremos

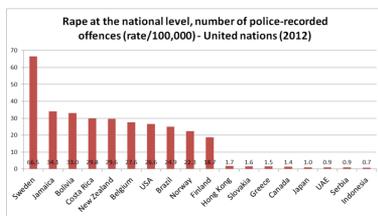
Beginning in 2016, a new hemispheric movement is underway expressing outrage over violence against women in the Americas. **Ni Una Menos** began in summer 2014 in Argentina, culminating in an August 2016 demonstration in Lima that was [characterized as the largest demonstration ever seen in Peru.](#) It was reactivated in South American cities including Buenos Aires and Rio Di Janeiro in

October 2016, in [response to the drugging, rape, and murder](#) of a 16-year-old Argentinian girl.

Hemispheric hashtags coordinating these movements include [#niunamenos](#) (not one less or not one fewer) and [#vivaslasqueremos](#) (we want them alive) – proactively worded demands that not a single woman or girl be killed by systematic violence. This proactive framing makes every death cause for further protest.

One striking strategy in this movement is its theatricality. From [dressing as death in Mexico](#) to applying makeup to simulate bruised and bloodied faces and crotches in this [demonstration in Buenos Aires, Argentina](#), these movements rely upon visual impact. In the United States, it is common to embody the unjustly dead – in [#blacklivesmatter](#), the [#icantbreathe](#) hashtag for Eric Garner and hoodie-posing to say “we are Trayvon Martin” are two of many examples of resurrection through performance. But this practice of embodying a bruised, bloodied woman is distinct from most feminist protests seen in the US.

The performative, graphic strategies in the Latin American [#niunamenos](#) demonstrations were not replicated in the massive Women’s March in the US in January 2017, although many women face violence in the US. Perhaps marchers in the US sought to embody the [“they go low, we go high” approach](#) – as in Michelle



Although the US has significant issues with sexual violence, protests do not usually include the graphic performances embodying the abused women that are seen in Latin American protests.

Obama’s speech at the DNC following the recording of Trump boasting of using his wealth and stature to grab women “by the pussy.” But the difference may come down to class more than nationality.

The performative demonstrations in Latin America reflect the

grim reality of being unable to “go high” and hide abuse for many of its survivors. Many abused women wear their visible bruises on their faces. The sounds of abuse are more evident on city streets and in smaller apartment buildings than in large houses and suburbs. Abuse of poor women is more visible than abuse of wealthier women – even when poor women don’t live on the streets, lower-class status is generally accompanied by a lack of personally owned or controlled space. As [Margaret Rodman has written](#), “The most powerless people have no place at all.” In these hemispheric demonstrations, the streets become women’s place, with demonstrators of all classes increasingly marching them. By making the marks of women’s abuse and murder public, they drag into the public eye what has long been understood as a feature of women’s private lives in the Americas.

Update: #metoo

After this book was released, the #metoo movement ensued, in late 2017. As I write this update, [the #metoo movement is sweeping the US and other nations](#), as charges and evidence of long histories of sexual harassment and abuse circulate in the media and online. The movement has pervaded the academic and political spheres in the US and other nations as well.

Experiencing targeted hate online

Student Content, Spring 2021



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The identity of my profile picture mainly stems from the LGBTQIA+ community. As someone very much a part of the LGBTQ community, it takes up a very big part of my life. I want to make it a big part of my online presence as well, since I want to be who I really am online, even if I am scared to do it in real life.

As someone who is transgender, transfeminine to be exact, I want to be able to proudly wear it, and stick up for the people it represents. I want to be able to help anyone that needs it and having a show of support on a very public part of my life, helps to show that I am there to help and support as needed. It can be hard to be someone in the LGBTQ community sometimes, as there are a lot of hateful and spiteful people out there. Any little bit of support and help goes a long way to boosting spirits.

As time has gone by, I have slowly slipped out of my shell, mainly during college. I have left the safety of my private accounts and networked publics(?) and now I want to show my support outwardly, to maybe help give that boost even just one person might need. Even if I get hate for it, I want to help support my brothers and sisters and anyone in between.

This is shaping how I grow out of my shell, as I now proudly display things I hid not long before. Leaving my shell was terrifying, as I had previously been hurt by sharing my opinion on the open web, as shown in the audio story above. But this time, I had a lot of support and safety. A lot of my friends came out in support of me, which helped ease my worries, and realizing I had a giant space, way more welcoming than I thought helped a lot too.

Privacy is great. I love to try to keep my things private if I can. But one thing I have learned is too much privacy can also suck. If you try to be too private, then you cannot learn anything new, and you stick in the same bubble. But if you go too public, then everyone knows everything about you. Both sides are bad. There must be an in between, and I think I have found that with where I am. I am public enough to show support and talk with people that might need it, but also private enough to keep to myself, and still be a mystery, if I so desire to be. There is a fine line.

Granted I do not really use social media as much as a lot of other people. I only really use Reddit, some Instagram, and some Snapchat. This makes me have a lot less experience dealing with everything as a lot of other people do. I am still new to a lot of this stuff, so my profiles might not be set up the best way they could. But I want to become someone who is out there more. I want to be able to meet new people and make new friends. I want to help the people that might need it. I hope I can inspire people to be themselves as long as it's safe to. I want to teach understanding and hopefully change people's minds about hate.



About the author

Struggling with themselves, the author is a transgender person who likes computers. They love gaming and watching videos, and loves anything to do with the internet. Currently goes to university for Data Science.

Respond to this case study...

The author shared how online activism requires a balance between privacy and exposure, as well as some of the consequences of being visible as a marginalized group online. Drawing from our course discussions, the readings, and your experiences, how might the affordances and culture of a social media platform encourage or discourage activism?

Critiques of the #metoo movement are also circulating. One example is the [response #whataboutus by working-class women](#) that draws attention to the limits of #metoo in telling their stories. Another critique elevates [discomfort among feminists](#) with #metoo's simplistic image of women as victims, and of the collapsing of such a vast range of behaviors into the concept of "harassment."

The creative online activism explored in these chapters is remarkable for its inclusiveness and complexity in the face of these critiques. Branding is hard. **Oversimplification** is a threat faced by any spreading movement; in this phenomenon, complex causes can be reduced to a simplistic phrase or meaning as the movement spreads. Oversimplification of a message seems inevitable for it to gain national or global traction, as critiques of the #metoo movement charge. Yet the Black Lives Matter movement has remained complex, so why not #metoo?

As of this writing, I do not include the US-based #metoo among the movements I label creative online activism – yet. Although the Hollywood actresses whose accounts received the most attention are very visible, the movement's strategies are not highly visual, or performative; rather, the movement has gained traction through the voices of people who already have access to significant public attention and national platforms. Imagine if they used their skills at performance and visibility to redirect the attention of their audiences to working-class women and women in nations with oppressive regimes? I hope #metoo advocates where the movement is most visible will turn attention to the women who need help most, rather than celebrating #metoo as a simple success.

Social and activist movements take time. Decades may pass before the effects of a movement are in full view.

In the next chapter – as we explore cultural branding – keep activist movements in mind. But also remember that whereas the goal of

cultural branding is immediate influence, the goal of social and activist movements is long-term cultural change.

Core Concepts and Questions

Core Concepts

exposure

the affordance of social media to draw matters society guards as private into the public sphere

male guardianship

the system in Saudi Arabia whereby every woman must get the approval of a male guardian for decisions about her body and life including passport applications, travel, and marriage

appropriation

use for a different cultural purpose than originally intended

staircase thoughts

the affordance of social media to allow people who will be gathering in person also to get a sense of what others are thinking before they meet face to face, and continue sharing their ideas after they leave the meeting

Ni Una Menos

translated from Spanish as “not one less”, this is a hemispheric movement expressing outrage over violence against women in the Americas, this movement began in Argentina and led to an August 2016 demonstration in Lima that was characterized as the largest demonstration ever seen in Peru

oversimplification

the threat faced by any spreading movement for complex causes to be reduced to a simplistic phrase or meaning as the movement spreads

A. Questions for qualitative thought

1. Start looking at hashtags online used alongside #metoo and also look at stories posted in #metoo over the last several years. In your groups, choose one or two posts to discuss. What do the stories using like hashtags have in common, and what are some ways that they differ?
2. What are some of the smaller impacts you have noticed in the years since #metoo and companion hashtags and practices have come about? In your own experiences or those you know about.
3. If you were aware of the women's movements discussed in this chapter before, what had you heard about them? Do these movements influence you to think differently about women's roles in the cultures from which these movements came? Explain.

B. Review: Which is the best answer?



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Related Content

Consider It: Americans' Experiences and Beliefs around #metoo

Worried about sexual harassment – or false allegations? Our team asked Americans about their experiences and beliefs

From *The Conversation*



In a survey, 81% of women and 43% of men said that they

had experienced sexual harassment or assault at least once.

[Mihai Surdu/shutterstock.com](https://www.shutterstock.com)

[Anita Raj, University of California San Diego](#)

Since the launch of #MeToo, there's been [a lot of attention](#) on problems of sexual harassment and assault in the U.S.

Unfortunately, this has not amounted to much progress in terms of reductions in sexual harassment and assault or improvements in conviction rates. This is in part due to the social and political dissension regarding [the veracity of accusations](#) and what constitutes [fairness of due process when cases arise](#).

[Our new study](#), published April 30 by nonprofit Stop Street Harassment, in partnership with our team at UC San Diego's Center on Gender Equity and Health, as well as others, looks closely at the scope of these issues in our country.

The headline figure is that, as has long been known, sexual harassment affects most women and many men.

However, our study dug deeper, providing insight into three questions that are central to today's media coverage of #MeToo.

I. Have the rates of sexual harassment and assault changed with the #MeToo movement?

In the nationally representative sample of the approximately 2,000 Americans whom we surveyed in early

2019, 81% of women and 43% of men said that they had experienced sexual harassment or assault at least once in their lives.

Eighteen percent of women and 16% of men reported recent sexual harassment or assault in the last six months, which is [not a significant change from 2018](#).

The overall prevalence of sexual harassment or assault throughout one's lifetime also showed no change.

These findings suggest that [improved awareness of #MeToo](#) and [potential backlash against it](#) have not altered the incidence or reported prevalence of these abuses.

However, while these data indicate no change in survey reports, U.S. crime data indicate that more people are [reporting sexual harassment and assault to the police](#), possibly due to greater comfort engaging the criminal justice system thanks to #MeToo.

Nonetheless, high rates of sexual harassment and assault, particularly for women, continue to be a norm in the U.S.

2. How safe from sexual harassment are students and workers?

Our study suggests that most sexual harassment occurs on the street or in other public venue.

However, 38% of women and about 15% of men have experienced sexual harassment in the workplace and at school.

<https://datawrapper.dwcdn.net/FWbhJ/1/>

Harassment in high school was particularly common, reported by 27% of women and 11% of men. Smaller but significant groups said they had experienced harassment at their middle school and college campuses.

This suggests that, despite concerns about sexual harassment in U.S. schools and workplaces, long-standing federal policies from [the Department of Education](#) and the [Equal Employment Opportunity Commission](#) against these abuses are not effectively preventing perpetrators from acting anyway, typically with impunity.

3. How safe are boys and men from false allegations of sexual harassment and assault?

[False allegations](#) of sexual harassment and assault against high-profile individuals are a growing public concern. Some have expressed worry that there is great risk for [unfair and unfounded accusations against men and boys](#).

These fears were raised by some, for example, in national discussions of the allegations against [President Donald Trump](#) and Supreme Court Justice Brett Kavanaugh.

While our data reveal that most people believe survivors to varying degrees, one in 20 women and one in 12 men felt that most or all of the allegations in recent high-profile cases were “false and that accusers are purposefully lying for attention or money.”

<https://datawrapper.dwcdn.net/hDB3F/2/>

While one-third of respondents reported ever

perpetrating sexual harassment or assault, only 2% of men and 1% of women said they had ever been accused of these abuses. That shows that, while ongoing public perceptions of false accusations as a major risk persist, any accusation, including false accusations, is in fact very rare.

What does this all mean?

Sexual harassment and assault is a persistent issue in the U.S. Our study underscores that it's particularly common for American children, disproportionately girls. Furthermore, many are also enduring this harassment in the workplace.

When these abuses occur, most bear them in silence, without accusations against those at fault. How do I know this? Well, this is the part where I cannot tell you based on our research, but because I did not tell anyone when I was sexually harassed in school and early in my career:

#MeToo.

We say nothing because it is not worth the burden – of tackling institutional accountability when there is [little likelihood of repercussions](#) for those who victimize us; of trying to justify or prove ourselves in environments where people continue to [believe that false accusations and confused memories are common](#); of taking the time to process what happened rather than just focusing on moving forward, and avoiding those trying to harm or impede us.

I believe that the U.S. does too little to educate the public regarding the nature and scale of problem, or the fact that

men are far more likely to be victims of these abuses rather than of false allegations related to their perpetration.

My team's hope with this work is to give light to the risk and harms of sexual harassment and assault as a social epidemic in our country. Given how rare it is for those affected to seek help, the U.S. needs to prioritize its prevention for the benefit of all, regardless of gender.

[Anita Raj](#), Professor of Society and Health, Medicine, and Education Studies, and Founding Director of the Center on Gender Equity and Health, [University of California San Diego](#)

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6. Activism

Before the internet was an effective product marketing tool, it was a tool of activism – and social media has extended and complicated the ways activists can use it (in other words, its activist *affordances*). This chapter takes a few key movements as examples – from 1994 when Mexico’s Zapatista movement forced the Mexican government into a ceasefire, to 2017 when Black Lives Matter hashtags now quickly activate publics in the US and beyond. I refer to these movements under the umbrella of **creative online activism**. What ties these movements together is their creativity in using the affordances of the internet to promote activist agendas and avoid the pitfalls of oversimplification and appropriation.

Note: This chapter focuses on movements that have coalesced (formed) around racial and ethnic identity groups, as well as income inequality and political decisions.

The Zapatistas

In early 1994, only a tiny percentage of the world was online, and the term “social media” did not exist. The internet was very young and very Web 1.0, with static pages that did not allow visitors to contribute. (You can review



Zapatistas in Chiapas used early social media to advance their cause and protect their lives. (Image: Zapatistas, ilf_, https://www.flickr.com/photos/ilf_/30207494941, CC BY-SA)

Web 1.0 vs Web 2.0 in Chapter 2). Yet our first example of creative online activism begins here, with Mexico’s **Zapatistas**. Creative deployment of the affordances of a young, sparse internet both saved indigenous protesters in Chiapas, Mexico from slaughter *and* allowed them to influence the new global economy.



NAFTA signing by leaders of Mexico, Canada, and the US (Image: Nafta ceremony 1992, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Nafta.jpg>, Public Domain.)

NAFTA signing by leaders of Mexico, Canada, and the US

The beginning of the story was [the end of life as many in rural Mexico knew it](#).

Governments of the US, Canada, and Mexico began negotiating the **North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA)** in the early 1990s, forging

interdependence between their economies. Among other deals, this trade agreement would subsidize corporations taking over Mexican land to grow cheap crops. Many Mexicans – particularly the native, or *indigenous*, people – foresaw that this would lead to drastic alteration of the land and to farming by genetic crop modification and spraying of chemical pesticides.

As their political leaders worked toward NAFTA, Mexican farmers fought it using traditional methods. In the early 1990s, protestors staged in-person demonstrations at the *zocalo* (town square) in Mexico City. And they organized and wrote [impassioned statements in print media](#) about the devastating consequences NAFTA would have on farming and many other aspects of life in their country. But North American governments ignored these offline pleas and signed NAFTA into effect in 1992 and 1993.

On January 1st, 1994, NAFTA became the law of the land in the US, Mexico, and Canada – and the Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN) rose up against the Mexican Government under the leadership of a masked man known as Subcomandante (Subcommander) Marcos. This army of “Zapatistas” – an army of mostly poor, rural, indigenous people inspired by the historic Mexican revolutionary Emiliano Zapata – peacefully occupied the city of San Cristóbal de las Casas in the state of Chiapas, to demand that their protests against NAFTA be seen and heard. Rising up

against the Mexican government seemed like a catastrophic move by the EZLN occupiers, many of whom were poor indigenous farmers from the Chiapas area.

The Mexican government was enthusiastic about NAFTA, as they would benefit financially from corporate NAFTA investment even if their farmers suffered. So it seemed certain the formidable Mexican army would covertly slaughter the small EZLN forces before their protest could make Mexico look bad as corporate investment. But ironically, in this case the internet was what



The internet can be “a Janus machine, an engine of liberation and an instrument of repression.” (L. Dery via Martinez-Torres, p. 348). (Image: Statue of Janus by lienyuan lee, <https://web.archive.org/web/20161102210716/http://www.panoramio.com/photo/66538480>, CC BY.)

[Martinez-Torres](#) describes as **Janus faced**, helping governments repress people *while* helping those people protest that repression at the same time. While young, online global networks made it possible for economies to globalize and to crush poor people in the process, they also made it possible to mobilize networks of popular protest and fight back.

Enter information warfare

When on-the-ground resistance alone got the Zapatistas little traction in their resistance to NAFTA, they turned to the internet and began a campaign of **information warfare** – the strategic use of information and its anticipated effects on receivers to influence the power dynamics in a conflict. Thanks to the affordances of the early internet to connect people in similar struggles in different places, international peace activists were already networked online in the mid-1990s; the [Internet Archive has lists and snapshots of pages](#)

[describing some of these organizations](#). Some of these activist organizations were witnessing or supporting similar struggles in other countries, as poor people battled transnational trade agreements that would destroy their ways of life.

The EZLN Army got the international word out about their cause with remarkable speed, thanks to these online peace networks. With the charismatic masked leader Subcomandante Marcos as a spokesperson, the EZLN Zapatistas created a dramatic campaign online. Their vivid imagery of the EZLN's masked army of farmers spread rapidly across international online networks.



Subcomandante Marcos (on left): Masked spokesman for the EZLN army of “Zapatistas” in Chiapas, Mexico (Image: Subcomandante Marcos by tj scenes / cesar bojqorquez (flickr), https://ast.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ficheru:Subcomandante_Marcos.jpg, CC BY.)

At the height of their online visibility, twelve days after declaring war on the Mexican Government, the Zapatistas publicly called for a ceasefire. The Mexican government still had the physical power to annihilate EZLN – but now the world was watching. Once EZLN called for peace, any action against their forces [including women and children](#) would make Mexico look evil – and risky as a corporate investment destination. As a result, the Mexican government was forced to accept the EZLN ceasefire. They could not reverse NAFTA; it would take more than an awareness campaign to reverse such a powerfully backed agreement. But [the EZLN protesters lived and continued their demands for social change](#).

The EZLN's Information War has inspired many civil society movements visible today. These include current movements against genetically modified food and for “fair trade” compensation of farmers. In terms of online strategies, the Zapatistas' activist campaign was an early example for activists of how media can be

used sociopolitically to demand civil rights – and to recognize how, Janus-faced, [those same media](#) can also work against those rights.

In the next sections, I demonstrate how the Zapatistas’ strategies fall under the umbrella of creative online activism and why such strategies remain powerful.

Creative online activism in recent times

Political campaigning in the 21st century

Student Contribution, Fall 2020



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The Accessibility of Politics on Social

Media

One of the main features I enjoy about social media is the level of accessibility it provides. In one tap, you can connect with an old friend, find entertainment, get news and so much more. One “old school” medium that has found new life on social media is politics. The accessibility of politics via social media has made politicians and issues easily available to the general public thanks to their integration of the new media into campaigns.

Tana Mongeau is a twenty-two-year-old influencer who gained a lot of followers from her Youtube “storytime” videos. She tries to be as transparent as possible with her audience and is not afraid to be herself. Mongeau has over 5 million Youtube subscribers which means that a lot of people value her opinions. I have watched Tana Mongeau’s Youtube videos before and I always admired how authentic she was with her audience. Tana usually tries to stay out of controversial situations because she has gotten herself into trouble in the past on social media leading to her almost being canceled. This is why I was a little surprised to see her actually campaigning which usually means half the people in your audience will disagree with you. I do not look into politics on social media because I never know if there is misinformation from an unreliable source. I will also see a lot of disinformation where people will intentionally spread fake news to make one politician look better than the other.

Because social media allows for everyone to have a voice,

there is a lot of that gets spread around by people who do not actually care about politics, but rather the attention. When I first saw “Booty For Biden”, I thought that it was probably just a meme trying to get Biden’s name out. However, Tana was very passionate about campaigning for Biden and said that it was true. This campaign strategy has proven to be successful with “naked philanthropists” such as Kaylen Ward who fundraised over 1 million dollars for Australia during their fire crisis. They tend to reward people who donate, or in this case vote, with a naked picture of themselves.

However, once again, Tana got a lot of backlash about her Biden endorsement campaign. Lots of people noticed that what she is doing can be considered “vote-buying” which is an electoral crime. Vote buying is defined as, “when offering an expenditure to any person, either to vote or withhold his vote or to vote for or against a candidate.” Punishments can include fines and up to two years in prison. It is also illegal to take a picture of your ballot in sixteen states and potentially criminal in another thirteen states. In light of this knowledge, Tana decided to change her requirements. Instead of sending her a photo of your ballot, you could just send her a video saying that you voted for Biden. With these lower demands, it is hard to account for how many people truthfully sent her proof, but Mongeau claims that she got “tens of thousands” of people to say they are voting for Biden.

Tana’s campaign ended up costing her some Youtube subscribers. She lost twenty thousand subscribers in September, which was around the start of her “Booty For Biden” campaign. Even though her channel took a hit, I believe her passionate dedication to the Biden campaign is

admirable even if she may have lost some followers. In the end, she was able to use her platform to shine a light on a topic she was passionate about, which may have even swung some votes and led to Biden's victory. Having her political view accessible to social media allowed for her to be even more transparent with her audience as well as earn herself some credibility by addressing a newsworthy national topic. "Booty For Biden" generated a lot of attention for the Biden campaign. Whether someone was pro-Biden or not, they were engaged in the political process albeit in a somewhat roundabout way. Perhaps that led to people finding more information on politics, even though it may have simply stemmed from wanting to see a nude pic.



About the Author

Jessica Nickerson is a sophomore at the University of Arizona studying Pre-Business. She enjoys spending time with her hedgehog and going on long drives. Jessica has been active on social media ever since 2011.

Respond to this case study...

What strategies made Tana's campaign uniquely suited to social media, as opposed to traditional electoral media like newspaper advertisements, television commercials, and campaign mailers? Describe another political messaging campaign or endorsement that grabbed your attention in recent years. Describe the platform(s) involved, the technological affordances, and how your various publics responded.

Organizers have continued using the internet to mobilize, and their work has arguably been made easier with the development of mobile phone apps and social media. This [timeline](#) by Mashable gives a selective overview of noted online activist movements through 2011.



Arab Spring (Image: Infobox collage for MENA protests by HonorTheKing, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Infobox_collage_for_MENA_protests.PNG, CC BY-SA.)

Creative online activism has developed in conjunction with social media apps since the mid-2000s. These apps are certainly not created equal when it comes to facilitating activism; in fact, some have been found to intentionally hinder the exposure of social injustice. For example, although they have had a huge user base for the last decade, [Facebook algorithms have been found to](#)

[hide or slow controversial and “negative” stories from its users’ feeds](#), making it a poor platform for activism.

But the platform is only a small part of the recipe for an activist movement. Human creativity has facilitated the use of technologies in activism in ways software developers never imagined. In a typical example of human shaping of technology, [Twitter leadership didn’t build hashtags](#) into the platform intentionally and even rejected the idea that they would be widely used; human users proved them wrong. Several years later, [Twitter hashtags](#) began playing important roles in online activism, including in the [Arab Spring protests](#).

Case study: #settleforbiden

Student Content, Fall 2020



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<https://opentextbooks.library.arizona.edu/hrsmwinter2022/?p=87#h5p-32>



About the Author

Lilly is a first-year student at the University of Arizona who enjoys traveling and having a good time.

Respond to this case study...In her audio piece, this author focuses on the use of the hashtag #settleforbiden. In what ways could this hashtag fall under the category of creative online activism? In what ways could it be considered slacktivism?

Social media platforms like Twitter are sometimes practically credited with creating movements, but this technological determinism fails to recognize how much complex human wrangling is required to run an online campaign and [keep control of its message](#). Only a small percentage of protestors used Twitter to exchange key information and then disseminated that information through face-to-face communication and other media. All messages that spread widely online face the threat of oversimplification and appropriation; only the best-executed retain their depth and complexity. And, regardless of platform, the real work for social

change still happens across various digital and analog (non-digital) platforms – and most crucially, on the ground.

The Black Lives Matter Movement



Alicia Garza
July 13, 2013 · 🌐

black people. I love you. I love us. Our lives matter.

Like · Comment · Share

👍 Esteban Rodriguez, Anthony Julius Williams, Christopher Cook and 112 others like this.



Patrisse Marie Cullors-Brignac
July 15, 2013 · 🌐

Alicia Garza myself, and hopefully more black people than we can imagine are embarking on a project. we are calling it **#BLACKLIVESMATTER**

#blacklivesmatter is a movement attempting to visiblize what it means to be black in this country. Provide hope and inspiration for collective action to build collective power to achieve collective transformation. rooted in grief and rage but pointed towards vision and dreams. Tonight I will be talking about this project as well as the actions that have taken place the last couple days in the city of Los Angeles. Jackelyn Denise Ixchel Alvarez will be joining me on air with [Flip the Script](#) on 90.7FM @ 8:00pm.

Like · Comment · Share

One of the most well-known online movements to date is [Black Lives Matter](#). The central phrase and hashtag of this movement came from Alicia Garza and Patrisse Marie Cullors-Brignac in July 2013 in response to the acquittal of George Zimmerman in the killing of 12-year-old Trayvon Martin. Armed with this concise phrase – and fueled by outrage over injustices against black citizens by American institutions including law enforcement today – **Black Lives Matter** has built into a sophisticated movement online and offline with profound influence on government policy and popular consciousness.

Although its signature phrase began online, [the Black Lives](#)

[Matter movement gained traction](#) over the next year as Twitter users deployed #blacklivesmatter to mobilize on the ground. Subsequent hashtags used in connection with #blacklivesmatter networked protestors and helped them assemble massive on-the-ground demonstrations very quickly after subsequent police killings. These included #ferguson to organize protests in Ferguson, Missouri after police were acquitted in the killing of Michael Brown there in November 2014.

socially aware branding

Student Contribution, Fall 2020



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Project 3

I chose the public of The Mayfair Group because it is an account that I am very familiar with and have been

following for a long time. I think the content they create and post is incredibly inspiring and relatable to all. Their profile is very unique and full of creativity. It is a newly founded company and does a great job of reflecting some of the younger generations' ideas. The Mayfair Group specializes in the sectors of public relations, social media, sales, graphic design, branding, events, and creative content. Their Instagram account inspires me to think out of the box, reflect on my life, and to be more original.

The Mayfair Group's Instagram account affords exposure because it draws matters society guards as private into the public sphere. For example, they post very honest quotes about deeper emotions and the sides of life people do not normally portray. They feature real-life issues such as climate change, mental health, politics, and female empowerment. The brand specifically focuses on gender equality. They provide very positive content, especially things that improve your mental health. It is evolving and revolutionizing as a company and has grown immensely. With a following of over 400k on Instagram, The Mayfair Group has a great deal of influence. Their posts receive a lot of comments from people sharing their own thoughts and beliefs about the topics being discussed. It goes beyond their platform as they plan collaborations, events, social and PR campaigns for specific brands to give them exposure.

The account brings a lot of people from many backgrounds together to fight for one cause. This is a great example of an organizational layer. Modern activist movements are often ignited through interactions between key personalities, and networked groups of people who respond together. On posts discussing activism topics, the

comment section is flooded with users who all share the same belief.

The Mayfair Group also is a fashion company and many of their products reflect these strong positive quotes and movements. This will bring a greater exposure because as the products and garments are worn, others who are not involved in the public will see it and possibly look into the brand. I am also especially interested in this brand and their public because it relates very well to my current major. I am majoring in marketing and I am extremely passionate about fashion, and the entertainment industry as a whole. The modern feel of this company is something I hold very high and hopefully will be able to work for a brand similar to The Mayfair Group. I pay close attention to the way they market their products and their choices of posts because everything is connected. I find it incredible that they have never paid for ads, followers, or promotions. This a very successful marketing story and I can learn a lot from this brand. The CEO says, “It all comes down to hustle and building relationships – that’s how a business should be built”.

About the Author

Created by a student for
iVoices Media Lab.



Respond to this case study...

Describe some of the affordances of Instagram that have contributed to the Mayfair Group's success. Are the strategies identified above unique to the public (or community) that follows the Mayfair Group? Use core concepts from our textbook to explain what the CEO might mean by "hustle and building relationships."

Creative online activist strategies in Black Lives Matter and beyond



A Black Lives Matter demonstration: broad, inclusive online activism for the 21st century (Image: Year Commemoration of the Murder of Michael Brown, the Ferguson Rebellion, & the Black Lives Matter uprising by The All-Nite Images, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:1_Year_Commemoration_of_the_Murder_of_Michael_Brown,_the_Ferguson_Rebellion,_%26_the_Black_Lives_Matter_uprising._\(2042628532\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:1_Year_Commemoration_of_the_Murder_of_Michael_Brown,_the_Ferguson_Rebellion,_%26_the_Black_Lives_Matter_uprising._(2042628532).jpg), CC BY-SA.)

Black Lives Matter campaigns have deployed several strategies that were key to the EZLN campaign, as well as to other online activist movements. To make it easy to understand the strategies these movements deployed in common, I will list them and describe them in the next section.

Five strategies deployed by creative online activist movements:

- 1. Speed
- 2. Visuals
- 3. Performances
- 4. Inclusiveness
- 5. “Masked” leadership



Speedy response has been key in the Black Lives Matter movement (Image: Black Lives Matter protest by Fibonacci Blue, <https://www.flickr.com/photos/fibonacciblue/23750484692>, CC BY.)

1. Speed

Like the Zapatista online campaign, it was crucial in 2015 that Black Lives Matter protestors mobilize with speed. Responding fast to the actions of government or authorities allowed both

movements to gather large publics when outrage over authorities' decisions was high. In Black Lives Matter, an immediate response also sent the message that this public would not tolerate police violence any longer – effective immediately.



Hands up, don't shoot is a powerful phrase: It became a hashtag, an easily recognized gesture, and an on-the-ground synced performance. (Image: Protest against police brutality by Debra Sweet, <https://www.flickr.com/photos/worldcantwait/14968977425>, CC BY.)

2. Visuals

In both the Zapatista and Black Lives Matter movements, campaign organizers gathered attention through effective use of *visual* content. Images of the masked Zapatista army are still widely circulated online. This [article](#) in WIRED Magazine explores the spreadable content of the Black Lives Matter movement, especially the visuals – photographs easily shared online that evoked the in-person experience of being black, in protest.

3. Performances

We must also remember the *performances* involved in each of these protests. The Zapatistas called a truce at a dramatic moment that would have cast the Mexican government as the villain if they continued to fight the small EZLN army. In Black Lives Matter,

hashtags like #handsupdontshoot remind us that these protestors moved together in synced gestures that gave tremendous energy to their on-the-ground protests. Reenactment has also been an effective performance strategy, exemplified in protestors using the #icantbreathe hashtag to reenact the video of Eric Garner dying after police ignored his repeated pleas of “I can’t breathe.”

Online activism scholar [Paulo Gerbaudo](#) phrases it this way: Online media can be used for the “**choreography of assembly**” in organizing on-the-ground demonstrations. That is, online organizers can choreograph individual acts of cultural repetition (memes, discussed more in Chapter 7), such as clothing or gestures protestors can repeat to recognize and reinforce one another’s work. And they can organize the meeting places, escape routes, and conduct of massive groups of people. Gerbaudo notes that these actions can influence public consciousness most powerfully when they occur in a **symbolic center** – some meaningful public place that serves as a theatrical stage for activism to be seen and performed. A park at a city center, a football field, the Olympic medal ceremonies, a memorial statue: All of these have been symbolic centers for protest in the US and abroad.

4. Inclusiveness

Black Lives Matter’s strategy was also similar to the Zapatistas’ in the *inclusiveness* of the campaign. It was understood and stated by those in the movement that women must have equal access to the rights being fought for, and that in-family violence was part of what they were fighting. In Black Lives Matter, rights around gender and sexuality were always part of the discussion, as exemplified in this movement “[herstory](#).”

Today’s social media-fueled movements tend to use rhetoric that acknowledges differences in power among the people they fight for or represent. This sets modern rights campaigns apart from some rights movements in the past. Both the Civil Rights and Black Panther movements focused on black men more than other citizens. The 20th-century women’s rights movements focused more on white women than any others. The 20th-century gay rights

movement centralized the identities of white gay men. “Not your grandfather’s civil rights movement,” is one way Black Lives Matter has been described, reminding us that today’s movements broaden the focus from fathers and grandfathers to the rest of the family, the organization, and the community.

5. “Masked” organizers

In modern online activism, leaders wear *masks* – literally, and sometimes, figuratively. In the 20th-century, a much-remembered feature of social activism campaigns like the Civil Rights Movement was their visible leadership and culture of “heroes.” Dr. Martin Luther King is commonly remembered as the “father” of the Civil Rights Movement. Meanwhile, as [this article by Jamil Cobb on Black Lives Matter reminds us](#), there were other strategies at work in the Civil Rights movement as well as leaders who shunned the spotlight, like Ella Baker of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. Today, the branding has shifted, with many declaring today’s online activist movements “leaderless.”



Anonymous as masked activist (Image: A member of Anonymous at the Occupy Wall Street protest in New York by David Shankbone, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File%3AOccupy_Wall_Street_Anonymous_2011_Shankbone.JPG, CC BY.)

The Zapatista spokesman Subcomandante Marcos was a bridge between these two styles of organization, the 20th-century heroic leader versus the 21st-century decentralized campaign. Marcos was the Zapatistas' most visible "hero." But he wore a mask, hid his true identity, and chose the false title of "Subcommander" (subordinate Commander) rather than "Commander." A decade later, the "hacktivist" group Anonymous began organizing actions on 4chan in which the identities of the organizers and participants were not known; Anonymous made significant appearances during protests against the World Trade Organization. More recently, there have been figurative masks on many popular online movements including Occupy Wall Street, with all insisting there are no leaders. The

strategy of “masked” organizers makes a movement difficult to defeat, while also resisting the persistent surveillance that is a function of the internet, and that can get activists jailed or killed.

Advancing and and complicating social activism through online engagement

There are many critiques of online activism as [inferior](#) to more traditional forms of activism. For example, techno-sociologist Zeynep Tufekci argues that by removing the hard work and shared risk of social organizing, social media technologies gather demonstrators too quickly for them to understand one another and think together. In another critique, scholar Evgeny Morozov uses the term “[slacktivism](#)” to characterize certain low-risk levels of “activism” such as signing online petitions, which offer participants the illusion they are contributing significantly, at zero risk to themselves. While these critiques may overlook the subtle shifts in the public consciousness that online chatter can effect, they have merit. As illustrated by the Zapatistas in Chiapas and Black Lives Matter in Missouri, online activism is at its most powerful when on-the-ground action provides roots to online campaigns.



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here: <https://opentextbooks.library.arizona.edu/hrsmwinter2022/?p=87#oembed-3>

However they are branded, successful online activism movements are never dependent only on leaders, and they are also never leaderless. Rather, modern activist movements in the US in

particular are often ignited through interactions between key driving forces or personalities, and then mobilized networked groups of people who respond together. This idea, which author David Karpf has called an “[organizational layer](#)” of American political advocacy, may be the closest we can come to accurately describing the real effects of the internet on how we do activism.

Core Concepts and Questions

Core Concepts

creative online activism

activist movements that deploy creativity in using the affordances of the internet to promote activist agendas and avoid the pitfalls of oversimplification and appropriation

Zapatistas

an army of mostly poor, rural, indigenous people rose up against the Mexican government in 1994, and successfully used the early internet to reach out for witnesses and support

Janus Faced

a symbol, derived from ancient Roman mythology, of something that simultaneously works toward two opposing goals

information warfare

the strategic use of information and its anticipated effects on receivers to influence the power dynamics in a conflict

North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA)

an agreement between the US, Mexico, and Canada in the early 1990s forging interdependence between their economies, including subsidies for corporations taking over Mexican land to grow cheap crops

Black Lives Matter

a sophisticated movement online and offline, fueled by outrage over injustices against black citizens by American institutions including law enforcement today

Five strategies deployed by creative online activist movements:

Speed, Visuals, Performances, Inclusiveness, Masked leadership

choreography of assembly

Paulo Gerbaudo's term describing how successful online organizers preplan social activist movements that will ensue on the ground

symbolic center

Paulo Gerbaudo's term for a meaningful public place that serves as a theatrical stage for activism to be seen and performed, such as park at a city center, a football field, the Olympic medal ceremonies, or a memorial statue

slacktivism

coined by Evgeny Morozov, this concept relates to critiques of online activism as inferior to more traditional forms of activism, with organizing online perceived as so fast, easy, and risk-free, it results in insufficient gains or change

organizational layer

political scientist David Karpf's term for the networked groups of people responding together who he argues form the most important agents for change in American political advocacy today

Core Questions



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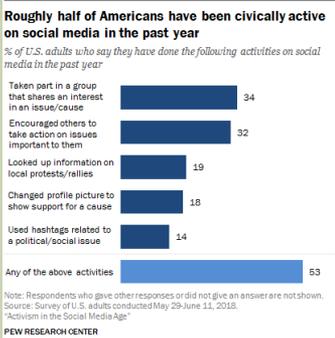
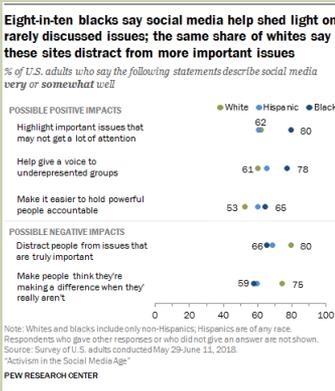
Consider it: A new era in online activism?

First, read the article “[The Second Act of Social Media Activism](#)” by Jane Hu, published in June 2020 in *New Yorker Magazine*.

Also consider findings from the [Pew Research Center's](#)

[2018 study](#) of American perceptions of the internet as a tool for social activism.

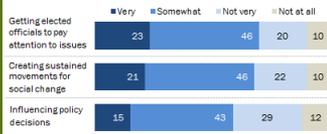
Techno-sociologis Zeynep Tufekci argued in 2015 that the tools to organize activist movements online may move too fast to build coalitions that “think together”. Whether that was true then, is it now? Support your answer, including what might you say to others in the Pew polls who think differently than you in order to explain your views.



Graphics by Pew Research Center.

A majority of Americans say social media are important for getting politicians to pay attention to issues, creating long-lasting social movements

% of U.S. adults who say social media are ___ important for ...



Note: Respondents who did not give an answer are not shown.
Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted May 29-June 11, 2018.
"Activism in the Social Media Age"

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

Read it:
Grassroots activists
must consider the
costs of digital

campaigns (Delia Dumitrica, The Conversation)

Grassroots activists must consider the personal costs of digital campaigns



Attendees at the women's March on Edmonton, Alta on Jan. 21, 2017.

Mylynn Felt, Author provided

[Delia Dumitrica, Erasmus University Rotterdam](#) and [Mylynn Felt, University of Calgary](#)

Widespread use of social media has made it easier to mobilize collective action, yet citizen activists struggle to navigate these digital tools and increasingly report feeling burned out. Our research on grassroots digital activism in Canada has revealed some of the [strategies organizers employ when dealing with the technological, interactional and personal barriers of digital activism](#).

People's use of social media for activist purposes clashes with the commercial goals of these platforms. For example, as these platforms prioritize popular and recent content, activist messages have to be constantly updated and liked or shared in order to remain visible to wider audiences. This places the burden to adapt upon activists, who must make the best of these tools within the constraints set by the platforms' algorithms.

Dilution or dissemination?

Social media can enhance activist communication at the cost of loss of control over the message. This matters in collective action, because a clearly communicated set of demands and complaints is essential to obtaining political recognition.

[During the 2014 teachers' strike in British Columbia](#), three parents came up with the idea of hosting playdates in front of the offices of members of the B.C. Legislative Assembly (MLAs). The parents wanted to pressure the provincial government to negotiate with teachers and end the strike. As they circulated the idea of [#MLAPlaydates](#) on social media, they reflected on the possibility of message dilution:

It's not the traditional command and control. It's like:

here's an idea, why don't you play with it and see what you can do. You share, you pass on stuff.... So, it's a different framework of activism.... It's like beta testing, you don't know where it's going to fly.

Their solution was a form of “open-source activism,” which entailed monitoring social media to reinforce the message and prevent it from being co-opted, while inviting supporters to adapt and personalize this message.

Echo-chamber effect

Filter bubbles of like-minded people make it difficult for digital activists to get their messages outside of individual networks. Yet, some platforms are more public than others, using different algorithms to make content visible to their users.

Organizers of [Alberta's #SafeStampede](#) wanted to call attention to the rape culture around the annual Calgary Stampede. They found that:

Facebook is far and away the best place to have actual discourse [around these issues], but again, you're mostly talking to your own friends, so it does become a bit of a feedback loop.

To combat this barrier, organizers created public profiles on more open platforms like Twitter and Tumblr to breach the echo chamber effect.

Popularity contests

On social media, visibility is often enabled by the newness and

reactions a message receives. Activists need to constantly monitor how algorithms push content to the top of other users' newsfeed. This pressures them to think and act like digital marketers, strategizing their message production and circulation.

The digital activists in our research spoke to the necessity of adapting to platform-specific practices, as well as the learning curve of understanding these practices in the first place.

You have to be careful of the algorithms, so if you're posting too much, you're not going to get as wide of an audience.... With Instagram, if you posted three or four really good pictures with good descriptions and hashtags a week, you're going to get more of a response than if you're posting like, you know, five times a day every day. So, you want to be kind of conscientious in what you're posting, and how often.

Allies and trolls

Alongside algorithms, interaction on social media brings along its own challenges to digital activism.

For [the #SafeStampede organizers](#), social media platforms helped them find each other through their existing networks. Online connections grew into face-to-face meetings and relationships, facilitating critical backstage efforts to their public social media campaign:

I don't think anything exclusively happens on social media anymore. There needs to be a point where things transcend social media and you end up having real conversations with people and you build relationships.

Social media also opened the campaign up for abuse and trolling.

This was also the experience of another gender-related movement, the [Women's March in Alberta](#). The organizers described how people searching terms like “transgender” and “pussy hat” launched a gender-biased calculated attack a few days before the march. To deal with the backlash, the organizers resorted to a strategy of “block, delete, report, repeat,” pointing out that:

It had to be done, and we just tried really hard not to let all of our time and emotional energy get sucked up by that.

The camaraderie built online and offline helped mitigate the toll of these confrontations. Still, online attacks and trolling can easily deplete the already scarce resources that citizen activists have at their disposal.

Burning out and dropping out

While our participants minimized the personal and professional costs of their digital activism during our conversations, they also spoke of burnout making long-term involvement unsustainable.

The emotional cost of trolls, backlash and hyper-aggression on social media was difficult for organizers to escape as social media tied their public names to their activism:

You attract negative comments on you ... attract people who feel they have the right to attack you ... I try not to think about this too much, having too much information out there leaves me open to potential stalkers, or people who want to harm me or my child.

Distancing one's self, either from the movement or from the potential risks of your activities, seems to be the only possible strategy for organizers in these situations.

Furthermore, because social media algorithms display the

messenger alongside the message, organizers also expressed concern that their visible activism may create potential career risks.

Digital organizing strategies

The citizen activists interviewed in our research employed various strategies to navigate barriers to digital activism. Here are some of their lessons for other activists:

- Stay up-to-date with how algorithms are designed and updated for the platforms you are using.
- Use multiple platforms to reach different audiences and mitigate the effects of echo chambers.
- Allow some for some change in your message, but monitor the conversation in order to maintain its core.
- Connect with fellow organizers and supporters offline.
- Join a local, regional or national collective so you have fellow activists to lean on and pass the baton to when you need to step away.
- Anticipate the costs and risks of activism, and reflect on where you need to draw your own boundaries.
- Build flexibility and adaptation into your tactics of action.

While digital activism can be a crucial part of any successful campaign, activists needs to remain aware about the costs and limitations of social media.

[Delia Dumitrica](#), Associate professor, Department of Media and Communication, [Erasmus University Rotterdam](#) and [Mylynn Felt](#), PhD Candidate, Communication, Media and Film, [University of Calgary](#)

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7. Memes

Often when people talk about what works in advertising online, they make it sound like it's the content itself that decides to spread. This is the idea behind the word *viral*: It suggests some content is just irresistible and spread by its human hosts almost without their choosing.



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The Salt Bae meme, from Turkish chef Nurs_et

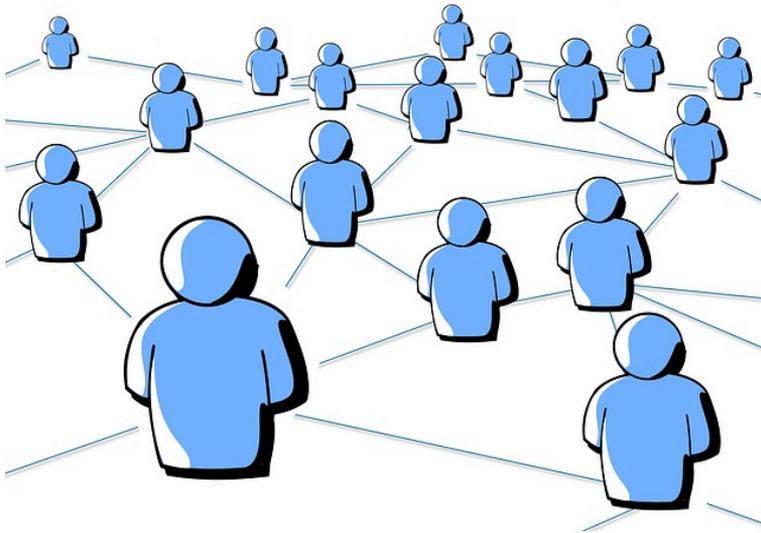
Think about this. This virus idea just isn't how media works. There wasn't some virus that made you share a **meme** last year, or a song, or a video. If you shared [that Salt Bae meme](#), it was because you wanted people to see it, and you wanted them to see it coming from you. You have human agency when you share things online, and you invest a piece of your identity in everything you share. You also may have strong reasons for sharing content, whether those reasons are personal, social, political, satirical, or all of these.

Why do larger, experienced companies sometimes falter in making their content spreadable while some gestures, phrases, pics, and videos spread in ways even their creators could not predict and maybe [didn't even want](#)? Misunderstandings abound as humans try to make sense of the relatively new world of social media content trends.

Still, in this chapter, we will brave the pitfalls and offer some

explanations and strategies for spreading content online. And we look at a few cases of companies and creators who have succeeded in making content spreadable, along with some spectacular failures.

What is spreadability, and why is it important?



Social networks: To reach viewers today, advertisers must reach their contacts, because social media users are looking at each other, not directly at advertisers. (Image: social-media-552411_640, geralt, <https://pixabay.com/illustrations/social-media-personal-552411/>, CC0)

The vocabulary used to refer to online sharing trends is unstable, with users adopting and spreading terms by users that may misrepresent what they name. Humans understand new phenomena in the world by comparing them to what we already know – which can be problematic, as the old and new phenomena will not be the same.

Take the word *meme*, for example. It originated in the work of a

biologist (Richard Dawkins, in his 1976 book *The Selfish Gene*) to describe something that spreads like a gene, only by cultural rather than biological means. But this definition is based on a metaphor rather than on observation of how content spreads. A better definition is one that acknowledges the qualities of memes – for example, noting that users often modify them as they spread them.

So it is with the concept of the media virus. Users and popular media outlets refer incessantly to media “viruses” and “viral” media. But viruses are biological phenomena. Can cultural phenomena really behave the same way?

The theorists Jenkins, Bell, and Green have written critically of the notions behind the concept of “viral media;” what they offer instead is the notion of **spreadability**. This relates to concepts we began discussing in Chapter 2 of this book, in the section on “The People Formerly Known as the Audience.” In the 20th century, advertising depended on one broadcasting outlet keeping the eyes of audiences directly on that broadcaster’s content. In the age of social media, though, users are not looking at that one broadcaster or television station; they are looking at each other. And with limitless choices and content online vying for their attention, to attract views you have to convince users to share your content with their publics: their families, “friends,” and networked contacts.

viral communities

Student Content, Fall 2020



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The Influence of Social Media

For this project, I chose to analyze Shawn Mendes and his fan group. I tried to focus specifically on Instagram, Twitter, and Tik Tok and looked to see what fans were posting in relation to Shawn Mendes. I began by starting with a very broad search of simply #ShawnMendes. This was a good start to my research because it showed me a culmination of all the possibilities for fan postings and other related content. Through this initial search, I saw that posts ranged anywhere from simply reposting original videos of Shawn Mendes as well as his social media posts and could also be fan edits and memes created through his content.

As I began to dig deeper into other posts related to Shawn Mendes, I switched over to a very popular platform right now – Tik Tok. instead of viewing fan accounts on Tik Tok I simply viewed Shawn Mendes' own account. Here I was able to see that after the most recent release of his song Wonder, many fans had been trying to get Shawn

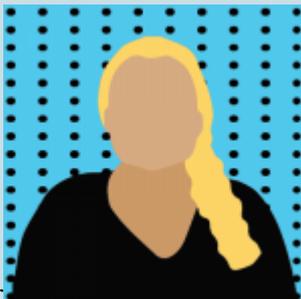
Mendes' attention through dancing and reacting to his music video. These videos that fans created ranged anywhere from simply doing the dance he did in his music video to very cool edits of Shawn Mendes. Fans would post with the hopes that Shawn Mendes would repost their content as he has done with so many videos.

As you can see through the rest of the screen recordings and videos, other content that is posted is also from other celebrities as well as fan accounts. Posts from other celebrities can simply be a picture of merch that Shawn Mendes may have sent them or banter between the two celebrities. Fans often jump on top of this media and repost it again creating an even bigger community surrounding one celebrity.

It is very obvious that one celebrity can have a major impact on many fans. This community of fans, as well as the creator's impact, creates a sort of **crowdculture** around the celebrity. Fans of the celebrity, other celebrities, and even the celebrity himself get involved in creating content and reposting in order to create a sort of community. Shawn Mendes' die-hard fans even have a name for themselves – The Mendes Army.

This large public that is created surrounding Shawn Mendes is not exclusive to this one artist. Many other celebrities have a large crowd following as well. For example, Justin Bieber's fans call themselves the Beliebers and Miley Cyrus fans call themselves the Smilers. Social media is an amazing way to connect celebrities who you may never meet down to the individual fans that are listening to their music or watching their content. As a fan, you may never get to meet the celebrity you follow but one comment or repost can truly make your day and make you

feel as though you can interact with your favorite celebrity.



About the Author

A student at the University of Arizona. She is currently studying prenursing in hopes of becoming a pediatric nurse.

Respond to this case study...Based on how this writer uses crowd culture as well as your own experiences and knowledge of the term, what is the effect that crowd cultures have on spreadability?

One of the crucial points in Spreadable Media is that online cultures work together as agents to make content spread. A company cannot do it alone. Consumers of the media content a company desires to spread must become sharers, and even producers: liking, reposting, sharing with specific publics, meming, creating fanfiction offshoots, and making the content their own. *Spreadability* is Jenkins, Bell, and Green's theory of how content spreads online – though *spreadability* is not a strategy any one agent can control.

Indeed, *spreadability* requires some loss of control of content by the creator.

To begin to understand how to make content spreadable in this way, let's look at an example of content that spread almost inadvertently – without anyone really even planning for it to explode.

Ken Bone as meme, truce, and unicorn

Ken Bone during the 2016 presidential debate.

During the second presidential debate in 2016, a man named Ken Bone asked a question and became an internet sensation via #BoneZone. Why?

I always speak with my students about social media news. The day the Ken Bone memes exploded, I asked one insightful group I had *why*. Why did everyone go nuts over Ken Bone? In the discussion that followed, we went over several factors that helped Ken Bone spread so fast. Here are four of them:

1. Ken Bone was easy to meme.

His sweater was red. His face was small. His glasses were neat rectangles. His shape when cut out was roundy like a cloud. Ken Bone was so memeable he was [drawn by Disney before his persona was born](#). With his collar shirt buttoned up all white and snug he appeared to have been lovingly dressed by his mom. In Pictionary, it would take at least 60 seconds to draw most people. Ken Bone, maybe 6 seconds. Instant recognition enables easy imitation, making Ken Bone's image a very spreadable social object. Plus his name only takes up 7 characters. That's spreadable.

2. Ken Bone was a regular guy – very unlike both 2016 Presidential candidates.

While their backgrounds were different, candidates Trump and Clinton had both long occupied the high halls of the privileged. Watching them battle one another on stage was like watching

Godzilla and Mothra. Fascinating... but where were the humans to be tossed around in their struggle? Election cycles have grown so long, the American public's attention span for the two candidates had begun to peter out. And then came the human caricature Ken Bone – like switching the channel first to a reality TV show, then a cartoon.

3. Ken Bone was a national ceasefire.

It has been a brutal election battle, with most of the American public in filter bubbles echoing with rage, and occasionally coming into hostile contact with the opposite side. And then came Ken Bone – a [Twitter user](#) called him, “a human version of a hug,” which a popular blogger subsequently rephrased as “[a hug, personified.](#)” Everyone could like him. He was a safe topic at family gatherings. And maybe he was a messenger dove, cooing in his kind voice that after that awful election, political enemies might eventually be able to talk to each other again.

4. Ken Bone was an undecided voter – a unicorn.

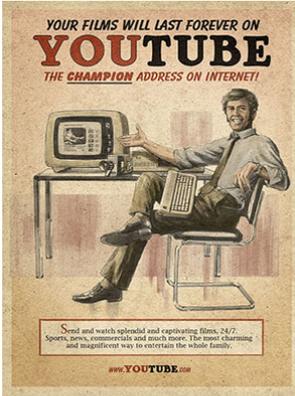
For many, it was difficult to believe any Ken Bones even existed. Viewers marveled when he appeared: *There are undecided voters? In this polarizing election? Where do they live? Is it quieter there? Do rivers sparkle with the ether of forgetfulness? Oh my goodness... there's one now!* Bone's fame only grew when it was discovered that before that pivotal 15 seconds of exposure, he had only 7 Twitter followers – and two were his grandmothers. What a wonderful little public that must be.

The end of Ken Bone's fame

Of course. the truce between Clinton and Trump supporters could not last. Bone, online searches revealed, [had posted things online](#) in the past that not everyone could love. His brand was compromised. If only he'd lasted through Thanksgiving, we might not have needed [Adele](#).

The internet is a dangerous place for unicorns.

Branding on social media



What each major social media platform can do and is known for, as well as how advertising has changed. (Image: vintage, Mats Adamczak, <https://www.flickr.com/photos/matsadamczak/> 5732303303, CC BY-SA)

So if you are an advertiser, how do you do what Ken Bone did – combined with what viewers created out of what Ken Bone did – and how do you keep the resulting culture going? How do you make a lasting brand with spreadable content?

One worthwhile analysis of this topic is in Holt's [Branding in the Age of Social Media](#) in the March 2016 Harvard Business Review. Some important terms to understand from the article are *branding*, *crowdcultures*, and *art worlds*.

In the article, Holt explains branding as “a set of techniques designed to generate cultural relevance.” What this means is, branding requires paying attention to cultures online. Cultures are kind of like publics, except cultures have much deeper roots. Cultures are practices, symbols, meanings, and much more shared by people who have coexisted in a place or other site or context. To brand successfully today you have to learn about the cultures you are marketing to: their inside jokes, trends, taboos, and so much that can be hard to understand to cultural outsiders.

Holt writes that much of the internet is based in crowdcultures, which are cultures around certain concepts, including products. Crowdcultures can come from two sources, subcultures or art worlds. These crowdcultures may be subcultures – people who are deeply devoted to these concepts. Or they may come out of art worlds, with people talented in creating online content and making a culture more attractive and resonant even if it’s all very new. Ken Bone grew out of art worlds, with artistic people quickly meming him into videos and images, which attracted a crowdculture that continued to spread him.

How did those initial art world creators know that Ken Bone would spread quickly? Maybe they didn’t. But if they did, they understood some of the beliefs and interests of the American people who spread him. They knew how to read the culture their crowd would come from.

gen z Memes with anti-bullshit themes

Student Content, Fall 2020



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<https://opentextbooks.library.arizona.edu/hrsmwinter2022/?p=93#oembed-3>

The #Trump2020 page on TikTok may not be what you think it is...

Now I know when I think of #Trump2020, it's not a page filled with democratic gen-z'ers. On TikTok though, if you were to look up #Trump2020 you would find endless videos of democratic teenagers and young adults who have turned this page into a kind of prank. This happened as a result of another trend where conservative republicans were posting videos spreading or being just a little too dramatic, that it was seen as a way to spark fear into some people. These kids ended up clapping back by starting a whole trend of making fun of these videos, as a way to discredit the false information being spread. Now, when you first hear this it sounds a lot like cyberbullying, which I understand and I think that some people can definitely take it too far, but overall all the videos are lighthearted and funny. I chose this topic, as an observer, to get a deeper look into how people have come up with new and entertaining ways of shutting down false information.

One specific video that particularly caught my eye and millions of other people on the app, was a video of a Trump supporter who's overall message on her video was that if Biden wins vaccines will be made to be mandatory and are bad. She made it like it was a scene from a movie, she commented on her video that she calls vaccines “the mark of the beast”, which is a chilling and frightening thing to have pricked into your arm. In her video she demonizes and makes vaccines out to be a scary thing that is enforced by horrible people; these people being President Biden and other democrats.

Now, if I were a 13 year old on the app and I watched this without knowing any information I would be terrified and never want a vaccine. But the fact is that vaccines are good at preventing the spread of illness, and especially in light of the current situation we're in with Covid, vaccines could help us reduce the lives being taken. Her video is terrifyingly spreading false information that is especially dangerous in a time like this, where we should be supporting the idea of vaccines. And I know that vaccines can be scary, because I am terrified of needles and am 19 years old and still ask for the nasal spray when I go in for my flu shot. But to make it be anything more than that, a scary needle, is bullshit. Now, some have responded to this video by leaving mean comments on her video calling her dumb, etc. But the responses that have gotten the most attention are gen Z democrats who have turned her into a meme. They respond with similar videos that just show how over dramatic and silly she was in her video. It's a real life version of what her dramatic film like representation showed.

I think that this kind of retort is smart and very much a

common trend today in social media, yes we still have twitter where we respond with words, but for the most part today we respond with memes. This example I felt was very strong because it discredits the false information the original video was spreading while also being funny and not being mean. This trend is smart because there is a plethora of false information being spread (on both sides), but especially a spread in fear and it is a creative way for people to physically show how someone else is wrong. Overall this hashtag started out as a platform for people to spread a lot of false information on TikTok, but these groups on gen Z democrats, the same group who pranked Donald Trump and his rally over the summer, have once again struck by turning this hashtag and its content into a meme.



About the Author

Alyssa De Leon is a current sophomore at the University of Arizona. She is a film and television major from northern California. She spends quarantine watching reality tv and baking.

Holt breaks down to five steps the process for reading and marketing to a culture. Below I list each of these steps followed

by an explanation. What is important to understand is that your company cannot do it alone; you need the help of users, tastemakers, bloggers, and others to become an internet sensation.

1. Map the cultural orthodoxy.

To read a culture and understand how to market to its members, first ask, “What are the conventions to break from?” If you want to attract the attention of Americans entrenched in pre-election political warfare, you might notice at this point that the cultural orthodoxy around the #debate at that time is intensely negative and partisan.

2. Locate the cultural opportunity.

The cultural opportunity means finding whatever is missing from the current landscape around that culture and seeing how you can fill that gap. If you noticed that election debate viewers are surrounded by negative, partisan media, the cultural opportunity might involve imagining something refreshingly hopeful and nonpartisan.

3. Target the crowdculture.

Once you’ve located the cultural opportunity, you must next locate the tastemakers and hubs for spreading content in that culture. What networks should you plug into once you have content to spread? For example, BuzzFeed found some of the initial user-created Ken Bone memes on social media sites like Twitter and Reddit and then spread them more widely.

4. Diffuse the new ideology.

Your new content piece is the new ideology, and it should “embrace subcultural mythologies” – joining the active conversations already taking place in the networks and cultures you are targeting. Still, you must be careful here to avoid whatever your content is trying not to be. No content mentioning Trump or Clinton spread in the Ken Bone meme. Talk of the candidates had been the orthodoxy, and everyone was tired of them! Referring to previous internet memes, however, might reactivate meming internet cultures.

5. Innovate continually, using cultural flashpoints.

[Chipotle – Back to the Start](#) from [Nexus Studios](#) on [Vimeo](#).

This is where many brands face challenges for continued success; new flashpoints are essential. Chipotle (as seen in the video embedded above) got the content part right long enough to do very well as a brand of healthy, natural food. But over time they struggled to remain relevant, and several outbreaks of foodborne illnesses drew into question Chipotle’s wholesome branding.

The internet is full of content sensations that never became brands. #BoneZone and many other Ken Bone memes were initially unstoppable! But Ken Bone did not last long as a highly successful brand...which may have been ok with him as he never endeavored to be a brand in the first place. Remaining relevant in the age of social media requires constant monitoring of the cultures you must entice to promote your brand with you. And if you’re a countercultural meme (or even a countercultural brand), [you can only last as long as your icon resists being taken over by the mainstream](#).

Failing at branding: Pepsi’s 2017 “Black Lives Matter” ad

In one of the worst advertising mishaps in recent years, a large company attempted to follow the steps for **cultural branding** – but severely misread the targeted cultures and their own product. In a [2017 commercial](#), the Pepsi corporation tried to capitalize on widespread attention to the Black Lives Matter movement (discussed in Chapter 6), while failing to hear all of the demands of the protestors at the center of that culture. Immediate backlash led them to take the ad down within 24 hours.

How could Pepsi, a multinational corporation with decades of marketing experience, have gotten it so wrong?

It is easy to speculate some of what Pepsi was going for. From the imagery in the ad, we can reasonably assume that Pepsi ad executives were inspired by dramatic [images of real Black Lives](#)

[Matter protesters](#) that struck chords with online publics. And Pepsi execs may also have been trying to match the massive success their competitor Coca Cola had achieved with their Hilltop Ad, in which their product idealistically bonds young, attractive people across national, racial, and ethnic boundaries.

But that Hilltop ad was 1971. And those dramatic images of Black Live Matter protestors involved real people putting themselves at risk to address persistent, thorny issues. Black Lives Matter had indeed gathered a formidable crowdculture – but a can of Pepsi had no place in their conversations. Placing a white woman with a Pepsi as the problem solver at the center of an explosive racial issue was deeply insulting to many people. Whichever Pepsi executive dreamed up the 2017 ad, it was a bad idea.

This brings up a more important question: How did such a bad idea make it out of the drawing board room? Eric Thomas, a LinkedIn Brand Specialist, [connects](#) what happened in that room to a lack of diversity:

“This is what happens when you don’t have enough people in leadership that reflect the cultures that you represent. Somewhere in the upper levels where this commercial was approved, one of two things happened. Either there was not enough diversity – race, gender, lifestyle, age or otherwise – or worse, there was a culture that made people uncomfortable to express how offensive this video is.”

Internet cultures can dupe also advertisers in multiple ways. First, the level of bias and cultural appropriation online within connected publics may make fool advertisers into seeing widespread acceptance of these culturally insensitive practices. [A recent exploration of “digital blackface” by New York Times journalist Amanda Hess](#) captures one example of a common online practice big advertisers would be wise to avoid.

The other misleading quality is that brands today are far more [global](#) than in the past, so branding is particularly tricky. Reading cultures well requires teams of people who acknowledge

their own biases and think deeply about social issues. The takeaway from Pepsi's spectacular failure, then, may be this: Diversity is essential in successful branding in the digital age. We have to welcome, listen to, and become all the voices at the table to get it right – or at least avoid spectacular wrongs.

Losing Control of the Narrative: That Polar Bear and the Hot Mess of Spreadable Science Memes

You probably saw it.

From National Geographic's YouTube Channel

[A "viral" video of an emaciated polar bear](#) in 2017 led to significant chatter about climate change on social media. Yet there is another heating climate that has my colleagues and I worried as Information Scientists. Social media is a hotbed for videos, images, and memes about science: not just climate change but news on NASA activities, the EPA, vaccinations, and many other fiery topics for the American public. In this hot mess, our concern was – and remains – how difficult it has become to tell the truth.

Why shouldn't science be packaged and spread online? In recent years there has been an understandable push by scientists and those who fund our work to make our findings accessible. This has meant moving beyond peer-reviewed journals and science-focused publications, creating flashy media that will interest non-scientists, and unleashing it on social networks. These strategies seem reasonable: Our work is funded by the public, so it should be accessible to the public. More importantly, to fight human-caused phenomena like climate change we need to inspire shifts in human behavior on a massive scale. Social media seem designed for the mass appeal that our mission to educate requires.

The problem arises when we chase public attention at the expense of good science. Yes, it is essential that scientists tell engaging stories – but the stories have to be about our findings,

not just our *observations*. The video of the polar bear filmed by a photographer for [SeaLegacy](#) was first spread with no text on the video itself, separating that project's observations from deeper analysis.

Was the bear's sad condition related to climate change? Yes – but [in complicated ways](#) that the video did not convey. This lack of analysis invited users and media outlets like [National Geographic](#) to omit the initial poster's description and [meme it with their own interpretations](#) on social media. The video and these less-than-scientific interpretations of its meaning spread like wildfire, prompting a mass reckoning over the effects of human behavior on our world – but also [legitimate complaints about the accuracy of claims attached to the video](#). This spark of legitimate debate then quickly ignited across [networks of climate change skeptics, playing as evidence](#) that scientists lie.

It is so tempting to package our stories to sell, rather than tell the whole truth. Researchers have found that [content based on exaggerations and lies spreads faster on Twitter than content based on truth](#). The less true a story is, the more it may appear to be breaking news, and the easier it is to make it flashy.

Is it worth it, burning past steps in the scientific method, to spread our message? Even in a warming world, we don't think so. A [2016 Pew study](#) found that less than a third of Americans believed scientists on the causes of climate change, and under one fifth trusted scientists in general “a great deal.” More than half selected the second-highest option, saying they trusted scientists “a fair amount.” When we allow one video of one bear to take the place of analyzed findings, we trade a fickle public's attention for the more valuable asset of public trust. In August 2018 [National Geographic published an acknowledgment](#) that they “went too far” in reducing the bear's condition to the effects of climate change.

We estimate that an astonishing 2.5 billion people were reached by our footage. The mission was a success, but there was a problem: We had lost control of the narrative.

The first line of the National Geographic video said, “This is what climate change looks like”—with “climate change” highlighted in the brand’s distinctive yellow. ~ SeaLegacy photographer Cristina G. Mittermeier, in the 2018 issue of National Geographic Magazine

Today’s scientists must all be good media producers. We need to understand the climate not only of the Earth we live on, but of the world that receives, spreads, and memes that media. We need to transcend tribalism and understand how our messages spread, to those who trust us and those who do not. Most importantly, we need to apply the same rigor to our media production that we apply to our studies. Seeing a starving polar bear on snowless terrain did make some social media users sweat over their own energy use. But it also burned a little more public trust in scientific research and institutions.

Core Concepts and Questions

Core Concepts

crowdculture

a (digital) culture built around certain concepts, which could include products

cultural branding

a branding strategy that tries to exploit existing crowdcultures and/or build new crowdcultures

art world

an inspired, collaborative competition among artists and content creators

spreadability

the ability for media to be spread to many people, who may then choose to use, modify, and/or spread it further

meme

something culturally significant – a concept or a form of media – that spreads from person to person, often being modified as it does so



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Related Content

Read it: Pivot to coronavirus –How meme factories are crafting public health messaging

(Crystal Abidin, Curtin University, for The Conversation)



United Nations COVID-19 Response//unsplash Memes

might seem like they emerge “naturally”, circulated by like-minded social media users and independently generating momentum. But successful memes often don’t happen by accident. (Image: United Nations COVID-19 Response, <https://unsplash.com/>)

I’ve spent the past two years studying the history and culture of “meme factories”, especially in Singapore and Malaysia.

Read more:

[Explainer: what are memes?](#)

Meme factories are a coordinated network of creators or accounts who produce and host [memes](#).

They can take the form of a single creator managing a network of accounts and platforms, or creators who collaborate informally in hobby groups, or groups working as a commercial business.

These factories will use strategic calculations to “go viral”, and at times seek to maximise commercial potential for sponsors.

Through this, they can have a huge influence in shaping social media. And – using the language of internet visual pop culture – meme factories can shift public opinion.

When meme factories were born

The first mention of meme factories seems to have been a slide in a [2010 TED talk](#) by Christopher Poole, the founder of the controversial uncensored internet forum [4chan](#).

4chan, said Poole, was “completely raw, completely unfiltered”. He introduced his audience to the new internet phenomenon of “memes” coming out of the forum, including [LOLcats](#) and [Rickrolling](#) – the largest memes to have emerged in the 2000s.



‘LOLcats’ were one of the meme forms of the 2000s.
(Image: Clancy, lolcat, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lolcat#/media/File:Lolcat_in_folder.jpg, Ratliff/Wikimedia Commons, [CC BY-SA](#))

Today, corporate meme factories systematically [churn out](#) posts to hundreds of millions of followers.

They [commissioned artists](#) to “live-GIF” the 2012 US Presidential Election debates in an assembly line of soft political content. They [congregated on a closed Facebook group](#) to decide who could “take credit” for a school shooting. They created [sponsored political posts](#) for Michael Bloomberg’s Presidential campaign.

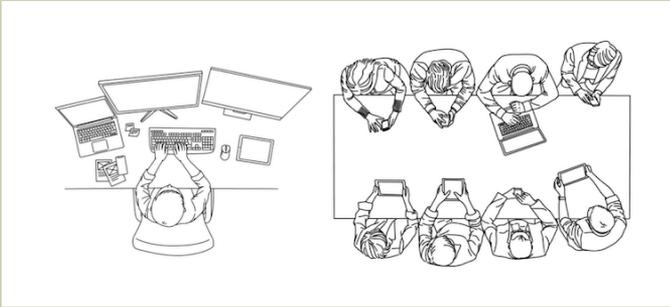
On reddit’s gaming communities, activating a meme factory (sincerely or in jest) requires willing members to react with coordinated (and at times, inauthentic) action by [flooding social media threads](#).

Amid K-pop fandoms on Twitter, meanwhile, K-pop idols who are prone to [making awkward or funny expressions](#) are also affectionately called meme factories, with their faces used as reaction images.

Three types of factories

In [my research](#), I studied how memes can be weaponised to disseminate political and public service messages.

I have identified three types of factories:



Meme factories can be single curators or collaborative groups. (Image: Meme factory cultures and content pivoting in Singapore and Malaysia during COVID-19, Crystal Abidin, <https://misinforeview.hks.harvard.edu/article/meme-factory-cultures-and-content-pivoting-in-singapore-and-malaysia-during-covid-19/>)

Commercial meme factories are digital and news media companies whose core business is to incorporate advertising into original content.

For instance SGAG, owned by Singaporean parent company [HEPMIL Media Group](#), has commissioned memes for various business partners, including promotions of [radio stations](#), [groceries](#) and [COVID-19 recovery initiatives](#).

Hobbyish niche meme factories, in contrast, are social media accounts curating content produced by a single person or small group of admins, based on specific vernaculars and aesthetics to interest their target group.

One example is the illustration collective [highnunchicken](#), which creates original comics that are a critical – and at times cynical – commentary about social life in Singapore.

[STcomments](#), meanwhile, collates screengrabs of “ridiculous” comments from the Facebook page of The

Straits Times, calling out inane humour, racism, xenophobia and classism, and providing space for Singaporeans to push back against these sentiments.

The third type of meme factory is meme generator and aggregator chat groups – networks of volunteer members who collate, brainstorm and seed meme contents across platforms.

One of these is [Memes n Dreams](#), where members use a [Telegram](#) chat group to share interesting memes, post their original memes, and brainstorm over “meme challenges” that call upon the group to create content to promote a specific message.

Factories during coronavirus

Meme factories work quickly to respond to the world around them, so it is no surprise in 2020 they have pivoted to providing relief or promoting public health messages around COVID-19.

Some factories launched new initiatives to harness their large follower base to promote and sustain small local businesses; others took to intentionally politicising their memes to challenge censorship laws in Singapore and Malaysia.

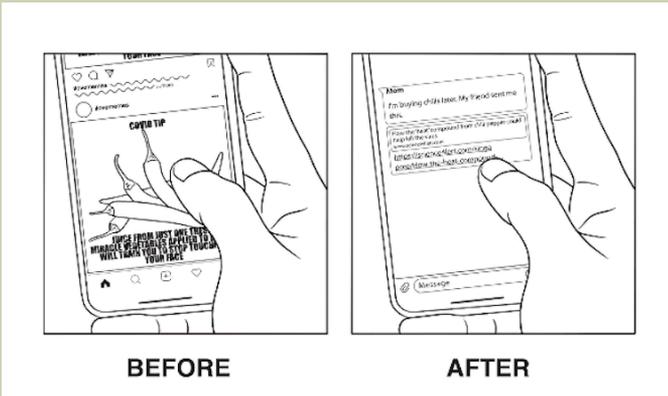
Factories turned memes into public service announcements to educate viewers on topics including hand hygiene and navigating misinformation.

They also focused on providing viewers with entertainment to lighten the mood during self-isolation.

Memes are highly contextual, and often require insider knowledge to decode.

Many memes that have gone viral during COVID-19 started out as satire and were shared by Millennials on Instagram or Facebook. As they spread, they evolved into misinformed folklore and misinformation, shared on WhatsApp by older generations who didn't understand their satirical roots.

An early Facebook meme about how rubbing chilli fruits over your hands prevent COVID-19 (because the sting from the spice would burn and you would stop touching your face) very quickly evolved into a WhatsApp hoax saying the heat from chilli powder would kill COVID-19 viruses.



A meme that was shared among Instagram Millennials became distorted and shared on WhatsApp among Boomers.

Crystal Abidin, Author provided

Memes can be orchestrated by savvy meme factories who operate behind the scenes; or by ordinary people engaging in democratic citizen feedback. Beyond the joy, laughs (and

misinformation), memes are a crucial medium of public communication and persuasion.

[Crystal Abidin](#), Senior Research Fellow & ARC DECRA, Internet Studies, Curtin University, [Curtin University](#)

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8. Information

In the age of social media, the notions of truth, information, and knowledge are all changing. These notions were once amorphous and invisible – the kinds of airy, invisible topics only philosophers and a few scientists studied. But today truth, information, and knowledge are all represented, constructed, and battled about online. Page views, shares, and reactions clue individuals and companies in to what spreads from machine to machine and mind to mind. Content editable by users online is negotiated and changed in real time. In this chapter we'll look at the problems and opportunities afforded by social media in relationship with truths and knowledge.



Knowledge is always based on multiple pieces of information, and usually involves finding coherence across them when they conflict.

(Image: human_knowledge_gears, Lightspring,

<https://www.shutterstock.com/image-illustration/teamwork-leadership-education-symbol-represented-by-81043615>, CC0)

“Fake news” and “post-truth”

Much has been made in recent years of [“fake news.”](#) This is a term, favored by the President of the United States among others, that circulates ubiquitously through social as well as traditional media. In 2016, Oxford Dictionaries presented [“post-truth”](#) as its “word of the year.” But what do these terms mean, and what do they have to do with social media?

To understand these terms, we have to look closely at what we expect with the word “news” and notions of truth and “fake”-ness. These conversations start with the concepts of objectivity and subjectivity.

From Horse Travel to Human Touch – Speedy News

Student Content

Years ago, news and ideas spread day by day rather than in seconds with one click of a button. Newspapers and letters were the way that people were informed about the latest news and drama. Now, with technology advancing and **spreadability**, things are changing.

We, humans, are always moving fast, looking at the easiest way to do things and with social media and the internet, it seems like spreadability is at an all-time high. There are many positives that come with social media and

the rate at how fast word can travel such as texting your parents whenever you miss them or face-timing your significant other when doing long distance. If you were to go back to the 20s you would see that people would read the newspaper to hear the latest news or wait for letters to see how a loved one is doing. Nowadays within two minutes of a celebrity's death, the whole internet is informed. If a political party is angry a hashtag can bring them all together to meet at a destination and begin a protest. With easy access to information, whether it is true or false, the way that social media spreads has a huge impact on society. Some people would say that the world is the most divided that it has ever been because of this while others say that social media brings us together.

When people talk about social media there are many different topics like politics, memes, films, clubs, sports, and many others, and in most of these categories, there is **fake news**.

With social media and the easy way to access information and news, everyone seems to know everything that is going on. Due to this, there are many different sides of things like conservatives and liberals, Clippers fans and Lakers Fans, Pro-Life and Pro-Choice, Animal Advocates and Realists, and many more. Since there are many different sides and opinions, many things that are said by opposing opinions are called fake news. This is a topic that is brought up a lot when it comes to politics and clashing political views. Usually, when someone is passionate about something like a political side, their computers will use algorithms to keep their social media feeds full of this information

In today's world, with social media and the fast speed that information spreads, everyone seems to have an answer for

everything. This could be good or bad. It adds a deeper division between people with different opinions while also bringing people together or informing others of new information. Within the last few chapters, we have learned how fast social media spreads and the different ways that information is shared. It has also allowed me to learn that I should be careful about what I post and say on social media because it can spread information or pictures to anyone in the world. Social media is the middle man and divider to many issues and spreadability is the key ingredient to share it on a bigger scale.

About the Author

Jenna Wing is an animal lover, filmmaker and student at The University of Arizona. She is a girl that loves to have a camera in her hand to make short films on almost everything.



Objectivity and subjectivity

To be objective is to present a truth in a way that would also be true for anyone anywhere; so that truth exists regardless of anyone's perspective. The popular notion of what is true is often based on this expectation of objective truth.

The expectation of objective truth makes sense in some situations

- related to physics and mathematics, for example. However, humans' presentations of both current and historic events have always been subjective – that is, one or more subjects with a point of view have presented the events as they see or remember them. When subjective accounts disagree, journalists and historians face a tricky process of figuring out why the accounts disagree, and piecing together what the evidence is beneath subjective accounts, to learn what is true.

Multiple truths = knowledge production

In US society, we have not historically thought about knowledge as being a negotiation among multiple truths. Even at the beginning of the 21st century, the production of knowledge was considered the domain of those privileged with the highest education – usually from the most powerful sectors of society. For example, when I was growing up, the Encyclopedia Britannica was the authority I looked to for general information about everything. I did not know who the authors were, but I trusted they were experts.

Enter Wikipedia, the online encyclopedia, and everything changed.



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here: <https://opentextbooks.library.arizona.edu/hrsmwinter2022/?p=100#oembed-1>

The first version of Wikipedia was founded on a more similar model to the Encyclopedia Britannica than it is now. It was called

Nupedia, and only experts were invited to contribute. But then one of the co-founders, Jimmy Wales, decided to try a new model of knowledge production based on the concept of [collective intelligence](#), written about by Pierre Lévy. The belief underpinning collective intelligence, and Wikipedia, is that no one knows everything, but everyone knows something. Everyone was invited to contribute to Wikipedia. And everyone still is.

When many different perspectives are involved, there can be multiple and even conflicting truths around the same topic. And there can be intense competition to put forth some preferred version of events. But the more perspectives you see, the more knowledge you have about the topic in general. And the results of negotiation between multiple truths can be surprisingly accurate when compared with known truths. [A 2005 study in the prominent journal Nature](#) comparing the accuracy of the Encyclopedia Britannica and Wikipedia found they had around the same numbers of errors and levels of accuracy.

What are truths?



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So what qualifies as “a truth?” Well, truths are created and sustained from three ingredients. The first two ingredients are evidence and sincerity. That is, truths must

involve evidence – pieces of information that could or can be seen or otherwise experienced in the world. And truths must involve sincerity – the intention of their creator to be honest.

And the third ingredient of a truth? That is you, the human reader. As an interpreter, and sometimes sharer/spreader of online information and “news”, you must keep an active mind. You are catching up with that truth in real-time. Is it true, based on evidence available to you from your perspective? Even if it once seemed true, has evidence recently emerged that reveals it to not be true? Many truths are not true forever; as we learn more, what once seemed true is often revealed to not be true.

Truths are not always profitable, so they compete with a lot of other types of content online. As a steward of the world of online information, you have to work to keep truths in circulation.

Case Study: Searchability: The Helpful, but Inescapable Nature of Online Media

Student Content

As a member of Generation “Z”, commonly known as the iGeneration or Internet Generation, I grew up being told not to listen to what I read on the internet. However, as more and more members of our society have become more

trusting of the internet as a source for information, communication, and conversation, it has gained more praise than ever before. Unfathomable amounts of data are stored in, and accessible, via the internet. The question is: is that necessarily a good thing?

Reddit, an immensely popular forum website, is particularly known for being a useful tool in answering everyday questions, no matter how specific they may be. A simple search of a question and the addition of the word “Reddit” at the end brings up previous posts ranging anywhere from 1 hour to 9 years ago, allowing internet-browsing individuals to find a thread that begins with their very own question or concern and ends with, more often than not, a pretty useful answer.

Not only does Reddit seem to have a post for everything, but it also may seem like it contains a community for everything too. The other day I showed my friend a video of a cat that I enjoyed, and he informed me that there is a group/ community on Reddit, known as a “subreddit”, that is dedicated to that [specific cat](#).

You may already be able to tell that this aspect of searchability leads to some problems. To begin, when we consider the very nature of this practice of searching, it boggles the mind. Of course, at least 1 other person has had this same question, comment, concern, or opinion as you, considering the sheer amount of people we have on this planet. Different cultures, beliefs, etc. are so easily shared via the internet, and in turn, so easily searched for by others.

When applied to information, this ability to refine a search to such minute details combined with the presence

of **misinformation**, **disinformation**, and **bullshit** often results in **confirmation bias**. In the digital universe, you are bound to have a multitude of individuals and sources that support a belief or claim that you have, even though that belief may be backed up solely by multitudes of “sources” riddled with dangerously false information.

Let’s think back to the “subreddit” my friend showed me. If there is a community on Reddit specifically dedicated to a random internet cat with around 30k members total, what other communities are able to exist, and be searched for, on Reddit? Some communities have incredibly dark, disturbing, and disgusting content that has been shared previously by various members. Examples of these communities include r/CreepShots, a community where suggestive images of women were shared without their consent or knowledge. Another example is r/WatchPeopleDie, a page full of horrendous videos depicting the real-time deaths of individuals (Wikipedia 2021). Whenever content is posted on the internet, including the horrific material posted in these communities, it can be searched for and found by almost anyone who browses the internet.

When I think back to my childhood, and being told not to trust what I hear on the internet, and not to search for “bad things”, I always brushed it off, thinking that there was no way for me to be able to find that sort of content from just a google search. Now that I’m older, I realize that almost anything can exist on the internet, and in turn, anything can be searched for.

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About the Author

Devon is an Undecided Major, but has many hobbies including drawing, collage art, journaling, and online gaming. She considers herself to be an amateur writer with big ideas.



Respond to this case study...The author states that misinformation, disinformation, and bullshit lead to confirmation bias. What is a real-world example of when false information led to confirmation bias?

"LIES SPREAD FASTER THAN THE TRUTH"



~ 10 YEARS OF TWITTER DATA

(Vosoughi, Roy, & Aral, Science 2018)

RETWEETS OF FACT



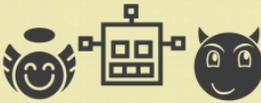
Factual inquiry is slow.



Truth can be predictable.



True posts elicited sadness & trust.



Bots spread truth and lies equally.

RETWEETS OF FICTION

SPREAD 6X FASTER!



NEW! EXCITING!



LIES LED TO SURPRISE & DISGUST!

HUMANS SEEM TO PREFER SHARING LIES TO TRUTH!



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Infographic by Diana Daly based on the article by Vosoughi, S., Roy, D., & Aral, S. (2018). The spread of true and false news online. *Science*, 359(6380), 1146-1151. (Image: [infographic_lies_spread_faster_with_cclicense](#), Diana Daly, CC BY-NC-SA)

Why people spread “fake news” and bad information

“Fake news” has multiple meanings in our culture today. When politicians and online discussants [refer to stories as fake news](#), they are often referring to news that does not match their perspective. But there are news stories generated today that are better described as “fake” – based on no evidence.

So why is “fake news” more of an issue today than it was at some points in the past?

Well, historically “news” has long been the presentation of information on current events in our world. In past eras of traditional media, a much smaller number of people published news content. There were codes of ethics associated with journalism, such as the [Journalist’s Creed](#) written by Walter Williams in 1914. Not all journalists followed this or any other code of ethics, but in the past, those who behaved unethically were often called out by their colleagues and unemployable with trusted news organizations.

Today, thanks to Web 2.0 and social media sites, nearly anyone can create and widely circulate stories branded as news; the case study of a story by Eric Tucker in [this New York Times lesson plan is a good example](#). And the huge mass of “news” stories that results involves stories created based on a variety of motivations. This is why Oxford Dictionaries made the term [post-truth](#) their word of the year for 2016.

People or agencies may spread stories as news online to:

- spread truth
- influence others
- generate profit

Multiple motivations may drive someone to create or spread a story not based on evidence. But when spreading truth is not one of the story creators’ concerns, you could justifiably call that story “fake

news.” I try not to use that term these days though; it’s too loaded with politics. I prefer to call “news” unconcerned with truth by its more scientific name...

Bullshit!



Bullshit is a scientific term for information spread without concern for truth. (Image: quality_bullshit, <https://www.flickr.com/photos/dougbeckers/> 3478034698, Doug Beckers, CC BY-SA)

Think I’m bullshitting you when I say **bullshit** is the scientific name for fake news? Well, I’m not. There are information scientists and philosophers who study different types of bad information, and here are some of basic overviews of their classifications for bad information:

- **misinformation** = inaccurate information; often spread without intention to deceive
- **disinformation** = information intended to deceive
- **bullshit** = information spread without concern for whether or

not it's true

[Professors Kay Mathiesen and Don Fallis at the University of Arizona](#) have written that much of the “fake news” generated in the recent election season was bullshit, because producers were concerned with winning influence or profit or both, but were unconcerned with whether it was true.

Bugs in the human belief system



Fake news and bad information are more likely to be believed when they confirm what we already believe.

(Image: FakeNews_PublicDomainReview_Flickr, The Public Domain Review, <https://www.flickr.com/photos/publicdomainreview/32187569544>, Public Domain)

We believe bullshit, fake news, and other types of deceptive information based on numerous interconnected human behaviors.

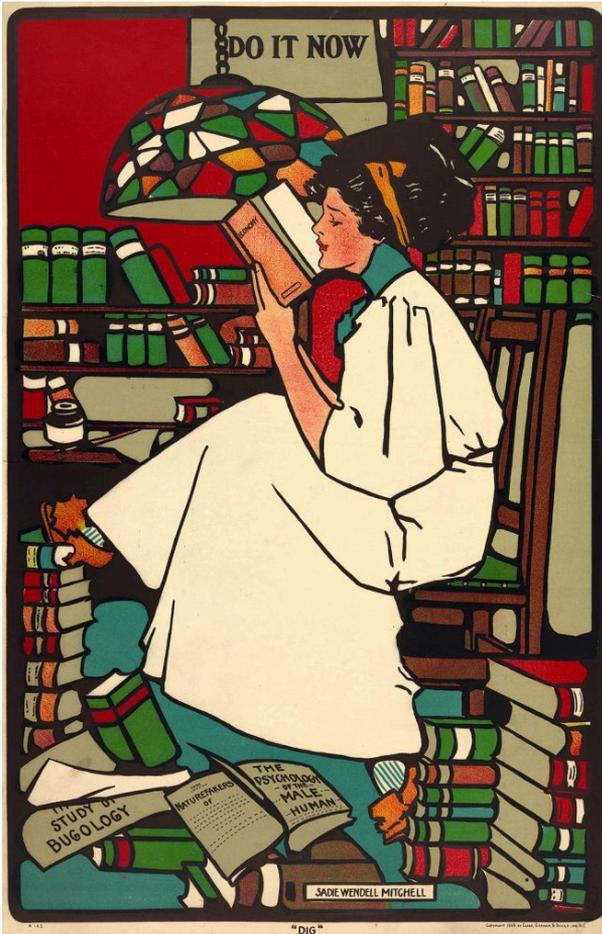
Forbes recently presented an article, [Why Your Brain May Be Wired To Believe Fake News](#), which broke down a few of these with the help of the neuroscientist Daniel Levitin. Levitin cited two well-researched human tendencies that draw us to swallow certain types of information while ignoring others.

- One tendency is **belief perseverance**: You want to keep believing what you already believe, treasuring a preexisting belief like Gollum treasures the ring in Tolkien's Lord of the Rings series.
- The other tendency is **confirmation bias**: the brain runs through the text of something to select the pieces of it that confirm what you think is already true, while knocking away and ignoring the pieces that don't confirm what you believe.

These tendencies to believe what we want to hear and see are exacerbated by social network-enabled filter bubbles (described in Chapter 4 of this book.) When we get our news through social media, we are less likely to see opposing points of view, which social networking sites filter out, and which we are unlikely to see on our own.

There is concern that youth and [students are particularly vulnerable](#) to believing deceptive online content. But I believe that with some training, youth are going to be better at “reading” than those older than them. Youth are accustomed to online content layered with pictures, links, and insider conversations and connections. The trick to “reading” in the age of social media is to read all of these layers, not just the text.

Dr. Daly's steps to “reading” social media news stories in 2020:



Reading today means ingesting multiple levels of a source simultaneously. (Title: 1024px-Sadie_Wendell_Mitchell_“Dig”_1909, Sadie Wendell Mitchell, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Sadie_Wendell_Mitchell_“Dig”_1909.jpg, Public Domain)

1. **Put aside your biases.** Recognize and put aside your belief perseverance and your confirmation bias. You may want a story to be true or untrue, but you probably don't want to be

fooled by it.

2. **Read the story's words AND its pictures.** What are they saying? What are they NOT saying?
3. **Read the story's history AND its sources.** Who / where is this coming from? What else has come from there and from them?
4. **Read the story's audience AND its conversations.** Who is this source speaking to, and who is sharing and speaking back? How might they be doing so in coded ways? ([Here's](#) an example to make you think about images and audience, whether or not you agree to Filipovic's interpretation.)
5. **Before you share, consider fact-checking.** Reliable fact-checking sites at the time of this writing include:
 - politifact.com
 - snopes.com
 - factcheck.org

That said – no one fact-checking site is perfect.; neither is any one news site. All are subjective and liable to be taken over by partisan interests or trolls.

Core Concepts

fake news

a term recently popularized by politicians to refer to stories they do not agree with

misinformation

inaccurate information spread without the intention to deceive

disinformation

information intended to deceive those who receive it

bullshit

information spread without concern for whether or not it's true

knowledge construction

the negotiation of multiple truths as a way of understanding or “knowing” something

confirmation bias

the human tendency for the brain to run through the text of something to select the pieces of it that confirm what you think is already true, while knocking away and ignoring the pieces that don't confirm what you believe

belief perseverance

the human tendency to want to continue believing what you already believe

Core Questions



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hrsmwinter2022/?p=100#h5p-43](https://opentextbooks.library.arizona.edu/hrsmwinter2022/?p=100#h5p-43)

Related Content

COVID-19 vaccines for children: How parents are influenced by misinformation, and how they can counter it

(Jaime Sidani, Beth Hoffman, and Maya Ragavan, University of Pittsburgh Health Sciences, from The Conversation)



Health care providers are just one trusted source of information for parents on the safety of COVID-19 vaccines for children. [Cavan Images/Cavan via Getty Images](#)

[Jaime Sidani](#), [Beth Hoffman](#), and [Maya Ragavan](#), [University of Pittsburgh Health Sciences](#)

Since [COVID-19 vaccines became available](#) for children ages 5 to 11 in early November 2021, many families have been lining up to get their school-age kids vaccinated prior to holiday travel and gatherings.

As of Dec. 14, [5.6 million U.S. children ages 5 to 11](#) – or about 19%

of this age group – have received at least one dose of a COVID-19 vaccine. And 2.9 million, or about 10% of this age group, are fully vaccinated.

However, the [pace has begun to slow](#). Vaccination rates in this age group [vary widely across the country](#), and the U.S. is still far from reaching a threshold that would help keep COVID-19 infections in check.

We are a team of [medical](#) and [public health](#) professionals at the University of Pittsburgh. We have [extensive experience](#) researching [vaccine misinformation on social media](#) and [working with community partners](#) to [address vaccine hesitancy](#), counter misinformation and [promote vaccine equity](#).

Analysis of the world, from experts



When parents turn to social media to find information about COVID-19 vaccinations for children, they can become easy targets for misinformation spread by anti-vaccine activists. [Povoziniuk/iStock/Getty Images Plus via Getty Images](#)

Through this work, we have seen and studied the ways that anti-

vaccine activists on social media target vulnerable parents who are trying to navigate the challenges of digesting health information to make appropriate choices for their children.

Social media and vaccine misinformation

Anti-vaccine activists are a small but vocal group. According to research conducted by the non-profit Center for Countering Digital Hate, [just 12 social media accounts](#) – the “disinformation dozen” – are [behind the majority](#) of anti-vaccine posts on Facebook. Studies also show that only [about 2% of parents](#) reject all vaccines for their children. [A larger group](#), or about 20% of parents, can more accurately be described as vaccine hesitant, which means they are undecided about having their children receive vaccines [as recommended by the U.S. Centers for Disease and Control and Prevention](#).

[With regard to COVID-19 vaccines specifically](#), as of October 2021, about one-third of parents with children ages 5 to 11 years said they would get their child vaccinated right away. Another one-third said they would wait to see how the vaccine is working, and the last one-third said they would definitely not get their child vaccinated.

It can be difficult for parents to sort through the large amount of information available about COVID-19 vaccines – both true and untrue. In their search for answers, [some parents turn to social media platforms](#). The problem is, these parents are often targeted by anti-vaccine activists who are better organized and [more skilled at tailoring their messages](#) to the [varied concerns of people who are vaccine hesitant](#) in comparison to pro-vaccine activists.

Social media, in particular, has been [a primary vehicle](#) for the spread of misinformation. Although sometimes misinformation is blatantly false, [other times it is more like a game of telephone](#). A kernel of truth gets modified slightly as it is retold, which ends up becoming something untrue. Unfortunately, exposure to COVID-19

misinformation has been shown to [reduce people's intent to get vaccinated](#).

Addressing parents' vaccine concerns

So how can pediatricians and other health care professionals empower parents to feel confident in the choice to get their children vaccinated for COVID-19?

The answer may lie in working with communities to promote the vaccine as trustworthy instead of simply asking communities to trust it. We are part of the Pittsburgh Community Vaccine Collaborative, which is a community-academic partnership that seeks to ensure equitable access to the COVID-19 vaccines. Through that effort, we have focused on [building trustworthiness of the vaccines](#) and of the providers and health systems that are offering the vaccines in their communities.

[Health care providers are a trusted source of information](#) for COVID-19 vaccine information, but they are not the only sources. [Research has found](#) that it is important to lean on the expertise and voices of community partners, community health workers and religious leaders.

Our research suggests that pediatricians and public health professionals [can effectively use social media](#) to promote vaccination and provide families with reputable scientific information to address their questions and concerns. Results of a survey that was [recently published in Academic Pediatrics](#) found that 96% of parents used social media. Of those, 68% reported using it for health information.

For example, [a pediatric group](#) we partner with [uses comedy combined with information](#) to combat myths and answer questions about the COVID-19 vaccines.

Social media is also an effective way to reach adolescents who can decide for themselves if they want [to get a COVID-19](#)

[vaccine](#) without their parents' consent ([in some cities and states](#)). Adolescents may also be able to influence their parents.

[Research shows](#) that parents who report high COVID-19 vaccine intention for themselves also report high COVID-19 vaccine intention for their children. Therefore, talking about vaccines as a family may be helpful in combating misinformation around the COVID-19 vaccine. In addition, parents who have had their children vaccinated can use social media to share their experiences and [make it feel more normal](#) and accepted among their peers.

We have also learned that promoting [media literacy](#), which encourages people to question the media information they come into contact with, can empower parents to sift through the “[infodemic](#)” of COVID-19 vaccine information. While social media platforms have announced policies of removing vaccine misinformation, [research suggests](#) this is not always effective at reducing the influence of such misinformation. Learning how to find the source of a piece of information and thinking about who are the intended targets may help people determine whether the information is true or distorted.

Next steps

Addressing COVID-19 vaccine misinformation can feel overwhelming. The [American Academy of Pediatrics](#) has [helpful information for parents](#) to support making decisions around the COVID-19 vaccine. Parents can also have conversations with their children about media literacy and evaluating information. And they can talk to their children – especially adolescent-age children – about how getting the COVID-19 vaccine can protect them and others.

Increasing COVID-19 vaccine rates for children and young people is important to promote their health and wellness, as well as to move closer to ending the pandemic.

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9. Relationships

Expressions of and searches for love and sexuality pervade all corners of the web today, particularly the world of mobile applications. If there is one area of life that we can say has been deeply changed by technology today, it is the conflagration of love, sex, loneliness, and marketing which we will simply call online dating.

Sexting and selfies

As always, history reveals that the changes enacted through technology on online dating have been gradual; that there is a great deal of convergence between how we have loved and lusted in the past and how we do so now. For example, this video by [the Atlantic Monthly](#) provides examples of sexual texting or “sexting” style messages exchanged among lovers and lusters in generations and centuries past.

1860s erotic photographs

Erotic photos, particularly nudes of women, have been circulated for centuries

Selfies are a new genre of photography, and art, according to Jerry Saltz in this article for [New York Magazine](#). They also may signify a new sense of self-reflection that is redefining romance and sexuality. For example, images of nude women have been circulated on every type of medium used in history. But in the age of selfies

and sexting, [women are now the most frequent photographers of the female form](#); the sexualizing gaze is directed at the self, and then shared with the world. In her article entitled [Sexting as Media Production](#), Amy Hasinoff promotes the idea that sexting can be empowering for young women. She also unveils the complications when laws designed to punish people for circulating pornographic images and abusing children are applied to young people who are expressing sexuality over phones and online. As seen in the erotic photos just above, the online circulation of sexualized images is an old practice with new players.

How social media leads to self-obsession

Student Content

My 500-Word Story on My Unique Perspective on Social Media



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<https://opentextbooks.library.arizona.edu/hrsmwinter2022/?p=106#h5p-44>

Social media has always had a big impact on my life. Around the age of 11 I was invested in playing the games on Facebook. My mom got to the point where she was so tired of having to log into her Facebook for me to play the games that she allowed me to make my own social media page. This is what started the slope of my life into the social media world. My knowledge on social media is extensive. When I was entering high school Instagram had just become a very popular platform, and having started social media at 11, by 15 I had almost every social media there was. Though this was the age I became invested into making a good instagram. I followed **bloggers**, who posted their luxurious lives, and I strived to have mine resemble theirs.

This is when I began to develop a knowledge on editing photos. I downloaded an app called FaceTune where I learned the interworking's of photo editing. I eventually got so good I could completely change the background of the photo and edit out anyone's insecurities, even items in pictures. I also became invested in the Adobe editing world with an app called Lightroom. The Famous Influencers on Instagram I followed, were selling edit's to photos that made your feed look a certain way. I was so obsessed with the concept of a color scheme, and all my photo's looking the same on social media, that the photo's I posted didn't even resemble me.

My whole social media, which I had become a pro at creating a whole life in, was a complete sham. I had become so good at using social media, that I wasn't being my self. I had looked more at how many followers I had gained than the positive things I was doing in life. Social Media can consume a person, once you gain even the slightest bit of knowledge. That is what happened to me. Even before going to college, I had become obsessed with how my outfits looked, how many people commented, and how many likes I got on every photo. I would use my Instagram algorithm to see who was interacting, what the best times to post were, and what type of posts got the most likes. This led to me having 'photo shoots' to get just the right picture, because I had to look perfect on Instagram.

The obsession with Instagram, is what led me to being insecure about my body and the way I looked. I eventually had to take a step back and see that my knowledge and exposure to social media is what was consuming me. I needed to stop letting my world be revolved around getting a perfect picture, because I wouldn't enjoy and experience since I was too focused on taking pictures. I really wish that I hadn't had the exposure to social media that I did because I think I would have been a lot happier with my life if it weren't for social media's effect. I hope as I grow older I can start living in the moment and using less social media.

About the Author

Savannah Williams is a Communication Major at the University of Arizona. She is from Scottsdale, Arizona.

Williams one day wants to open up her own business in her hometown.



Connecting to the network and infiltrating the tribe

A significant part of human social life is organized around who we form lasting romantic relationships with. The online world, once idealized as a place of anonymity and separation from offline life, now has networks devoted to replicating offline life online, and building networks of relationships. These interconnected relationships are what experts really mean when we talk about *social networks*, which sociologists began studying decades before online social networking sites existed.

Dating on Social Media: Authenticity Vs. Structure

Student Content, Fall 2020

Boyfriends and Social Media



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<https://opentextbooks.library.arizona.edu/hrsmwinter2022/?p=106#h5p-45>

Music: Spirit (Final) by Aritus, [CC BY 3.0](#).

What Social Media Means to Me

For me social media has always been a safe space for me to be my authentic self. Starting it in the 5th grade, I had no intent to show off or impress anyone. I would post maybe five times a day and I wouldn't even care what I posted about. However, I noticed recently that I have started to fold into the mix of overthinking instagram and thinking too much about the traditions within it.

Instagram is so big that it has its own culture, its own language, its own traditions. And as users we have the option to adhere to these or follow our own path. The societal pressure, and especially being 19, it's hard to not just follow the status quo. I have tried to go down my own

path of not caring what other people think about my profile, but over time it has gotten harder to not just post for me. You find yourself wanting to post to impress your mom, friends, and other acquaintances.

In my podcast I discuss with my boyfriend Alec, the peer pressure I felt of us posting about each other for the first time. As a guy, who despite his resistance, follows his own set of traditions on social media. We relayed how as a culture we perform or act on our posts. As a little girl the biggest deal to me was to be able to post pictures of my boyfriend as I got older because that's what I saw my older cousins do and what I was looking forward to be able to do. When Alec and I were able to visit each other during the summer, I knew that we had to get the perfect photo for instagram. And for the most part there were great moments of just us living in the moment, which I really tried to stick with, but then I remembered the pressure I felt. This pressure stems from years of social anxiety and having my own insecurities.

Talking with Alec made me realize how much power I give social media, and I think that goes with a lot of other people. We are given these standards or traditions and told to stick with them, and if we don't we will be criticized. And I think that nowadays there is too much power that social media gets, power I no longer want to give. I mean, instead of enjoying time in front of the golden gate bridge with my boyfriend, I made us put up a facade that we were having a perfect time. And as much as it was great, it wasn't perfect, because nothing is!

Overall, what I learned from this experience and being able to state it out loud was that I no longer want social media to have power over me. I want to be able to have

freedom and express whatever I want. Whether that's a political opinion, an outfit I would have otherwise not shown, or really goofy photos that I would have normally been too embarrassed to share. For the sake of my mental health and overall enjoyment of the app, I want to let social media be fun and not always have to follow the typical traditions that come with it.



About the Author

Alyssa De Leon is a current sophomore at the University of Arizona. She is a film and television major from northern California. She spends quarantine watching reality tv and baking.

Dating is important. It offers the rare invitation for someone unconnected with one's social network to enter, at least temporarily. Dating can be the preface to an intimate relationship and potentially a lasting one. So this invitation can't be extended to just anyone; we have to vet people before they can enter the inner sanctums of our lives, and biases can play significant roles in that vetting. The discomfort of this process for a new partner of a different race is captured in two films about a young black man

coming to the home of the family of his white girlfriend: 1967's [Guess Who's Coming to Dinner](#), and 2017's [Get Out](#), which explored these themes through the lens of horror. Yet even when dating does not end in horrific consequences, it is still a high-stakes activity.

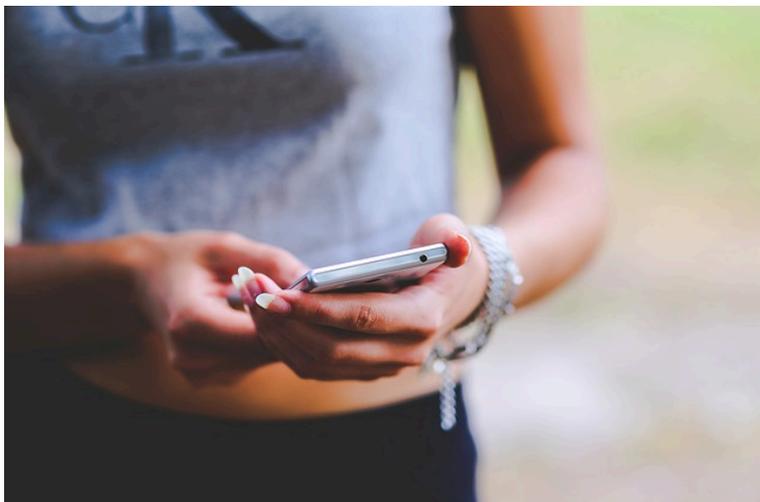


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here: <https://opentextbooks.library.arizona.edu/hrsmwinter2022/?p=106#oembed-1>

But is dating always so serious? What if the connection is intended, by one or more of those involved, to be just about sex? Well, [that is part of human history as well](#). And it still has significant emotional and social consequences.

The sequence for seeking someone special



A cellular phone number in one study represented a new layer of intimacy. Does it still? (Image: <https://pixabay.com/photos/cell-phone-mobile-phone-technology-791365/>, cell-phone-791365_640, kaboompics, CC0)

In a 2014 article entitled [From Facebook to Cell Calls](#), Yang and coauthors found that college students progressed through **layers of electronic intimacy** – different media chosen as benchmarks in the progression of a romantic relationship. When they were interested in someone, they began by connecting with a “crush” through Facebook, which allowed the “crush” to see who their admirer’s friends were and how the admirer looked, communicated, and behaved. The next layer was instant messaging – direct communication, but not as direct as the use of one’s “digits” or cellular connection. After instant messaging, they moved to the more intimate sanctum of text messaging. The final step was a face-to-face meeting. Overall this sequence of media they used followed a pattern: they began by performing in front of and viewing one

another's social networks, they then moved into more direct one-on-one communication before meeting in person.

Data in the above study was likely collected in 2011 or 2012. So what might people like the participants in Yang and coauthors' study be doing to find romance now, five years later? College students today may be using some different platforms in their pursuit of new connections than the students in Yang et al's study; [Instagram is likely high on the list](#).

However, it is also likely that at least some of the pursuit of romantic interests that happened through different media in the past is now consolidating in online dating sites. The Pew Research Center published a [report](#) in 2016 about the growing number of Americans who have used online dating. They found that online dating usage by those aged 18-24 has nearly tripled since 2013 and usage by those aged 55-64 has doubled; other age groups' use has increased as well.

Do dating apps do what we did before?



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Online dating apps afford the presentation of ourselves to prospective friends, partners, mates, and hookups. On these apps, users' imagery and self-description tend to be idealized, [sometimes to the point of deception](#). Apps such as [settleforlove.com](#) have been developed around the desire for more honesty in online dating,

but their market share has not been spectacular. It seems upfront honesty is not the best way to gather a public of potential lovers.

Do dating apps also follow the sequence found in Yang and coauthors' study, moving from social and tribal to direct connection? That depends. Some apps leave out learning about someone's social connections, relying instead on complex algorithms to calculate who might be a good match – [even if scientific evidence does not show that these algorithms work](#). Others just speed through the sequence by facilitating immediate [direct connection](#), and in some cases, quick sex. Some use the language of sociality like “tribe” and some [connect you to matches through your social networks](#).

But we humans and our cultural norms still determine a great deal of how dating apps are used. Just as bias affects algorithms across the web, [bias has been found to tip the scales on dating sites](#) in favor of white men, to the detriment of groups including black women and Asian men. Sites and apps follow our leads as much as we follow theirs. And apps only go so far; dating apps today function [more like online shopping](#) than like relationship formation of the past. In the BBC Horizon film [How to Find Love Online](#), the romance-focused anthropologist Dr. Helen Fisher says they are better called “Introduction services,” with the act of dating and the final vetting before it still conducted in person.

Mobile dating apps

Mobile apps are particularly influential in the world of online dating today. One of the pioneers was [Grindr](#), a gay dating app. [Bae](#), an up and coming site branded “for black singles,” [was recently acquired](#) by a company aiming to make it global. [Her](#) caters to queer women.



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And then there is [Tinder, the most popular in the US \(although not the world\) at the time of this writing](#), which has taken the heterosexual dating world by storm. There are many critiques of Tinder's effect on heterosexual dating, however, including studies finding that it [favors men's usage norms over women's](#). Tinder faces strong competition from numerous competitors for the US market, however, including a direct challenge – with a grudge – from a Tinder cofounder's site, [Bumble](#), discussed more below.

Connecting, Tinder, and the Social Media Coma

Student Content

My Perspective on Social Media Use



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Living in this day and age, social media is used by millions and millions of people all around the globe. I enjoy using social media for purposes such as being social (obviously), keeping in touch with my friends and family, expressing myself, sharing some of my own personal thoughts, beliefs, and opinions, and having a platform for myself to share whatever I want, whenever I want.

Social media usage comes with many benefits and positives. However, there are also many negatives that come along with being on social media. In my own personal experience, I have gotten my feelings hurt over seeing people doing something without inviting me, leaving me to feel left out and excluded. Also, people tend to be very harsh and rude over social media because they are behind a screen and not face to face. Therefore, they may be more confident in the cruel words that they are typing. I try to use my social media as a positive additive into my life. I feel like there is already so much hate, judgement, and negativity in the world, so why should there be any more from being on social media (which is supposed to be fun)? Personally, I choose to follow accounts that preach

positivity and lift my spirit, and then unfollow all the others that do the opposite.

Social media can also be very time consuming. Some days I have found myself buried in my phone on the couch or laying in bed for hours upon hours as the day wasted away. I like to call this action a “**social media coma**.” It is moments like those that make me feel guilty and ashamed that I actually spent countless hours on my phone, examining other people’s lives, when I am actually wasting my own by doing so.

Another aspect of social media that I do not participate in, unlike many high school students, college students, and young adults is online dating/ hooking up apps. The most popular one among this generation is Tinder. Tinder is a “dating” app where you basically judge someone in a matter of a few seconds on their looks, age, name, location, and biography (if they have one). Then, you either swipe right or left, depending on if you like what you see or not. If you match with someone, meaning both people swipe right on each other, then you can arrange plans to start talking, hanging out, or whatever else. I have an old soul and would much rather find a life partner in a more natural way... say maybe bumping into someone at the grocery store and locking eyes and feeling immediate sparks (very cliché and seen in almost every rom-com, I know)! I don’t think that there is anything wrong or shameful about Tinder or other dating apps, but I just choose to not be a part of them.

Overall, social media is very prevalent in today’s society. It can provide countless opportunities and knowledge, just at the click of your fingers. I think that using social media in moderation is a good thing to do. People should also be uplifting, supportive, and kind to one another over the

screen to help make social media a healthier, happier, and safer environment.

About the author

Marissa Farhi is a college student at the University of Arizona. She loves to work out, spend time with friends and family, and eat avocado toast.



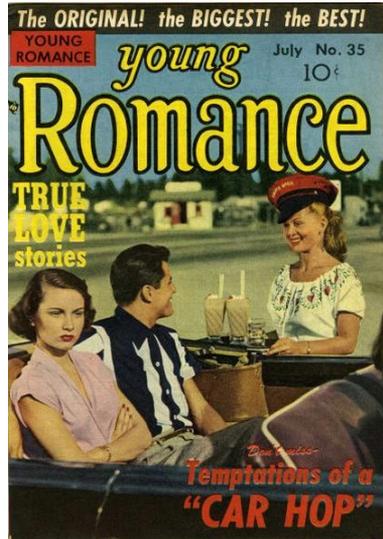
The paradox of choice

Some scientists and users are critical of online dating apps because of the wide selection they provide. As [Aziz Ansari points out in this podcast episode](#), and in this [article](#), for some people dating once meant choosing from an extremely small selection of people. He and the podcast host cite studies finding a “[paradox of choice](#),” psychologist Barry Schwartz’s theory that the more selection we have, the less likely we are to choose something and feel satisfied with our choice – whether it is a partner or a jar of jam. And today? Thanks to these apps, users get exposed to a lot more jam.

For users in big cities, it is possible to swipe almost infinitely through prospects for dating and potential sex. As my friend Mary Franklin Harvin describes it, it gives “[an air of disposability](#)” to people. [Nancy Jo Sales’ Vanity Fair article on Tinder](#) goes further, claiming women have fewer orgasms in the numbers-game exchanges Tinder facilitates – and in these situations with so little intimacy or rapport for feedback, men do not learn the skills to be good lovers.

Many in the article linked above, including Sales, have charged that Tinder encourages a culture of harassment of women. That may be in part because the culture within the company has been the site of harassment. Tinder co-founder [Whitney Wolfe](#) left Tinder in 2014 after being sexually harassed there, received a settlement, and started Bumble.

But online dating sites, like most technologies, depend on humans to use them and shape their norms. To end with a ray of hope for those who feel they have to use Tinder, artists like [Audrey Jones](#), [Matt Starr](#), and [Jarrod Allen](#) use Tinder to make art. If nothing else, they remind us that humans can choose to use platforms in new ways – even if using them differently than the crowd can be lonely.



Young Romance: Many have blamed Tinder for a terrible modern dating culture that leaves young women dissatisfied.(Image: 418px-Young_Romance_No_31_1951a, Unknown author (photo), https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Young_Romance_No_35.jpg, Public Domain)

selfies

a 21st-century genre of popular art and media production

layers of electronic intimacy

a term by Yang et al (2013) to describe how college students chose different media platforms as benchmarks in the progression of a romantic relationship

Sexting as Media Production

a 2013 article by Amy Hasinoff promoting the idea that sexting can be empowering for young women, and unveiling the complications that arise when laws designed to punish people for circulating pornographic images and abusing children are applied to young people who are expressing sexuality over phones and online

paradox of choice

psychologist Barry Schwartz's theory that the more

selection we have, the less likely we are to choose something and feel satisfied with our choice

Core Questions

Choose the best answer:



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Question for Qualitative Thought:

Consider the layers of electronic intimacy discussed in this chapter, and then consider your own generation and subculture. What layers of electronic intimacy do people you know often go through as they try to get to know another person?

Related Content

4 tips for staying connected during coronavirus, from migrants who live far from family (by Lynette Arnold for The Conversation)



For immigrants like Juana, from El Salvador, migration – not coronavirus – is the main cause of separation from family. Norwalk, Connecticut, March 25, 2020.

[John Moore/Getty Images](#)

[Lynette Arnold, University of Massachusetts Amherst](#)

As social distancing and [shelter-in-place orders](#) are

implemented to curb the spread of coronavirus, ever more people worldwide are separated from relatives, friends and loved ones. As of March 29, an estimated [229 million Americans](#), [60 million Italians](#) and [1.3 billion Indians](#) have been asked to stay home.

Forced separation, while new to most, is a fact of life for the world's [migrants](#). Still, many sustain close relationships with relatives through years, even decades, of physical distance.

As a [linguistic anthropologist interested in the power of everyday language](#), I study how such families maintain relationships by analyzing recordings of their conversations. I worked with migrant families living stretched between El Salvador and the United States to record 75 hours of these conversations over four months.

I've identified four communication strategies of long-distance families that may help people in coronavirus-related isolation cope with physical separation and maintain social connection.

i. Nothing beats a good phone call

As [millions more people](#) rely on video-conferencing technology, they're discovering what migrant families have long known: Video communication can be draining – physically, mentally and emotionally.



A couple on coronavirus-related lockdown uses videochat, Turin, March 22, 2020.

[Stefano Guidi/Getty Images](#)

For work-related video conferencing, the challenges include preparing yourself and your immediate surroundings for broadcast. For families, studies show, seeing those you love on video [can make feelings of separation more intense](#), increasing the yearning to be together.

Text messages and other written communication, on the other hand, [can feel too impersonal](#) and may not be accessible to those – like young children – who can't read, or to people with visual impairments.

That's why the families in my research rely on phone calls for almost all of their communication. Calls are intimate. Hearing a loved one's voice can convey emotions without the constant visual reminders of separation.

2. Communicate to connect

Communication isn't just about conveying information – it's also a [way of caring for others](#). The long-distance families I study use small acts of communication to reinforce their intimate bonds.

Take greetings, for instance. In the phone calls I have analyzed, greetings almost always sound something like this: “I send greetings to you, to my grandchildren, to my daughter-in-law and to all those who surround you.”

Such elaborated greetings articulate family relationships that stretch across space. They are an instance of the everyday [ritual that linguistic anthropologists have shown to be powerful communicative tools](#) in societies around the world.

As migrant families speak these greetings over and over, in every conversation, they continually create and re-create connections despite distance. That's because communication has [consequences beyond the moment](#) in which it happens. Research shows that migrant families are [aware of how the effects of conversations accumulate](#) over time.

3) Manage conflict carefully

These long-distance relatives have also developed

strategies for communicating about conflict, which is inevitable in any family, and minimizing its consequences.

By and large, the conversations I analyzed avoid explicit disagreement and signal concerns in subtle ways.

For instance, if relatives in El Salvador don't have enough money to cover their day-to-day costs, they embed indirect complaints as they recount family news. A story of their father's visit to the doctor, for instance, will include a quote from him lamenting that he cannot afford his new prescription.

This communication strategy puts family problems on the table for discussion without placing blame.

4) Celebrate the past – and a future together

Communication has the [ability to span not just distance but time](#).

The migrant families I study often reminisce about times when they lived together, recalling humorous incidents or past mishaps that lead to shared laughter. This isn't just nostalgia: Separated relatives leverage these shared memories to imagine what it might be like to live together again.

For example, two sisters talk about how they once shared household tasks, using these memories to imagine a scenario in which the migrant sister could play with the young niece she's never met.

The future is uncertain for migrant families. Many hope and plan to be together again, but restrictive immigration policies often [prevent relatives from reuniting or even visiting each other](#).



A Salvadoran migrant hugs a friend she fears she may never see again, at El Buen Pastor Methodist Church, Ciudad Juárez, Mexico, June 12, 2019.

[Paul Ratje/AFP via Getty Images](#)

For those locked down by coronavirus, the isolation should end in weeks or months. In the meantime, thoughtful communication can help sustain long-distance relationships.

And even after this crisis passes, I hope these lessons from migrant families will continue to enrich conversation and deepen social connections.

[*Insight, in your inbox each day.* [You can get it with The Conversation's email newsletter.](#)]

[Lynnette Arnold](#), Assistant Professor of Anthropology, [University of Massachusetts Amherst](#)

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Twitter and the way of the hashtag (by Jean Burgess for The Conversation)



[Jean Burgess](#)

Professor and Director, Digital Media Research Centre,
Queensland University of Technology

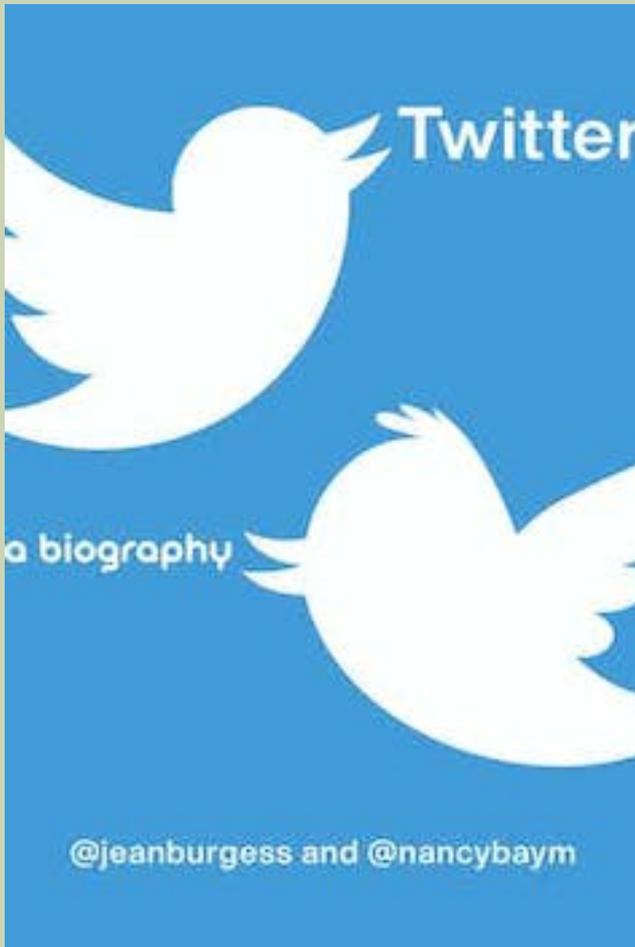


[Jon Tyson/Unsplash](#), CC BY

Perhaps no single character has been as iconic a symbol of Twitter as the now-ubiquitous hashtag.

The syntax of the hashtag has a few simple rules: it consists of the hash symbol (#) immediately followed by a string of alphanumeric characters, with no spaces or punctuation.

It is used routinely in social media communication across a number of platforms including Tumblr, Instagram, and even Facebook, but its most important point of emergence and polarisation has been in Twitter.



[NYU Press](#)

The hashtag remains most comfortable in Twitter, and it was Twitter that turned it into a highly significant, multi-functional feature. The hashtag has made its way off the internet, appearing regularly on television, in advertising, on products and on protest signs around the world.

From its beginnings as a geeky tool designed to help individual users deal with an increasingly fragmented information stream, Twitter made the hashtag a new and powerful part of the world's cultural, social and political vocabulary.

The @ feature helped people organise into pairs and create conversational streams. The hashtag, which organises tweets into topics, [publics](#), and communities, goes to the heart of a crucial question: how is the internet organised and for whom?

Read more:

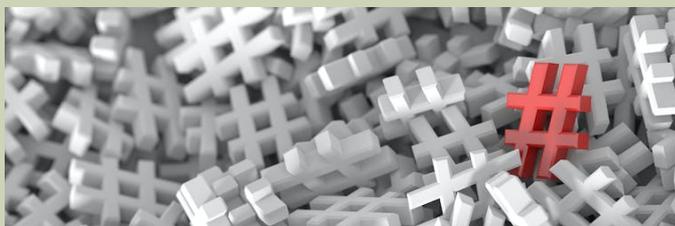
[Anger is all the rage on Twitter when it's cold outside \(and on Mondays\)](#)

Adding value

Although its use on Twitter was new, the # has a prehistory both as a punctuation mark and as part of internet communication. Imported from elsewhere, as was the @, the hashtag brought some of its prior conventional understandings with it.

Known as the “octothorpe” by typography experts, in

early computer-mediated communication the hash or pound symbol was used to mark channels and roles in systems like [Internet Relay Chat](#) (real-time, online text messaging used as early as 1988). It therefore worked to both categorise topics and group users.



As the hashtag grew more common on Twitter, a clash of cultures emerged.

[Shutterstock](#)

The # also became closely tied to crowd-sourced content tagging systems. On the [music-streaming site Last.fm](#), users could tag artists and songs. The site used these tags as information to “learn” about music, fuelling recommendations and radio streams, and laying the groundwork for [Spotify](#) and other apps’ current recommendation algorithms.

User-contributed tags were important on the [Flickr](#) photosharing website, where they helped direct people to images and to one another — a practice that was carried over to [Instagram](#). Crucially, users could add as many tags to their Flickr photographs as they liked, creating a system that was less a taxonomy (an expertly ordered system based on exclusive, hierarchical categories) and more a “folksonomy” (a crowd-sourced one, based on inclusive tags and aggregation).



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Folksonomical ordering, in the mid-2000s, was [widely imagined](#) as a more efficient, organic way of ordering content than categories or directories, and it was this model that underpinned the popular social bookmarking service [del.icio.us](#).

The Flickr folksonomy of user-contributed tags was paradigmatic of the Web 2.0 ideology — marked by a shift from the web 1.0 idea that web development was about serving content to audiences to one where the goal was building architectures for participation of users (sometimes distinguished from passive website “visitors”) and the expectation that the user community’s activities would add further value.

Reddit’s systems for upvoting user-curated content, subreddits and modern Twitter’s aggregated trending topics are contemporary versions of this early tag-based co-curation model.

Read more:

[Don't just blame YouTube's algorithms for 'radicalisation'. Humans also play a part](#)

A #solution to a problem

As far as we know, the hashtag's use in Twitter was first proposed in mid-2007 by [Chris Messina](#) in a series of blog posts.

In Messina's view, the hashtag was a solution to a need. At this time, it was still possible to see a public feed of every single tweet from a public account. Topical conversations among people who did not follow one another were incoherent at best.

The users advocating for the hashtag were technically proficient (many of them also developers) with an active online presence, who positioned themselves as participants in a community of lead users.

While some users were experimenting with hashtags, Messina's vision for them didn't catch on widely until a particularly acute and sufficiently significant event – the [San Diego brushfires](#) in 2007.

With this event, Messina achieved wider take-up of the hashtag as a tool for coordinating crisis communication by actively lobbying other lead users and media organisations.

<https://twitter.com/nateritter/status/356487862>

Although this rapidly unfolding disaster demonstrated a clear and legitimating use case, the broader meaning of the hashtag and its possible uses remained ambiguous. Despite this, Messina, as a tech-industry insider and lead user, continued to widely advocate for its use – even reportedly pitching it to the Twitter leadership.

Journalist [Nick Bilton](#) relates an encounter between Twitter founders Biz Stone and Ev Williams and Messina, at the Twitter offices, as follows:

‘I really think you should do something with hashtags on Twitter,’ Chris told them. ‘Hashtags are for nerds,’ Biz replied. Ev added that they were ‘too harsh and no one is ever going to understand them.’

Culture clash

Twitter had begun wrestling with the problem (which still haunts it) of conflict between the cultures of expert users that made the platform work for them and the new users they alienated but whom the company badly needed to sustain its growth. The hashtag provoked contestation between Twitter’s different cultures as it was taken up both for the serious uses – such as disaster and professional discussion Messina had envisioned – and to create sociable rituals and play.

From the beginning, there was debate around the right way to use hashtags.

As Messina's historical documentation and that of others show, there were several competing models of how and why to coordinate Twitter activity as the flow of tweets started to grow beyond an easily manageable size.

Perhaps the # was a tag, designed to help organise collections of tweets on shared topics? Or was it a way to form channels, or groups of users interested in those topics?

Underlying these different models of what the hashtag could become were different models of Twitter: as an information network, a social networking site or online community, or a platform for discussion and the emergence of publics (organised communities).

Such ideas were still new and hotly contested at the time. Though the informational seems to have won out over the conversational model of Twitter, the hashtag remains, and is used for an astonishing array of social, cultural, and political purposes – some of them vitally useful, not all of them serious, and some of them downright toxic.

The website Hashtags.org was launched in December 2007, and provided a real-time tracking and indexing of hashtags before Twitter implemented search. Participants at an event, for instance, could visit the website to see other tweets from the same event.

The hashtags in the earliest archived version of the Hashtags.org homepage, from April 2008, include a number of academic and tech conferences (#EconSM, #netc08, #interact2008) and sporting and entertainment events (#idol, #yankees, #REDSOX), and tweet categories

(#haiku). Hashtags were used for coordinating discussion topics and finding like-minded users (#seriousgames, #punknews, #college, #PHX), brands and products (#gmail, #firefox), and even people (such as Wired journalist #ChrisAnderson).

Back then, the most tweeted hashtags were represented as amassing tweets numbering in the tens or at most hundreds, a reminder of the modest scale of Twitter at the time. Uses of hashtags, such as for humour, activism or second-screen television viewing, had yet to emerge.



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Social media hashtags can have real political impact, as shown by TikTok teens and K-pop fans.

More than chatter

Ever since those early debates about whether Twitter needed “channels” (of topics) or “groups” (of users), hashtags have continued to play both structural and semantic roles: that is, they coordinate both communities and topics, helping users find each other and encounter a

range of contributions to the discussion of issues and events.

The hashtag has fostered the rise of Twitter as a platform for news, information and professional promotion, yet the forces that allowed hashtags to become influential are deeply rooted in its conversational and sociable uses.

<https://twitter.com/mcmsharksxx/status/1275793571107549187>

The capacity of the hashtag to help people navigate real-time events such as disasters, protests and conferences, and to expand and solidify social connections and community, proved particularly ideal for social movements and activism.

Such uses have in many ways come to define both the hashtag and, increasingly, Twitter itself. Perhaps the most notable confluence of hashtags and bodies-in-the-street activism has come from #Blacklivesmatter. As US academics Deen Freelon, Charlton D. McIlwain, and Meredith D. Clark [document](#):

The Twitter hashtag was created in July 2013 by activists Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi in the wake of George Zimmerman's acquittal for second-degree murder of unarmed Black teenager Trayvon Martin.

For more than a year, #Blacklivesmatter was only a hashtag, and not a very popular one: it was used in only 48 public tweets in June 2014 and in 398 tweets in July 2014. But by August 2014 that number had skyrocketed to 52,288, partly due to the slogan's frequent use in the context of the Ferguson

protests. Some time later, Garza, Cullors, Tometi, and others debuted Black Lives Matter as a chapter-based activist organization.

It's easy to dismiss hashtag activism as a form of slacktivism rather than real political engagement. But the rise of #Blacklivesmatter and its ties to street protests and unjust policing serves as an important reminder of the embodiment and liveness of many events that might look merely like “data” or chatter when viewed as hashtags.

<https://twitter.com/JoshuaPHill/status/1277789201183002627>

This is an edited extract from [Twitter: A Biography](#) by Jean Burgess and Nancy K. Baym, published by NYU Press.

Nancy K. Baym is Senior Principal Researcher, Microsoft Research and Research Affiliate in Comparative Media Studies/Writing, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Cambridge Massachusetts. [Jean Burgess](#), Professor and Director, Digital Media Research Centre, [Queensland University of Technology](#)

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10. Our Transformed Selves

Managing our publics like pros

In the world of mutual influence in which technologies and humans exist, are our selves changing? It would certainly appear so in an online search. Identity construction online is sophisticated and constant; not just a full-time job but an activity occupying all hours of our lives.

The need to manage our identities is a new phenomenon – right? Well, mostly. One culture that has been dealing with context collapse as an essential part of their work and lives is celebrity culture. And an increasingly popular strategy for pleasing multiple audiences in various contexts is to post like a celebrity.

Enter the phenomenon of **microcelebrity**, a way of presenting yourself like a celebrity: setting up your profile and “brand” online, gaining followers, and revealing things about yourself in strategic and controlled ways. The goal of microcelebrity is to make your brand – the marketing of yourself – valuable. The entire system around microcelebrity is called “the attention economy,” because with so much information out there vying for people’s attention, anything people choose to look at is perceived as more valuable, including ourselves. Microcelebrity leads social media users like you and I to apply marketing perspectives to our own identities.

Microcelebrity is [big business](#). It can make ordinary people famous, as when Youtubers can become household names with lucrative marketing contracts. But more often, microcelebrity helps ordinary users participate in social media culture while managing their contexts with polish. We understand increasingly that our social media presences are like art exhibits of ourselves, and we spend extra time in curating them.

Solo Media: Posting for Yourself

Student Content, Fall 2020



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Social media has become a major part of everyone's daily life within the last 10 years. Being 20 years old, I grew up without smartphones being invented yet until I was probably 11 or 12 years old. Even then, it was limited in the number of apps that were at your personal disposal during this time. I remember the first-ever social media site that I ever belonged to was Facebook and I rarely used the app, simply just to say I had a profile on the site.

The next social media app that I was exposed to was Instagram, and Instagram really changed how social media sites worked in the future. It's crazy how much the app has changed over the years, not just the format, but how people interact with the app as well as becoming Instagram models or even social media influencers. Social media was never really an important part of my life until I got to high school

and then just because everyone else cared how they were portrayed on social media, then all of a sudden I had to care. I would post on my personal Snapchat story of the things that I was doing during the day to try and seem cool or popular. It could have been peer pressure or was I finally being dragged into the world of social media?

It wasn't until I got to college that people do not care about the little things anymore. I started to develop this mindset and just realized that people do not care what you do during your day unless it personally impacts them. I also noticed that so many people want to become a social media influencer because they believe that they live their best lives. Little do most people realize is that social media is all based on what you want people to see unless you become famous and have people consistently watching over your back all the time. Most of the time social media influencers post pictures that show the good things in life, not the hardships.

In college social media is still very prevalent. From what I have witnessed it is more so used in Greek Life, than people not associated with Greek Life. For example, what I have noticed around Sorority girl's Instagram pages is a similar theme to their own personal profile. Even with Fraternity guys, they each have their own personal theme to their page. Is this intentional or is it simply just the culture of being in Greek Life and having an Instagram account? I think it has something to do with that, many people don't want to be different, they don't want to stand out. There is nothing wrong with that, but why would you not want to be different? Being different is amazing because it brings out another side of the people that people are not used to seeing and people are generally curious.

I recently started taking up photography during quarantine and I have had a blast doing it because I found myself too really love it and share my perspective of the world with others on Instagram. I started posting on my main Instagram page and the love that I received was something that I was not expecting. I was expecting to get hate or just nothing at all, but people who truly care about you are going to show support no matter what you do. This is when it finally hit me that it doesn't matter how many likes I get on pictures because at the end of the day I have shared what I think is truly beautiful and hopefully I can make somebody's day better. Self-respect is a huge part of being able to finally let go of everyone's opinion. It's not about how much praise or recognition you get from others it is about how you feel about what you uploaded.



About the Author

I am an African American male who is a sophomore at the University of Arizona. I am an avid photographer and it is one of my passions / hobbies!!



A “backstage” selfie with First Lady Michelle Obama and Ryan Seacrest demonstrates the demotic turn in celebrity (Image: First Lady Michelle Obama poses for a selfie with Ryan Seacrest, The White House, https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/9/99/First_Lady_Michelle_Obama_and_Ryan_Seacrest_selfie_Jan_2014.jpg, Public Domain)

Media theorist Alice Marwick has written about a paradox in microcelebrity: As ordinary people are acting more famous, famous people are acting more ordinary. Kim Kardashian presents a selfie of herself and Kanye West in a bathroom; Michelle Obama and Ryan Seacrest mug goofily for a selfie. Graeme Turner called this leveling of the everyday toward celebrity culture and vice versa **“the demotic turn” in celebrity culture**. “Celebrity culture is increasingly populated by unexceptional people who have become famous and by stars who have been made ordinary,” according to author [Joshua Gamson](#).

Social media has accelerated the demotic turn in celebrity. Many people quote Andy Warhol’s comment in the past that each person, no matter how ordinary, would have 15 minutes of fame. Today, technologically connected societies offer a lifetime of potential

discovery by audiences. High-profile celebrities perform the masses for the masses. And you all are superstars, to at least a small public.

How to be different on social media

Student Content, Fall 2020

Social media has and will continue to evolve and with that it will continue have a serious impact on not only my life but the lives of billions in this world. In my life I have decided to strive to have a different presence on social media, being constant in not necessarily posting or using this social media in terms of the “norm” by posting for desired attention or to prove how great my said life is. However, I post things that I care about and you can see in my media that there is a consistency in the media. With that I think what separates myself in a personal aspect of social media is that I have a unique story and perspective. I have something very much worth sharing. I would call this desired media. I have defined desired media as a source of media or media itself that wants the consumer wanting more and leaves them walking away feeling good. I believe personally most of my media is desired media in terms of it makes the consumer feel good, and especially those who know me well can relate with some of the media in their own lives as well, which can help contribute to that desired media.

In terms of being different on social media, many many

people are trying to be “different” in order to receive fame and accolade for this, however, that is not what being different entails. I would say being different on social media means having a purposeful message and using it with a purpose. For example, using media to promote something you really care about. So in my instance I am an advocate for Phoenix Children’s Hospital and their Cancer and Blood Disorder branch. With that I help promote their fundraisers and then get their message out to those who may not be aware of what their goals are and the impact you can have. Speaking on impact, this can make someone feel good about using their media to better themselves and have an impact on the community.

In terms of the culture of social media, it is constantly changing and will continue to change. As we all see the rise of and fall of some social media for example, the ascension of TikTok and even the different cultures on that application in general. You have people and kids that are striving for fame and that is their only goal. Then you have the group that uses it just as something for fun, and that just uses it as a different use and change of pace from other medias. Culture is important when it comes to anything, a workplace culture is what builds that places character and is essential to each workplace. The same goes for social media applications and the use of them. In a world that is constantly finding ways to scrutinize individuals for their success, especially on social media, the culture of social media is something that if the culture is on the right track, so will social media for the most part, and it goes both ways. Overall, in terms of my social media I have learned that having a purpose in using, using it because you genuinely care, and work towards building a good culture

are what separates myself in social media and can for you as well.



About the Author

I am a student at the University of Arizona and I am studying broadcast journalism and sports management.

Conclusion

Why is it important to know ourselves in order to understand social media? I called this book *Humans are Social Media* because the development of social media culture, including norms and technological affordances, is wrapped up in you, and me, and other humans. And we are also wrapped up in that culture; as we shape it, it shapes us.

I've tried to show the ways the partnership between social media technologies and human culture play out in this book. We began with the reverberations of this partnership on identity. We examined our society's communication practices informing early social media technologies. We looked at how human-created

algorithms bounce against human behaviors, reinforcing them but also sometimes being rejected by them. We learned about the ways humans have learned to use social technologies to seek what we want through online activism, branding, and lying. And we looked at the ways our bodies and needs for love play out in the digital landscape, performing new relationships and spectacular selves.

I hope this book has helped you to understand how important your role is as a human in a technological revolution.

And I hope that you will share what you've learned.

Core Concepts

microcelebrity

a way of presenting yourself like a celebrity: setting up your profile and “brand” online, gaining followers, and revealing things about yourself in strategic and controlled ways

"the demotic turn" in celebrity culture

Graeme Turner's term for the leveling of the everyday toward celebrity culture and vice versa (Understanding Celebrity, 2004)



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Question for Qualitative Thought:

Consider the branding practices on social media of yourself or a non-celebrity acquaintance you know. Compare these practices to an actual brand. Are the practices similar? How does it feel to brand oneself – what is emphasized, and what is left out?

Related Content

Why losing Kobe Bryant felt like losing a relative or friend (by Edward R. Hirt from *The Conversation*)



Flowers and messages are placed at a memorial for Kobe Bryant in front of Staples Center in Los Angeles.

[AP Photo/Ringo H.W. Chiu](#)

[Edward R. Hirt, *Indiana University*](#)

On the afternoon of Jan. 26, I was at the Indiana men's basketball game when a chorus of cellphones in the crowd pinged, alerting them to the news of [Kobe Bryant's death](#). I was astonished at how quickly fans' attention switched

from the game to utter shock and disbelief at the news of Bryant's passing.

Soon, it seemed like the entire nation was in mourning.

Sure, we might expect the basketball world to grieve the passing of one of its all-time greats. But grief came from all corners. The Grammy Awards featured [poignant tributes](#) to Bryant. [President Donald Trump](#) and former [President Barack Obama](#) offered their condolences. People who had never met Bryant told reporters they felt like [they had just lost a family member](#).

How can so many be so deeply affected by the death of someone they've never even met? Why might some people see Kobe Bryant as a family member?

[As a social psychologist](#), I'm not surprised by these reactions. I see three main reasons, grounded in psychology, that explain why Bryant's death had such a profound effect on so many people.

1. Feelings formed from afar

Psychologists Shira Gabriel and Melanie Green [have written about](#) how many of us form what are called "[parasocial bonds](#)" with other people. These tend to be one-way relationships with people whom we've never met or interacted with, but nonetheless feel intimately connected to.

Although ideas about parasocial bonds were first developed in the 1950s, they've garnered a lot of attention over the past couple of decades. For example, loyal fans of

Oprah Winfrey and Ellen DeGeneres watch their shows almost every day, [with the hosts actively trying to build a warm rapport with their viewers](#) and [their audience developing intense feelings of attachment](#).

But interest in parasocial relationships [has exploded](#) in the age of social media. People who follow celebrities on Twitter and Instagram get access to their relationships, emotions, opinions, triumphs and travails.

Even though it's a one-way relationship – what are the chances a celebrity actually responds to a fan's message on social media? – [fans can feel a profound level of intimacy with the famous people they follow](#). Kobe Bryant, with over [15 million followers](#) on Twitter and nearly [20 million followers](#) on Instagram, clearly had a massive following.

2. The 'what if' factor

Still, there was something about Bryant's death that seemed particularly tragic.

There's no way to measure whether the outpouring of public grief surpassed that of recent celebrity deaths like Michael Jackson, Prince or Robin Williams. But it's certainly possible that the unique circumstances surrounding Kobe Bryant's death evoked stronger emotions.

Bryant died in a helicopter during extremely foggy conditions. This can lead to a lot of "what ifs," otherwise known as "[counterfactual thoughts](#)." Work by psychologists Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky [has shown](#) that when we can easily come up with ways to undo an outcome – say,

“if it had been a clear day, Kobe would still be alive” – it can intensify the anger, sadness or frustration about a negative event. It makes the death seem that much more random – and make us feel like it never should have happened in the first place.

Furthermore, Bryant’s 13-year-old daughter, [Gianna](#), died in the accident, along with seven others. This broadens Bryant’s identity beyond the basketball court, reminding people of his role as a father of four daughters – three of whom will now have to live without their sister and father.



Students walk beside a mural of Kobe Bryant and daughter Gianna at a basketball court in Taguig, Philippines.

[AP Photo/Aaron Favila](#)

3. It's about us, not him

I'd also add that our grief over Kobe's death may actually be less about him – and more about us.

According to “[terror management theory](#),” reminders of our own mortality evoke an existential terror. In response, [we search for ways to give our lives meaning](#) and seek comfort and reassurance by connecting with loved ones. I found it striking that following the news of Bryant's death, his former teammate Shaquille O'Neal [said that he had called up several estranged friends](#) in order to make amends. Bryant's death was a stark reminder that life's too short to hold onto petty grudges.

Similarly, after the loss of loved ones, we'll often hear people suggest hugging those we love tightly, or living every day to the fullest.

Many had felt like they had gotten to know Bryant after watching him play basketball on TV for 20 years. His death was random and tragic, reminding us that we, too, will someday die – and making us wonder what we'll have to show for our lives.

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[Edward R. Hirt](#), Professor of Psychological and Brain Sciences, [Indiana University](#)

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Thanks for reading *Humans Are Social Media*. We'd love to hear from you!



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PART II

GUEST CONTRIBUTIONS

This section includes contributions by guest authors who are graduate students or whose work was made available through Creative Commons.

VR and AR: Bringing Closeness to Learning

WITH DR. BRYAN CARTER AND STEVE WHEELER

Meet Dr. Bryan Carter



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[TASL for Music:] [Feels Good 2 B By Jason Shaw](#), CC-BY

[View this video with transcript](#)

Virtual and Augmented Reality are technologies making rapid inroads into social media. Their popularity today is dependent in part on the need for closeness and intimacy in an increasingly distanced world. Below, educators who work with AR, VR, and other technologies discuss how they help engage students, and humans, in closer connections.

Video: Dr. Bryan Carter engages students in learning through his Virtual Harlem project and other uses of augmented and virtual reality.



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Blog Post: Being there (by Steve Wheeler)

From Learning with 'e's: My thoughts about learning

technology and all things digital.

(March 28, 2020)

Ever wondered how we can overcome feelings of loneliness and disconnect in distance education? It's a question that online educators have been grappling with for a long time.

When you're online, or using your smartphone to communicate, do you ever feel 'connected' to the person at the other end? It's a common psychological phenomenon to feel that although you are separated by distance, the technology actually mediates your connection with someone else. Conversely, if you feel disconnected, remote or in some way out of tune with the person at the other end, dialogue can be limited, and connection brief. This is where the technology may have failed to support the interaction.

Feelings of intimacy, or warmth, or common understanding through technology all fall under the category of [social presence](#). It's a term psychologists and technologists use to describe the ability to project physical, social and emotional presence and also to experience it from others during interactions. It's almost like being there alongside them.

Short, Williams and Christie (1976) argued that there is a spectrum of social presence inherent in the affordances of available technologies. That is, some technologies are better at creating the conditions for good social presence than others. When I was conducting the research for my research thesis (Wheeler, 2007), I used this principle to differentiate between the pedagogical power of four modes of communication: face to face (the richest), video conference, telephone, and e-mail (the poorest).

Today we have many more communication technologies to call upon, including handheld videoconferencing (Facetime and Whatsapp for example), social media in various formats, online discussion groups, virtual reality, social gaming, and other options

still emerging. Teachers who wish to use these technologies to support learning at a distance need to realise that each of these tools have various [affordances](#) (Gibson, 1966) some of which are more conducive than others, depending on the activities they are supporting.

So, when designing online activities and content, it is useful for educators to consider firstly what technologies are available to the student and secondly which of these technologies is best suited to support the activities. Almost always, social presence is a deciding factor in whether students persist in their remote studies, or whether they give up (Wheeler, 2007).



(Image: Young man seen from behind walking alone by Richard Revel, <https://www.publicdomainpictures.net/en/view-image.php?image=191398&picture=lone-walk>, Public Domain)

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Being There.... by [Steve Wheeler](#) was written in Plymouth, England and is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 3.0 Unported License](#).

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Social Networks and Online Communities

ANNA LEACH



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Social Media and Ourselves · Anna Leach Guest Chapter Intro Hasn

To be social with other people, you need to be connected. These connections form a social network. Social networks are held together by pre-established interpersonal relationships between individuals. You know everyone that is directly connected to you; your friends, your family, and people that you meet through other people. Each person has one social network, but a person can have different social graphs depending on which relationship we want to focus on (Wu, 2010).

What is a social network?

A **social network** is a network of individuals connected by varying levels of interpersonal relationships. These individuals can be family, friends, acquaintances,

friends of friends, friends of family, someone with a similar interest, or coworkers. “A social network consists of *actors* and some form of *relation* among them” (Brandes et al., 2014, p. 805). Social networks exist outside of social media. Social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, and Snapchat, are ONLINE social networks. For another view on what a social network is, check out a YouTube video: [Social Networking in Plain English](#). The video is older and references sites like MySpace, but has a great, simple definition of social networking.

Michael Wu identified the following characteristics of **social networks**:

1. Social networks are held together by pre-established interpersonal relationships between individuals – you know everyone that is directly connected to you.
2. Each person has one social network. But a person can have different social graphs depending on what relationship we want to focus on (see [Social Network Analysis 101](#)).
3. They have a network structure (Wu, 2010).

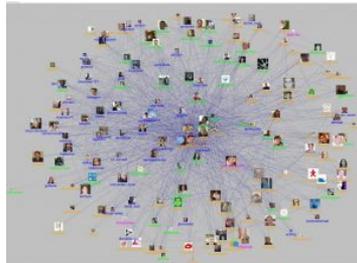


Image of a twitter social network using NodeXL (Image: Twitter networking by Marc Smith, <https://search.creativecommons.org/photos/acd207bd-9fd5-4ad2-b571-bc755e587721>, CC0.)

Social networks can also divide and isolate.

danah boyd's chapter titled White Flight in Networked Publics in the book "Race After the Internet" discusses the division that emerged during a study of the 2006-2007 school year (2011).

...Those who adopted MySpace were from different backgrounds and had different norms and values than those who adopted Facebook. White and more affluent individuals were more likely to choose and move to Facebook... Page 204

...The college-centered nature of Facebook quickly appealed to those teenagers who saw college, and thus Facebook access, as a rite of passage... Page 207

My impression is that MySpace is for the riffraff and Facebook is for the landed gentry.

Compared to Facebook, MySpace just seems like the other side of the tracks—I'll go there for fun, but I wouldn't want to live there.

My impression is [MySpace is] for tweens, high school kids that write emo poetry, and the proletariat. once the younger demo goes to college, they shift to Facebook. the proletariat? everyone knows they never go to college!

Just as those who moved to the suburbs looked down upon those who remained in the cities, so too did Facebook users demean those on MySpace. This can be seen in the attitudes of teens I interviewed, the words of these commenters, and the adjectives used by the college students Watkins (2009) interviewed. The language used in these remarks resembles the same language used throughout the 1980s to describe city dwellers: dysfunctional families, perverts and deviants, freaks and outcasts, thieves, and the working class. Implied in this is that no decent person could possibly have a reason to dwell in the city or on MySpace. While some who didn't use MySpace were harshly critical of the site, others simply forgot that it existed. They thought it to be irrelevant, believing that no one lived there anymore simply because no one they knew did.

To the degree that some viewed MySpace as a digital ghetto or as being home to the cultural practices that are labeled as ghetto, the same fear and racism that underpinned much of white flight in urban settings is also present in the perception of MySpace. The fact that many teens who left MySpace for Facebook explained their departure as being about features, aesthetics, or friendship networks does not disconnect their departure from issues of race and class. Rather, their attitude towards specific aesthetic markers and features is shaped by their experiences with race and class. Likewise, friendship networks certainly drove the self-segmentation, but these too are shaped by race such that departure logically played out along race lines. The explanations teens gave for their decisions may not be explicitly about race, ethnicity, or class, but they cannot be untangled from them, just as fear-based narratives about the "ghetto" cannot be considered without also accounting for race, ethnicity, and class.

In some senses, the division in the perception and use of MySpace and Facebook seems obvious given that we know that online environments are a reflection of everyday life. Yet, the fact that such statements are controversial highlights a widespread techno-utopian belief that the internet will once and for all eradicate inequality and social divisions. What unfolded as teens adopted MySpace and Facebook suggests that this is not the case. Neither social media nor its users are colorblind simply because technology is present. The internet mirrors and magnifies everyday life, making visible many of the issues we hoped would disappear, including race and class-based social divisions in American society.

In James Surowiecki's [TED talk about the power and dangers of online crowds](#) he says that although there are benefits to our online network, there is a dark side. The more tightly linked we become to each other, the harder it is for each of us to remain independent. Once you are linked in the network, the network begins to shape your views and your interactions with others. Groups are intelligent as long as the individuals have the ability to maintain independent thinking (begins at minute 13 of TedTalk below).



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As we build our social networks, we may be forced or unknowingly fall into silos of exposure; we do not meet different people. As Boyd discusses, we make assumptions on what a social networking site is and how it will help us build our network. In doing so we may be exposed to a limited amount of people and ideas! Furthermore, as we utilize our social networks, consider Surowiecki's point that we need to maintain individual thinking as we interact within our network. Social networking sites should be a tool for connection.



“marketing-with-social-networking-sites” by shopseal is licensed under CC BY 2.0

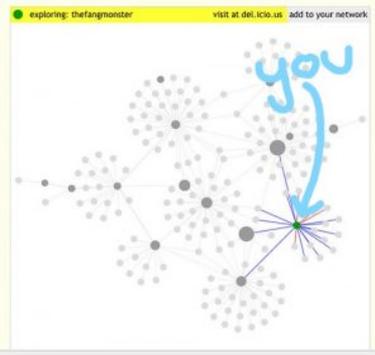
These **social networking sites** (sometimes referred to as SNS) are defined by [techopedia](#) as an online platform that allows users to create a public profile and interact with other users on the website. Social networking sites usually have a new user input a list of people with whom they share a connection

and then allow the people on the list to confirm or deny the connection. After connections are established, the new user can search the networks of connections to make more connections. A social networking site is also known as a social networking website or social website.

Have you ever considered what is at the center of your social network?

YOU are the center of your social network. The network extends from you and who you know. What does this mean? It means that your exposure is limited to your connections. The relationships are built from who you know.

Social networks are not the same thing as a community. For example, your social network could consist of your siblings or cousins. These are family members that you are connected with, but you may not share common interests. People connecting over a common interest are a community.



“me on delicious network explorer” by Noah Sussman is licensed under CC BY 2.0 & Modified by Anna Leach (added blue ink with “you”)



“Wyverstone Community Cafe” by oatsy40 is licensed under CC BY 2.0

Communities, from Wu (2010), are:

1. Held together by some common interests of a large group of people. Although there may be pre-existing interpersonal relationships between members of a community, it is not required. So new members usually do not know most of the people in the community.
2. Any one person may be part of many communities.
3. They have overlapping and nested structures.

“[T]he single most important feature that distinguishes a social network from a community is how people are held together on these sites.” (Wu, 2010)

How do we feel connected in these online communities?

[Elijah van der Geissen](#) asked the question “how important is it to you to feel a sense of community with other community members?” (2018). **Online communities** are groups of people, connected online, that share a common interest, and research has found both that they are everywhere and that they have characteristics in common. McMillian and Chavis (1986) study **elements of community**.

One element is *membership*. Membership is the feeling of belonging or of sharing a sense of personal relatedness. People feel they “can trust people in this community”.

A second element is *influence*, a sense of mattering, of making a difference to a group and of the group mattering to its members. People feel that the community can influence other communities.

A third element is *reinforcement of needs*: integration and fulfillment of needs. This is the feeling that members’ needs will be met by the resources received through their membership in the group. People connect strongly with the belief that “being a member of this community makes me feel good.”

The last element is shared *emotional connection*, the commitment and belief that members have shared and will share history, common places, time together, and similar experiences. People anticipate being part of the community for a long time and feel hopeful about the future of the community.

Communities of Practice

One model of community in the fields of social science and education is the **Community of Practice (CoP)**.



Image source: <http://frailtyicare.org.uk/making-it-happen/community-of-practice/>

CoP's can be distinguished from other communities through these three main points (Carol Ormand, 2017):

1. *Members learn from others' expertise while sharing their own.* I am part of a crochet group that meets every 1st and 3rd Friday of the month at a local coffee shop. We each bring our crochet projects and chat while we work. I have been crocheting for

about 8 years. When someone needs help reading a pattern or picking out new yarn, I am happy to help. When I need help with a particular stitch or idea for my next project, they help me. Another CoP that I am a part of is a Data Science slack group. Here we share tips and tricks for analysis. I learn from their experience and they help me to improve my skills.

2. *Members are motivated to continue to develop their own skills.* By attending the crochet meetings I continue to be motivated to finish my projects and show off the finished piece. We are also intrinsically motivated to try new patterns because we encourage each other to try different yarns and patterns. In the Data Science slack group, we also share Python code that can help us improve our processes. I am motivated to stay connected with the group because I will improve my skills as a data scientist.
3. *Members are resources for each other.* As was shared in the previous points, my CoPs are resources for information and I am a contributing resource for them. One of the best parts of these CoPs is that we also communicate online. The crochet CoP, has a Facebook page where we exchange information about meetings, pattern ideas, crochet items on sale, or fun memes! The Data Science Slack group is all online and we have never met face-to-face. These online CoPs are convenient for quickly sharing information and asking questions. I don't need to see them in person to connect with them.

A little more about your guest writer for this chapter...

Anna Leach is a PhD student at the University of Arizona. After completing her Masters of Learning Technology, she decided to research the use and interpretation of data in Learning Management Systems through the iSchool. She worked as a

graduate assistant with Prof Daly in the fall and spring of 2018-2019 for the ESOC 150: Social Media and Ourselves class. The following summer, she and Prof Daly researched the student-pay model of instructional technology. Then in the fall of 2019, Anna worked on this book chapter with Prof Daly through an independent study and taught ESOC 211: Collaborating in Online Communities. If this chapter was of particular interest to you and you would like to learn more about how we collaborate online, check out ESOC 211 for your next semester!

Core Concepts

social network

a network of individuals held together by pre-established interpersonal relationships

online communities

a group of people, connected online, that share a common interest

social networking sites

online platforms that allow users to create a public profile and interact with other users on the website

elements of communities

membership, influence, reinforcement of needs, and emotional connection

communities of practice

groups of people informally bound together by sharing expertise and passion for a joint enterprise

Core Questions

Questions for qualitative thought:

1. How are offline social networks and online

social networks different from one another? In what ways are they similar?

2. Consider your online communities. What are they? What makes them a community? Talk about the elements of communities with respect to your online communities.
3. What community of practice are you a part of? What about that community of practice has helped you learn from others, stay motivated, and be a resource for each other? Are you an active member or a peripheral member? What are the benefits or disadvantages of your level of activity within the community of practice?

Review: Which is the best answer?



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Related Content

Social Networking is about a person's connections on and offline. They are important and there are many benefits. Explore this article that examines the importance of social networks and why real world connections matter.

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/basics/social-networking>

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Online Activism in Indigenous Languages

AMY FOUNTAIN

Meet Dr. Amy Fountain



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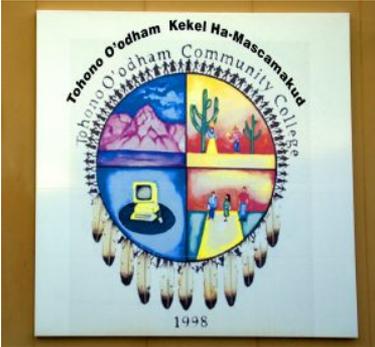
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I'd like to begin this chapter by introducing [myself](#). I earned my PhD here at the University of Arizona in 1998, in the Joint Program in Anthropology and Linguistics. I am now an Associate Professor, Career Track, in the [Department of Linguistics](#). I identify as a linguist, although I value and use my training as an anthropologist as well.

Linguists are scholars whose object of study is human

language ([Rickford 2017](#)), a communication system that appears to be a part of our biology as well as our society. We study languages as they are used within real human communities, and we observe patterns of regularity and exceptionality in order to better understand how this system really works. Linguistics is one of the few academic fields that is included in both the National Science Foundation's STEM category, and as a member of the National Endowment for the Humanities.

I became a linguist largely by accident. I grew up in two small towns in Eastern Washington State ([Yakima and Wenatchee](#)), and was the first in my family to go to graduate school. My first language is English, and it's still the only language I can carry on a conversation in. I am white, and my heritage is mostly European. I have never experienced discrimination based on language, as the language my family used at home was basically the same as the language that was rewarded in school. Until I was a graduate student, here in Tucson, I did not know that there were speakers of several Indigenous languages in and around my hometowns. I learned that based on books, not based on experience.



Tohono O'odham Kekel Ha-Mascamakud, Tohono O'odham Community College shield, founded 1998 (Image: Tohono O'odham Community College shield by biotour13, <https://search.creativecommons.org/photos/f801d583-46cf-4701-b24d-2c44e20c9e19>, CC BY-NC-ND)



Eastern Washington cities like Yakima and Wenatchee grew up around apple orchards and wheat fields made possible by the damming of the Columbia River. (Image: Apple Orchard by scrumpyboy, <https://search.creativecommons.org/photos/01862c87-a19c-4882-a339-489b811cff73>, CC BY)

In graduate school, I also learned about the variety of Indigenous languages of Arizona. The Tucson basin is the longest continuously occupied site in North America, and Arizona is home to [22 Federally recognized sovereign Native Nations](#). Each Nation includes at least one language community, some include several. For example, the Gila River Indian Community, which is near the Phoenix metro area, includes both Akimel O'odham and Piipash speakers. The languages of the Akimel O'odham and Piipash are members of two different language families, they are as different from each other as English is from Arabic.

Since beginning to study the local languages of this place, I have also learned that there are students, staff and faculty who speak Indigenous languages at home, with friends, and in their communities – but rarely at school. And there are students, staff and faculty whose parents or grandparents speak these languages, but who have not had the opportunity to acquire them. Some are studying their languages in [classes at the University](#), in many cases

this work is a part of maintaining, creating and sometimes repairing connections with home, family and heritage. So the first lesson of this chapter is that Indigenous languages are all around us, even if they're not used in public.

As a graduate student I was able to study two local languages, Tohono O'odham and Navajo (Diné Bizaad) in a classroom environment. In the Tohono O'odham language, I would be identified as a *mi:lgan*. In the Navajo language, I would be identified as a *bilagáana*. Each of these words is a borrowing of the English word 'American' into the Indigenous language. In each case, the term has come to mean something like 'white person' or 'outsider', though as I understand it, neither is an insult or a slur. My mastery of these languages is poor, and the words I share with you here are the product of my classroom study, not actual usage. If you know these languages, I hope you'll excuse any errors, and know that they are not the fault of my wonderful teachers.

But enough about me. Let's take a *linguistic* approach to the study of online activism in Indigenous languages.

By most counts, there are at least 7,000 languages used by contemporary human communities (Eberhardt et al 2020). Each language reflects thousands of years of cumulative cultural, ecological, social and scientific knowledge,



Flag of the Navajo Nation (Image: Flag of the Navajo Nation by dbking, <https://search.creativecommons.org/photos/b2b198d2-be39-473e-ab14-473827fd37a8>, CC BY)

and each also reflects a myriad of human connections – between family members, among friends and neighbors, and across generations. Each language is as thoroughly modern as it is ancient, because human language is almost infinitely adaptable and changeable, and it is used to fulfill human needs both noble (prayer, art, law, education) and mundane (gossip, small-talk, scolding, teasing). These languages are all either spoken or signed. Most are

used in multilingual contexts, often contexts in which they are economically and politically devalued – but none is less complex, intricate, systematic, creative or useful than any others. All are survivors. But most are under threat.

And most of those 7000+ languages are also [missing from the internet](#). Facebook (which is the most multilingual of the major social media platforms) currently supports only about 110 languages, and [98% of the web pages on the internet in 2018 were written in just 11 languages](#). Of the 7000+, more than 2,500 languages – representing about 5000 unique cultures and including more than 370 million people – are Indigenous languages ([United Nations 2019](#)). Almost all Indigenous language communities are confronted with some form of linguistic and cultural endangerment. The United Nations and UNESCO recognized the year 2019 as the International Year of Indigenous Languages, and at the close of that year, agreed to extend the work and declares 2022 through 2031 to be the [International Decade of Indigenous Languages](#).

An **Indigenous language** is one that is counted as a heritage language by an *Indigenous community*. Indigenous communities are those that have status as both native to a particular place, and not one whose history in that place predates colonialization, modern waves of immigration, and other forms of expansion by external groups. Indigenous communities in the US are typically referred to, when identified as a single group, as *Native American* or *American Indian*. Whether the label is one of these, or *First Nations*, or *Aboriginal*, or any of a number of others, Indigenous communities have in common with each other both an enduring connection to a place and a history of successful resistance. Each individual community, however, has its

own linguistic, cultural and social practices, and its own particular identity – a fact that is often overlooked in English language discourses about Indigenous people.

Explore Your Linguistic Environment

Using this [interactive map](#), see if you can find out what the **Indigenous languages** are for any of the places you've lived. Then ask yourself the following questions:

Were you already aware of the Indigenous languages of your area? If so, how and where did you learn about them? If not, why not?

The map only has relatively complete data for North America and Australia. It has some data for Central and South America, and some for the Circumpolar North. If you live outside those areas, can you find information about the Indigenous languages around you? Why might it be hard to do that?



In English, dog. In Tohono O'odham, gogs. In Diné Bizaad 'ééchaq'íi (Image: Brown dog by sonstroem, <https://search.creativecommons.org/photos/b2648677-cee5-4bd8-b9ea-8749b5ad2baf>, CC BY)



In English, the word is saguaro. In Tohono O'odham, it is ha:sañ. In Diné Bizaad, it is hosh. (Image: Saguaro Cactus in Arizona by Lazlo Ilyes, <https://search.creativecommons.org/photos/4dabef21-7e2f-4f02-b2b6-192491749ce5>, CC BY)

In our class discussion, we won't make that mistake. Instead, we'll focus on two Arizona communities whose languages: the [Tohono O'odham Nation](#) and the [Diné \(Navajo\) Nation](#), and we'll explore issues and approaches associated with online activism in these communities, in their languages, in 2020.

Hear University of Arizona Regents Professor Ofelia Zepeda read one of her poems in Tohono O'odham in the video below.



One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online here: <https://opentextbooks.library.arizona.edu/hrsmwinter2022/?p=128#oembed-1>

Get a video lesson in Diné Bizaad from youtuber Daybreakwarrior below.



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#metoo and Twitter: The Feminist Movement on Social Media

A Sociolinguist's Perspective

CLAIRE-ANNE FERRIÈRE

On October 15, 2017 the actress Alyssa Milano ignited a spark with a Tweet.



With this tweet, Miliano was urging those in her publics who had

ever been victims of sexual assault and/or harassment to identify as such by saying, 'me too.' She did not launch the hashtag as such, but it appeared very quickly – in the following minutes.



In 2007, activist Tarana Burke began a movement for women of color which was echoed a decade later by Milano's tweet and the responses. (Image: Tarana Burke from She's Revolutionary by Brittany "B.Monét" Fennell, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=71293066>, CC BY-SA.)

Alyssa Milano and her friend were not the only women who came up with the idea of 'me too' to help people express ugly circumstances and violation. Tarana Burke, a civil rights activist, had launched an offline "me too" movement back in 2006 to "give young women, particularly young women of color from low wealth communities, a sense of empowerment from the understanding that they are not alone in their circumstances" (Burke, 2013). In 2007, activist

Tarana Burke began a movement for women of color which was echoed a decade later by Milano's tweet and the responses. Milano's access to expansive networked publics gave a similar sentiment to Burke's the visibility and affordances of an online movement.

Burke's and Milano's uses of the phrase "me too" have come to be considered as two benchmarks in one movement due to the connected nature of events they describe. Through the hashtag #metoo survivors' accounts of being harassed and violated are **aggregated**, or digitally pulled or presented together as related. The societal norms of sexual harassment and abuse became entrenched in the past through many individual incidents that were normalized in families, cultures, and societies. By aggregating survivors' memories of these events, the Me Too movement has led to a cultural shift that centralizes survivor experiences, and shifts the blame to those who caused their pain.

The rapid spread of the Me Too movement is directly linked to the Harvey Weinstein case which started on October 5th, 2017, when The New York Times published an article entitled “Harvey Weinstein paid off sexual harassment accusers for years”, written by Megan Twohey and Jodi Kantor (Kantor & Twohey, 2017). Dozens of women have come out denouncing sexual abuse and harassment from the movie mogul, and demanding that the situation in Hollywood change. #Metoo occurs after that case, opening the demands and claims out of Hollywood. Several other events also followed from #metoo, such as the second Women’s March in January 2018 and the opposition to the nomination of Brett Kavanaugh to the Supreme Court of the United States over the summer of 2018, to mention only a few. All those events are therefore linked together and organized around common claims, which is why we can consider that all those events constitute a movement, and #metoo plays an essential role in the construction of this social movement. However, it does not play exactly the same role as social media did in the movements of performative activism, tackled in the previous chapter.

In order to get a full grasp of the “me too” movement on social media and how it is used, **sociolinguistics** comes in handy. Sociolinguistics studies the relationship between language on the one hand (-linguistics – the study of language) and society on the other hand (socio-), more particularly social relations; in other words, it studies how human beings use language and to what purpose. It is therefore an interesting approach to study how social media are used, and how they shape social relations. In this feminist movement, women spoke up, through language, denouncing systemic abuse and demanding that changes be made in society and in social relations between men and women. The movement was built progressively; interestingly, social media was not used the same way throughout the movement, and sociolinguistics helps us understand why it is so.

I. The Harvey Weinstein Case

In order to understand the relevance of the #metoo movement within the larger feminist movement as well as the relevance of the use of social media, we need to go back to the Weinstein case and its characteristics.

Indeed, if #metoo really turned to social media, the Weinstein case developed primarily through traditional media – i.e. in those forms of mass media that existed before the advent of the digital age (also called the new media age, as a matter of fact), for example, print media, radio broadcasting, and the television among other things. However, it is still important to keep in mind that, even if the denunciations against Harvey Weinstein were mainly done through traditional media (72 out of the 90 denunciations that were made public), all of them can be found on the internet, facilitating their diffusion. Nevertheless, it is interesting to note that those women should first choose traditional media to make their denunciations and claims public. On the contrary, very few were made through social media. One element that is essential to take into account is that the two newspapers that extensively covered the case, with in-depth investigations and analyses, were The New York Times (“Harvey Weinstein Paid Off Sexual Harassment Accusers for Decades”, by Megan Twohey and Judi Kantor) and the The New Yorker (“From Aggressive Overtures to Sexual Assault: Harvey Weinstein’s Accusers Tell their Stories,” by Ronan Farrow (Farrow, 2017)), two renowned and reliable newspapers. As a matter of fact, these two newspapers were awarded the Pulitzer prize for public service in 2018 for the reporting done by the aforementioned three journalists.

The stories these women were reporting were disruptive – Harvey Weinstein was a very prominent man in the business and even outside of it – and as such, they needed to establish their legitimacy in order to be believed. One way they had of doing so was actually by having their stories backed up by established, reliable

newspapers. Not all newspapers through which the victims testified are as renowned as *The New Yorker* or *The New York Times* – some denunciations were published in *Variety* or *Deadline*, for example – but the important element here is that it feels like the victims are never alone. Either the stories are reported by journalists, who lend their legitimacy to the victims, or if the victims write in their own name in opinion sections, they still have the legitimacy and weight of the newspapers backing them up. The same goes for the TV or radio shows.

The **theory of denunciation** put forward by Luc Boltanski et al. (Boltanski et al., 1984) supports that idea. In a nutshell, they argue that the higher the profile of the alleged aggressor and the bigger the difference between their status in society and that of the accuser is, the less “normal” the denunciation seems to be, “normal” in the sense of plausible, even possible. To put it bluntly, the more an alleged aggressor has to lose – status, some important position, wealth, etc. – the more suspicious people are because they might believe that the denunciation is not completely disinterested. In our case, even if some of the women who came out first against Harvey Weinstein were somewhat high-profile people too, Ashley Judd for example, some others were “mere” employees or former employees of one of Weinstein’s companies, and in any case, none of the accusers were actually as high-profile as Weinstein was. Having the support of newspapers such as *The New York Times* or *The New Yorker* is therefore extremely important to restore some balance between accuser and alleged aggressor.

This need to legitimize their stories is also apparent in the language they use, more particularly in how they speak about what they went through. Here is an example of a testimony delivered by one of Harvey Weinstein’s alleged victims, Louise Geiss.

(from 5’29 to 10’47)





One or more interactive elements has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view them online

here: <https://opentextbooks.library.arizona.edu/hrsmwinter2022/?p=132#oembed-1>

In linguistics, we often start from our own impressions, how we react to a text, and then we try and find some formal elements to back this up. We can think in terms of positive impressions, as in I felt/think that, or negative impressions, I didn't expect that/I would have thought it would be more like that.

One of the first things that is striking in the denunciations against Harvey Weinstein is the very “stick to the facts” style. Indeed, these denunciations are very descriptive, detailed, and sometimes very graphic in what they describe. They are presented as if everything that was done and said during the assault is being reported. Moreover, the denunciations are symptomatic of what we call a **paratactic style**, also called the additive style: elements are presented, one simple sentence after the other, and there are few elaborate sentences, as follows:

After about 30 minutes, he asked to excuse himself and go to the bathroom. He returned in nothing but a robe, with the front open, and he was butt naked. He told me to keep talking about my film and that he was going to hop into his hot tub that was adjacent to the room, just steps away. When I finished my pitch, I was obviously nervous, and he just kept asking to watch him masturbate. I told him I was leaving. I quickly got out of the tub, he grabbed my forearm as I was trying to grab my purse, and he led me to his bathroom, pleading that I just watch him masturbate.

This gives, once again, the impression that they are just providing the plain truth and facts as they happened. On the contrary, it seems that emotions are not so present, as one could have expected of a woman recounting and reliving the assault she suffered. These denunciations are therefore more fact-oriented than emotion-oriented. This also participates in legitimising and having their denunciations accepted and believed.

At that stage – or at the very least in the first ten days of the contestation – the movement was precisely not a movement: it was only centered on one particular man, Harvey Weinstein, and when claims were made; they were also quite specific, around the issues of the relationship between men and women in Hollywood. It was therefore limited to the world of Hollywood, which is also fitting with Boltanski's theory of denunciation that was previously mentioned: it is only logical that such a disruptive movement in society should start with women who are renowned and have some status compared to "ordinary" people. The movement and its claims needed to be legitimized by well-established people before being broadened to society at large with #metoo.

What we now consider to be the next stage of the movement, #metoo, is quite different from the Weinstein case, on different accounts.

2. #metoo

Tarana Burke gave a Ted talk in November 2018 called "[Me too is a movement, not a moment.](#)" (Burke, 2018) and indeed, this stage of

#me too was essential in the development of the Weinstein case as a moment into a fully-fledged feminist movement.

First, what we witness quite evidently in the #metoo movement compared to the Weinstein case is an opening up of the denunciations and demands. Indeed, #metoo is not limited to Hollywood anymore, nor is it concerned with the deeds of one particular man.

With #metoo, tens of thousands of people are saying that they too, were victims of similar kinds of assault. This was made possible through the use of social media, in particular Twitter, as a new and massive medium of protest. Twitter is accessible to anyone with an account: in the United States, in the third quarter of 2017, there were 69 million monthly active users according to the numbers released by Twitter (Clement, 2019). This represents a great change compared to the 90 women or so who reported having been assaulted by Harvey Weinstein. Moreover, more than numbers, the status of the people denouncing abuse changed. They are now “ordinary” people, like you and me, not Hollywood stars: the movement is not limited to Hollywood anymore, but broadened to society in general.

This is confirmed by the linguistic analysis of “me too” tweets. More than fifty thousand such tweets were posted in the first twenty-four hours following Alyssa Milano’s first tweet; for purpose of ease, we will only focus on the first hour of “me too”, which represents 3,847 tweets. When analyzed with specific software tools that scan the corpus (here, the set of tweets) to identify some of its linguistic characteristics, those tweets show that the most significant themes and concepts that come up are all linked to sexual assault and harassment that women suffer. Indeed, some of the most recurrent words in those tweets are “me too” of course, but also “sexually,” “harassed,” “assaulted,” and “women.” The results

therefore show a direct thematic link with the Harvey Weinstein case, and outline the scope of the movement.

What these results also show is a tendency towards generalization. Indeed, there are very few details about the types and circumstances of the assault that people tweeting “me to” are reporting; contrary to the Weinstein case in which denunciations were very specific, with the “me too” movement, specificities are somewhat smoothed and all different types of assaults are gathered under the umbrella expression “sexually harassed or assaulted”, which is used 273 times in the first hour. On the contrary, any more specific kinds of assault, such as reference to rape, being groped, etc. only occur sixty times in the corpus (out of the 3,847 tweets). This tendency not to go into details with the “me too” movement as opposed to what happened in the Weinstein case can of course be imputed to the format of the tweets itself. Indeed, tweets are limited to 240 characters, which prevents victims from giving too much detail of their individual experiences of assault. It is nonetheless significant that the movement should have moved from traditional media to social media, and not any media, to Twitter in particular, with the character limit. It shows that Alyssa Milano’s intention in launching this movement on Twitter was not to provide people with a space to explain what they went through, but rather to identify as part of a community.

This community is built on what the members feel they have in common, in this case, the fact that they all suffered experiences of sexual abuse or assault. The specificities of the assault do not matter at this stage anymore. This is also quite evident in the use that is being made of the expression “me too”. What is interesting with this expression is how it is used. Indeed, the software tools can identify what we call **collocations**, that is to say words that often occur together in the corpus. In our case, some of the most significant collocations are “me too”, which was expected, but also “too me,” “me me,” and “too too,” which is striking. This shows that not only is the expression “me too” often used, it is often used on its own, with no details provided, creating series of tweets only composed

of the expression “me too,” which the software tools then identify as collocations. Here is an excerpt taken from the corpus:

too 1st time: 13, babysitting the dad drove me home. In my drive, he groped my leg while i was still buckled up i unbelted and bolted	
too.	
too	
too	
too.	
. Me, too. At work.	
too. https://twitter.com/Alyssa_Milano/status/919659438700670976-1	
too	
too	
too	
too.	
eToo	
too	
too	
too	
too.	
etoo https://twitter.com/alyssa_milano/status/919659438700670976-1	
too. If all the women I know who have been sexually harassed and/or assaulted wrote "me too" as a status... http://fb.me/9liYX6eu2-t	
eToo	
eToo	
too	
too.	
. Rapes laughed off/not taken seriously. Harassment at work not believed or boss too powerful/more important. #MeToo #WomenWhoRoar https://twitter.com/thepandaabroad.tumblr.com/post/151382954096/why-i-dont-make-eye-contact-with-men-1	
eToo http://thepandaabroad.tumblr.com/post/151382954096/why-i-dont-make-eye-contact-with-men-1	
too	
too	
too	
too.	
too. https://twitter.com/Alyssa_Milano/status/919659438700670976-1	
too	
too.	
too	
too	
too. . . If all the women who have been sexually harassed or assaulted wrote "Me too." as a status, we might... http://fb.me/zOYNcNLR-t	

As we can clearly see, there are series of tweets only composed of the expression “me too,” analysed as “me too me too...” by the software tools, hence the collocations that we saw. This confirms the idea that, contrary to the Weinstein case, very few details are given by the victims who posted “me too” and that the expression itself comes to epitomise all kinds of experiences of assault that women suffer.

This tendency towards generalization is also evident in the reference to women that is made in the corpus. The term women is

referenced 471 times in the corpus, and only 65 times in the singular form woman. We can therefore conclude that in this corpus, women are presented as a group, not as individuals, which confirms this generalization tendency: what matters is not the individual experiences of every woman who identifies as a victim, but the commonalities between all the different experiences of these women (which is actually one of the reproaches that was made to the movement).

What comes out of the analysis of those first tweets of the “me too” movement is therefore the generalization process that is put into place. The different experiences and victims are gathered together into one community, a community that is built through this network of tweets. There are several ways through which this network is constructed, and which are already evident in the first hour of the movement.

First, it is important to keep in mind that the online movement began from one tweet, posted by Alyssa Milano, encouraging people to write “me too” as a reply if they identified as victims of sexual assault too. This process of reply is essential in the building of the network: indeed, out of the 3,847 first tweets, 2,053 are direct replies to Alyssa Milano’s tweet. All the replies are therefore linked together through the original tweet posted by Alyssa Milano. Moreover, 227 tweets tag Alyssa Milano directly with the @ function of social media, and there are also 1,207 tweets using the hashtag #metoo, although it was not mentioned in Alyssa Milano’s tweet. All those means participate in building a network of tweets, with people identifying with a community of victims of sexual assault, on a general level.

The “me too” movement therefore stages a depersonalization and a generalization of the movement, from the particular Harvey Weinstein case to thousands of women saying that they too, suffered sexual assault. Specificities and individualities are left aside to focus only on commonalities. What is at stake with the “me too” movement is the move from the personal to the political, which is an essential step in transforming a moment into a movement, to

use Tarana Burke's expressions. This notion of the personal being political dates back to 1970: Carol Hanisch (Hanisch, 1970) explained in an essay bearing the same name that according to her, individual, personal experiences of oppression that women were experiencing were not isolated but on the contrary repeated, systemic at the level of society, and as such, required not individual solutions, but social, political ones. The important step is therefore to recognise the commonality of all individual experiences, to connect them:

So the reason I participate in these meetings is not to solve any personal problem. One of the first things we discover in these groups is that personal problems are political problems. There are no personal solutions at this time. There is only collective action for a collective solution. I went, and I continue to go to these meetings because I have gotten a political understanding which all my reading, all my "political discussions," all my "political action," all my four-odd years in the movement never gave me. I've been forced to take off the rose colored glasses and face the awful truth about how grim my life really is as a woman. (Hanisch, 1970).

The meetings she mentions are consciousness-raising meetings at which women share their personal experiences in order for them to recognise patterns in other women's experiences. This is what the "me too" movement is doing. It is connecting thousands of similar experiences and highlighting the systemic, social character of those experiences in order to move from the personal to the political. Thus, the depersonalisation and generalisation process that is at stake with the "me too" movement also entails a politicization of the movement, that is to say, recognising that this is a social problem that needs to be addressed at the level of society. It is therefore an essential stage in the construction of the movement, which transforms an individual and seemingly isolated case into a social and political movement.

Nevertheless, social media do not play the same part here as they did with other social movements, such as the Zapatistas, or the Arab

Spring movement. In cases of performative activism, social media are an organising and communication tool supporting a movement offline. #Metoo strictly speaking has no reality, existence outside of social media. It led to other stages, such as the Women's March of January 2018 and the opposition to the nomination of Brett Kavanaugh at the Supreme Court of the United States in the summer of 2018, which, as far as they are concerned can be considered as forms of performative activism. However, the movement #metoo itself only occurred on social media, in particular Twitter. In a sense, we can even say that it was its own performance: the sheer scale of the movement is in itself performance enough in the sense that it makes an impression and is a very clear statement for the rest of the movement.

3. Social media after #metoo

The use of social media in the feminist movement after #metoo is quite different and is on the contrary closer to creative online performative activism. Social media was for example used during the different Women Marches to organize the events, communicate, and motivate people. The different elements defining performative activism can be identified here too. For example, after Trump's election, activists needed to organize with speed to mobilize people for the first Women's March, which was held the day after Trump's inauguration. If speed is less of the essence for the following Marches since organizers could coordinate the events ahead in time, speed was also important for the opposition to the nomination of Brett Kavanaugh. Social media enabled organizers to spread the word and mobilise people.

As far as visuals are concerned, the different events organized around the feminist movement also rely on symbolic visuals, such as the feminist symbol, pictures from previous marches, or, as in the case of the "National Walk Out" event organized as part of the

protest against Brett Kavanaugh, pictures of women walking out of the homes or places of work as a sign of dissent. The visuals are both shared before events to mobilise people and during the performances. Hashtags are also used a lot in the different events, also creating a form of unifying visual element.

There are performances that are organised, such as marches of course, but also rallies against Brett Kavanaugh when, among other events, hundreds of protesters flooded a Senate office building, shouted slogans, and displayed banners to express their anger. Chants are also used in those events as another form of performance.

The latest feminist movement really emphasized its inclusiveness to all women – or more particularly to all people who identify as women – all races, religions, social backgrounds, and so on. Inclusiveness, or **intersectionality** as it is theorised in feminism (the theory according to which different forms of oppression intersect and must be taken into account – for example, a black woman suffers discrimination both from being a woman and a black person. It also aims to recognise that not all experiences of women are similar), is an essential element for the feminists involved in this movement.

Finally, organizers are not masked per se, on the contrary, they do not hesitate to publicly express their minds, unmasked, and in their own names. Nevertheless, the movement is also coordinated through different organizations, either feminist groups which existed before the movement or organizations created as part of the movement. Organizations such as the Women's March communicate on social media under the name of the organization, through which activists therefore take a step back and therefore let the faceless organization speak.

We can therefore clearly see that the use of social media in the #metoo movement and the rest of the feminist movement is not the same. #Metoo is quite particular in this respect and developed solely online, contrary to the other events, for which social media is

used as a communication and organising tool and which therefore corresponds to creative online performative activism.

Core Concepts and Questions

Core Concepts

aggregate

to pull or present content together online as related

sociolinguistics

the study of how human beings use language and to what purpose

theory of denunciation

the more a “called out” person has to lose – status, some important position, wealth, etc. – the more suspicious people are of those who call them out or denounced them, because they might believe that the denunciation is not completely disinterested

paratactic style

also called the additive style, this is a linguistic style in which elements are presented, one simple sentence after

the other, and there are few elaborate sentences; often used by speakers wanting to be taken seriously

collocations

a collection of words that often occurs together

intersectionality

the theory according to which different forms of oppression intersect and can worsen oppression overall

Core Questions

A. Questions for qualitative thought

1. Why does the author assert women used traditional media rather than social media to initially denounce Harvey Weinstein? What do you believe would have happened had they relied more on social media initially?

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- Screenshot_2020-08-12 #metoo and Twitter The Feminist Movement on Social Media

Well-being (with Alexandria Fripp)

“The Internet can crack us open to seeing so many things that we would have never encountered otherwise. And that’s one of the most beautiful, miraculous things about it. But it can also divide our attention and make us feel fractured.”

[Chris Stedman](#), author of [IRL: Finding Realness, Meaning, and Belonging in our Digital Lives](#).

Is social media good for us? Is it bad for us? Can it be both? Research findings suggest many complex ways the use of social media platforms can impact our mental and physical health and well-being. In this chapter, we discuss a few relevant findings on social media—along with the voices of students who are consistently negotiating these issues in their lives.

<https://twitter.com/WSJ/status/1437805487618203658>

Dimensions of Wellness and Well-being

According to the [American Psychological Association](#) (APA), **wellness** is defined as, “a dynamic state of physical, mental, and social well-being.” However, the term “wellness” has become so popular as a marketing buzzword that it has countless meanings to different publics. For clarity, in this chapter we have chosen to use the term **well-being**, defined by the APA as, “a state of happiness and contentment, with low levels of distress, overall good physical and mental health and outlook, or good quality of life.” In this section, we introduce the next part of the chapter as a dive into each of these

three dimensions—with the understanding that these dimensions overlap and interact with one another regularly.

Physical health (and body image)

One wellness dimension is physical health. Social media may be associated with physically health improvements due to nutrition advice or “fitspiration”, and to problems with physical health caused by learning of unhealthy behaviors. One striking link between social media and mental health lies along the line of body image and satisfaction. For our social media aficionados, think about how many images of people we see each day. What do these folks look like? Do they have “[Instagram Face](#)”? Conventionally attractive? White? Thin? Able-bodied? Consider critically the seemingly perfect lives and bodies you see, comparing yourself to the images of these people, especially women, that may be surgically enhanced and/or heavily filtered.

Facebook, the parent company of Instagram, has conducted informal investigations of the app (Instagram) to see how it affected the relationship one has with their body. Approximately 32 percent of young women report feeling worse about their bodies after using Instagram. Moreover, the young women attribute Instagram for increases in the rate of anxiety and depression,” tying in the cyclical nature of depression and/or anxiety in relation to social media as shown by Hoge, Bickham, & Cantor (2017). Some of the adverse effects are thought to be Instagram specific such as social comparison, which is when people assess their own value in relation to the attractiveness, wealth and success of others.

The Facebook researchers state that social comparison is worse on Instagram than other platforms, asserting that TikTok is grounded in performance, Snapchat is “sheltered” by jokey filters that “keep the focus on the face.” Meanwhile, Instagram focuses heavily on the body and lifestyle. However, the research team

concluded this in 2020. Their findings may not hold up to the current social media landscape, with the prevalence of [Tik-Tok and the affordance of video filters to edit people's bodies](#). For Instagram specifically, the researchers note that essential aspects of the platform such as norms around sharing only the best moments and the pressure to look perfect combined with an “addictive product” can send young folks “spiraling toward eating disorders, an unhealthy sense of their own bodies and depression.” The internal researchers further state that the Explore page, curated by an algorithm can show harmful content.

In “[The Paradox of Tik Tok Anti-Pro-Anorexia Videos](#)” by scholars Logrieco, Marchili, Roversi, and Villani (2021) , the shifting stances around anorexia depiction content on TikTok is paradoxically encouraging harmful behaviors. The, “What I Eat in a Day,” format is a common form of this. Moreover, the numerous “Glo-Up” challenges on the platform reinforce beauty standards (and generally come with weight-loss), while staying away from fostering unconditional self acceptance. Like Instagram, there are beautification filters which slim and anglify the appearance of the face. What messages could people, especially people who do not fit racist, thin, or ableist societal standards of beauty internalize?

Meanwhile, many youth consider TikTok a respite from more overtly image-conscious apps like Instagram. Although Tik-Tok was released in 2016, the height of its popularity came about in 2020. Thus research has yet to catch up to the trends we are seeing on this platform. However, that does not mean that we should not think critically about how this platform is used, what is happening on this app, and the media we consume from it, and all platforms we use, when considering their impacts on physical health.

Mental health

Another wellness dimension we are exploring related to social

media is the second dimension, mental health, including anxiety and depression, as well as emotional regulation. In the digital age, social media can play a powerful role in our stress, happiness, and mental health. Social media has the capability of being a powerful tool in our wellness. For instance, many “mindfulness” podcasts have social media accounts where they share health experts’ tips on mindful living.) However, social media also has the potential to damage mental health and wellbeing as well—and as whistleblowers revealed in 2021, social media platforms may be aware of these impacts, yet do little to stop them.

Darkness that Stems from Light



An interactive H5P element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here:

<https://opentextbooks.library.arizona.edu/hrsmwinter2022/?p=338#h5p-61>

Consider the mental health component of wellness. How does social media affect that in your life? In this previous story the author (Kyra) delves into literature about social media and mental health that describes social media reinforcing a cycle of emotional avoidance by providing a digital distraction from emerging anxiety or negative emotions. Kyra’s interpretation of this is that by escaping these feelings, we do not learn how to properly emotionally

regulate- something that is core to our human experience of feeling and emoting. The article Kyra mentions delves even deeper.

The article Kyra refers to is authored by Hoge, Bickham, & Cantor (2017), in it the researchers explore the impact of digital technology on children's well-being, specifically anxiety, depression, and emotional regulation. The authors found that individuals who overuse or are addicted to the internet use the internet to avoid negative affect such as anxiety and depression. (this brings into question, what is overuse? More casual relationships have not been studied at the time this article had been written). This problematic internet usage is associated with poor emotional regulation.

About the Audio Creator

Kyra Tidball is a Veterinary Science major at the University of Arizona. She loves coffee and reading a good book.



Respond to this case study... This student compares social

media to drugs and asserts that people are often unaware of what they are getting into when they download it. Imagine you have the opportunity to help decide if warnings should come with social media downloads. Write a paragraph either (1) explaining whether you would support such warnings appearing, how they would function, and what they would say; or (2) why there should not be warnings, based on evidence. Then, write another paragraph in which you imagine you were introducing someone you care about to social media use for the first time. What would you tell them is a healthy practice? Include the practice, and evidence of how you know it is healthy.

Emotional regulation is a vital part of mental health. Specifically, it is a skill developed in childhood and adolescence by experiencing strong emotions and developing internal regulatory processes. Having this skill is a tool. The lack of and problems with emotional regulation are associated with mental health conditions such as depression and anxiety, conditions that individuals who “overuse” the internet report using the internet to avoid. Moreover, research has shown that depression symptoms predict internet usage to regulate mood. Thus our internet and social media use can be seen as a feedback loop, using the internet to avoid emotions, not emotionally regulating, experiencing emotional distress, then back to using the internet to avoid emotions once more.

Social media can be a mixed bag when it comes to our mental health and well-being. Hoge, Bickham, and Cantor (2017) state that , “although there is evidence that greater electronic media use is associated with depressive symptoms, there is also evidence that

the social nature of digital communication may be harnessed in some situations to improve mood and to promote health-enhancing strategies.” They further state that much more research is needed to explore these possibilities. In what ways can social media help us connect with others and positively contribute to our mental well-being?

Social Health

Another important wellness dimension and another is social health. Access to technology was a lifeline for many at the start of the pandemic. We limited our in person social contact as many businesses, schools, restaurants, and workplaces shut down or reduced capacity for the initial quarantines. According to Pew Research Center (2021), the internet has been personally important to 90% of adults with 58% saying the internet has been essential. Since the beginning of the pandemic we have relied on the internet and digital world to connect with others, whether family, friend, or for school.

Pew Research Center (2021) reports that about 81% of Americans have utilized video calls since the onset of the pandemic, and many researchers have found sharp increases in social media use since the pandemic began. Social media have become vital connection points to work, school, and social networks—our connections to nearly all other people when in person contact was scarce. However, these findings are complicated by the digital divide, as affordability and connection issues are frequent barriers to internet access and thus to connection with other people.

In his book, [Coping with Illness Digitally](#) (2018), Communication researcher Stephen Rains outlines how the digital landscape connects folks to find community while living with illness. However, many of his findings can be generalized to how we connect and find community online generally in relation to our social health. The technologies we use to connect with each other in order to communicate can be referred to as communication technology. This includes our phones, messaging apps, blogs, and other platforms. The use of these according to Rains is motivated by a desire to overcome isolations, reach others similar to use, and strengthen existing relationships with friends and family. Communication technology is similarly used by a large number of American adults and settings like online communities, platforms, and blogs are resources for support that is associated with well being. Informational and emotional support are common types of support found in online communities.

Rains identified [four affordances to creating social support](#), including control, anonymity, visibility, and availability.

- *Control* relates to the ability to manage aspects of human interaction, like editing a message before sending it. This is quite contrary to face to face interactions where one is unable to do that. This allows people to carefully curate messages.
- *Anonymity* is the concealing of one's identity from others. This can be seen by the use of pseudonyms.

Think back to the ASKfm days or how reddit is used to gather support. It allows folks to feel less nervous about asking questions online.

- *Visibility* is the affordance that involves the degree of observable behavior online. This allows folks to observe their digital landscape (ie: a viral twitter thread) or who gets to see a post. In the area of social support, seeing how others go about a situation or do something can be a valuable resource to us.
- *Availability* is the potential to connect with others when they are most needed (Rains, 2018).

Together, according to Rains, these affordances enable us to seek social support online to cultivate community, connect with friends and loved ones, and find support online.

Respond to this case Study: Think of a time when you have asked or you have seen other ask a question related to physical or mental health in a forum, on your story, or in any other online format. How did that go? What was that process like? Did people respond? If so, how did they respond?

We must also consider links between social media and **social anxiety**, or fear of embarrassment or humiliation, leading to the avoidance of social situations. The social media landscape is a wonderful way for us to connect to other human beings. On the other hand, it can lead to some distress as well. According to Hidge, Bickham, & Cantor (2017), the preference to communicate over text/IM/email over face to face increases the risk of social anxiety

in folks that are more prone to develop it. Over time, choosing to substitute digital media for interpersonal communication to avoid feared situations (that can trigger anxiety) may become cyclically reinforced. Thus, this is yet another cycle. An individual prefers digital communication and displaces face-to face interactions, which may worsen the symptoms and severity of social anxiety, leading to the individual using the internet and social media again as an emotional outlet.

Social media has the potential to initiate and sustain relationships. Given the potential benefits of social media, perhaps we should consider how to navigate it intentionally to protect ourselves and well being. After all, these technologies will be with us for a while. It's not going anywhere any time soon. Knowing that, how can we protect ourselves and our mental well-being? Technology and people can mutually shape each other (Ellison, Pyle, and Vitak, 2022), but in order to do so we have to rethink our relationship to social media and realize how our behaviours can actively and positively contribute to the virtual landscape.

Managing social media's impacts on our wellness

NPR Lifekit episode of rethinking our relationship with social media

<https://www.npr.org/player/embed/1016854764/1018979012>

NPR's Lifekit gives us some considerations to keep in

mind when defining or rethinking our relationship to social media. Keep these in mind:

- Social media is designed to encourage repetitive behaviors and compulsions, but social media is not physically “addictive” in the same way as drugs and alcohol.
 - features like pull to refresh, endless scroll, autoplay and the algorithms are intentional choices made to keep us on the apps by showing us more of what we might like
 - Push notifications, (Made) For You Pages, Click to See Image are all tactics to capture our attention
 - Remember: “Technology and people can mutually shape each other” (Ellison, Pyle, and Vitak, 2022). How might the above features keep us on platforms?
- think of your relationship with social media as a meaningful one with the capacity to show certain aspects about ourselves. Ask yourself:
 - What does a healthy relationship look like to me?
 - What needs am I trying to meet right now?
 - Scan your body – how do you feel after an hour online?
- Be an active participant in your relationship – declutter and reorganize
 - go through ‘following’ list on social media and clean it out – what is bringing joy and/or

value into your life

- block, mute, and other functions let you restrict the kind of content you don't want to see, which further fine tunes your algorithm to you.

Personal Conclusion

Is it possible to have a good relationship with social media? What steps can we take for positive impact?

Personally, I (Ally Fripp) can struggle with being bombarded by body types I feel are ideal that do not include mine. This weighs on me heavily some days, but I have to understand that these images are not always natural and real. Thus in order to give myself some tools combat this, I frequent a subreddit that spots body editing and am learning how to spot when other women use these filters and photoshop. Knowing that these folks don't look the way they portray themselves on social media is comforting and fills the space in my mind for negative self comparisons.

Social media is here to stay for a while. And I actually do quite enjoy it. It can be a fun outlet. However, I can feel when it does take a toll on my mental health. Armed with the knowledge presented in this chapter, I take steps to protect myself. This includes taking breaks from social media, limiting my time on it, and being critical of the content that I consume. Our relationships with social media.

Related Content

The thousands of vulnerable people harmed by Facebook and Instagram are lost in Meta's 'average user' data

By Joseph Bak-Coleman, Postdoctoral Fellow at the Center for an Informed Public, University of Washington



Mark Zuckerberg's company says the kids are all right, but the data it presents is only about how the average social media user is doing.

[AP Photo/Eric Risberg](#)

[Joseph Bak-Coleman, University of Washington](#)

Fall 2021 has been filled with a steady stream of media coverage arguing that Meta's Facebook, WhatsApp and Instagram social media platforms pose a threat to [users' mental health](#) and well-being, [radicalize](#), [polarize](#) users and [spread misinformation](#).

Are these technologies – [embraced by billions](#) – killing people and eroding democracy? Or is this just another moral panic?

According to [Meta's PR team](#) and a handful of [contrarian academics](#) and [journalists](#), there is evidence that social media does not cause harm and the overall picture is unclear. They cite apparently conflicting studies, imperfect access to data and the difficulty of establishing causality to support this position.

Some of these researchers have surveyed social media users and found that social media use appears to have at most [minor negative consequences](#) on individuals. These results seem inconsistent with years of [journalistic reporting](#), Meta's [leaked internal data](#), common sense intuition and [people's lived experience](#).

Teens struggle with self-esteem, and it doesn't seem far-fetched to suggest that browsing Instagram could make that worse. Similarly, it's hard to imagine so many people refusing to get vaccinated, becoming hyperpartisan or succumbing to conspiracy theories in the days before social media.

So who is right? As a researcher who [studies collective behavior](#), I see no conflict between the research (methodological quibbles aside), leaks and people's intuition. Social media can have catastrophic effects, even if the average user only experiences minimal consequences.

Averaging's blind spot

To see how this works, consider a world in which Instagram has a rich-get-richer and poor-get-poorer effect on the well-being of users. A majority, those already doing well to begin with, find Instagram provides social affirmation and helps them stay connected to friends. A minority, those who are struggling with depression and loneliness, see these posts and wind up feeling worse.

If you average them together in a study, you might not see much of a change over time. This could explain why findings from surveys and panels are able to claim minimal impact on average. More generally, small groups in a larger sample have a hard time changing the average.

Yet if we zoom in on the most at-risk people, many of them may have moved from occasionally sad to mildly depressed or from mildly depressed to dangerously so. This is precisely what Facebook whistleblower Frances Haugen reported in her congressional testimony: Instagram creates a [downward spiraling feedback loop](#) among the most vulnerable teens.



Large-scale population studies can miss effects experienced by a subset of people; for example, vulnerable teen girls on Instagram.

[AP Photo/Haven Daley](#)

The inability of this type of research to capture the smaller but still significant numbers of people at risk – the [tail of the distribution](#) – is made worse by the need to measure a range of human experiences in discrete increments. When people rate their well-being from a low point of one to a high point of five, “one” can mean anything from breaking up with a partner who they weren’t that into in the first place to urgently needing crisis intervention to stay alive. These nuances are buried in the context of population averages.

A history of averaging out harm

The tendency to ignore harm on the margins isn't unique to mental health or even the consequences of social media. Allowing the bulk of experience to obscure the fate of smaller groups is a common mistake, and I'd argue that these are often the people society should be most concerned about.

It can also be [a pernicious tactic](#). Tobacco companies and scientists alike once argued that premature death among some smokers was not a serious concern because most people who have smoked a cigarette do not die of [lung cancer](#).

Pharmaceutical companies have defended their aggressive marketing tactics by claiming that the vast majority of people treated with opioids [get relief from pain without dying of an overdose](#). In doing so, they've swapped the vulnerable for the average and steered the conversation toward benefits, often measured in a way that obscures the very real damage to a minority – but still substantial – group of people.

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The lack of harm to many is not inconsistent with severe harm caused to a few. With most of the world now using some form of social media, I believe it's important to listen to the voices of concerned parents and struggling teenagers when they point to Instagram as a source of

distress. Similarly, it's important to acknowledge that the COVID-19 pandemic has been prolonged because [misinformation on social media has made some people afraid](#) to take a safe and effective vaccine. These lived experiences are important pieces of evidence about the harm caused by social media.

Does Meta have the answer?

Establishing causality from observational data is challenging, so challenging that progress on this front garnered the [2021 Nobel in economics](#). And social scientists are not well positioned to run randomized controlled trials to definitively establish causality, particularly for social media platform design choices such as altering how content is filtered and displayed.

But Meta is. The company has petabytes of data on human behavior, many social scientists on its payroll and the ability to run randomized control trials in parallel with [millions of users](#). They run such experiments all the time to understand how best to [capture users' attention](#), down to every button's color, shape and size.

Meta could come forward with irrefutable and transparent evidence that their products are harmless, even to the vulnerable, if it exists. Has the company chosen not to run such experiments or has it run them and decided not to share the results?

Either way, Meta's decision to instead release and emphasize data about average effects is telling.

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Core Concepts (a Glossary)

“the demotic turn” in celebrity culture

Graeme Turner's term for the leveling of the everyday toward celebrity culture and vice versa (Understanding Celebrity, 2004)

a public

people paying sustained attention to the same thing at the same time

affordances

signals or cues in an environment that communicate how to interact with features or things in that environment

Affordances

signals or cues in an environment that communicate how to interact with features or things in that environment

aggregate

aggregated

to pull or present content together online as related

algorithm

a step-by-step set of instructions for getting something done to serve humans, whether that something is making a decision, solving a problem, or getting from point A to point B (or point Z).

Algorithms

a step-by-step set of instructions for getting something done

to serve humans, whether that something is making a decision, solving a problem, or getting from point A to point B (or point Z)

appropriation

use for a different cultural purpose than originally intended

Arab Spring

an explosion of protests against governments in the Middle East in 2011

art world

an inspired, collaborative competition among artists and content creators

barriered SMP's

A platform where it is relatively difficult to maintain a viewership compared to, say, something like Instagram (Student-Contributed term)

belief perseverance

The human tendency to want to continue believing what you already believe.

biases

assumptions about a person, culture, or population

black box algorithms

The term used when processes created for computer-based decisionmaking is not shared with or made clear to outsiders.

Black Lives Matter

a sophisticated movement online and offline, fueled by outrage

over injustices against black citizens by American institutions including law enforcement today

branchability

the degree of freedom one has to go from one piece of media to the next while doing the least physical work possible. example: the suggested videos on youtube (not *all* the videos as that is not least work as you'd have to search it up) (Student-Contributed term)

bridge

In the terminology of social network analysis, whenever an individual connects two networked publics (or any two entities, such as two other people), that connector is called a bridge.

broadcast media

one subcategory of older media, including television and radio, that communicates from one source to many viewers.

bullshit

Information spread without concern for whether or not it's true

bullying

a real phenomenon with specific criteria: aggressive behavior, imbalance of power, repeated over time. Defined by Dan Olweus.

cancel culture

a collective attack built upon the practice of using social media to call people out for perceived wrongs

choreography of assembly

Paulo Gerbaudo's term describing how successful online

organizers preplan social activist movements that will ensue on the ground.

civil inattention

Sociologist Erving Goffman's term for the common understanding in crowded spaces that you don't may politely acknowledge others, but you do not get in their business

collocation

a collection of words that often occurs together

collocations

communities of practice

groups of people informally bound together by sharing expertise and passion for a joint enterprise

confirmation bias

The human tendency for the brain to run through the text of something to select the pieces of it that confirm what you think is already true, while knocking away and ignoring the pieces that don't confirm what you believe.

context collapse

Context collapse is when the different contexts or worlds you associate with overlap or become mixed together.

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Context collapse is when the different contexts or worlds you associate with overlap or become mixed together

creative online activism

activist movements that deploy creativity in using the

affordances of the internet to promote activist agendas and avoid the pitfalls of oversimplification and appropriation.

crowdculture

a (digital) culture built around certain concepts, which could include products

cultural branding

a branding strategy that tries to exploit existing crowdcultures and/or build new crowdcultures

culture

a concept encompassing all the norms, values, and related behaviors that people who have interacted in a social group over time agree on and perpetuate.

cyberbullying

a term entangled in moral panics that caused and used it as parents and educators in the early 2000s struggled to recognize the longstanding issue of bullying in online discourse

data

raw material in the world of ideas and information concepts: A list of millions of likes on Instagram, with little understanding yet applied

deep work

computer scientist Cal Newport's term for the very human act of sustained thinking and creation

disinformation

Information intended to deceive those who receive it.

dynamic

based on a changing set of deciders. An examples the way online norms are based on changing deciders including software developers and the evolving practices of publics of users.

dystopia

an imagined society where everything is terrible

elements of communities

membership, influence, reinforcement of needs, and emotional connection

emoji

a graphic image used via text

emotional regulation

a skill developed in childhood and adolescence by experiencing strong emotions and developing internal regulatory processes

exposure

the affordance of social media to draw matters society guards as private into the public sphere

fake news

a term recently popularized by politicians to refer to stories they do not agree with

fallacies

types of flawed thinking including utopian and dystopian ideas and technological determinism

filter bubble

also called an echo chamber, this is a phenomenon in which we only see news and information we like and agree with, leading to political polarization. (Term coined by Eli Pariser.)

Five strategies deployed by creative online activist movements:

Speed, Visuals, Performances, Inclusiveness, Masked leadership

four key affordances of online communication

There are four affordances of online communication that danah boyd emphasizes are far more pronounced than in offline communication (It's Complicated, pg. 11). They are: persistence (online content and expressions can last for a very long time), visibility (many audiences and publics may be able to see what you post over time), spreadability (it's nearly effortless to share content posted online), and searchability (content posted online can be searched for.)

Furries

An Internet Public Based around Anthropomorphic Animals From Various Media. Uses Art and Other Mediums to Create an Online Persona and Interact with Others. (Student-contributed term)

hookability

ease at which one can go from one piece of media to the next, on the same platform (Student-Contributed term)

Hypebeast

Person who wears high fashion clothing, typically a person who has experience with reselling luxury items and trades for higher priced pieces. Person who can either afford or not afford this expensive lifestyle. (Student-contributed term)

Identifier

A way of referring to a set of characteristics
Your email address (myID@me.com) or user name (RaulB) or an account number (7633)

identity

<https://opentextbooks.library.arizona.edu/hasm/chapter/identity-2/>

An iteration of the self that links individuals with how they are perceived by others.

Identity (according to InternetSociety.org)

The complete set of characteristics that define you
Name, nicknames, birth date and any other unique characteristics that combined make you who you are

information

the bridge to making meaning from data, such as a research article interpreting findings from a study, or a newspaper article making sense of observed phenomena

information warfare

the strategic use of information and its anticipated effects on receivers to influence the power dynamics in a conflict

intersectionality

the theory according to which different forms of oppression intersect and must be taken into account

Janus Faced

a symbol, derived from ancient Roman mythology, of something that simultaneously works toward two opposing goals.

knowledge

the outcome of synthesizing information by considering it in our minds among all of our understandings of and experiences in the world

knowledge construction

The negotiation of multiple truths as a way of understanding or "knowing" something

layers of electronic intimacy

a term by Yang et al (2013) to describe how college students chose different media platforms as benchmarks in the progression of a romantic relationship

male guardianship

the system in Saudi Arabia whereby every woman must get the approval of a male guardian for decisions about her body and life including passport applications, travel, and marriage.

markuped

This term was entered after enabling markup

meme

something culturally significant - a concept or a form of media - that spreads from person to person, often being modified as it does so

memes

microcelebrity

a way of presenting yourself like a celebrity: setting up your profile and "brand" online, gaining followers, and revealing things about yourself in strategic and controlled ways

misinformation

Inaccurate information that is spread without the intention to deceive.

moral panics

fears spread among many people about a threat to society at large

net neutrality

a shorthand name for a key set of features that have made the internet what it is today.

network effects

A concept meaning that the more the platform is used, the more valuable it is - because the more likely it is where we go to interact with family, or friends, or customers, or all of these. A shorthand definition is "the more, the merrier."

network effects in platforms

the more the platform is used, the more valuable it is - because the more likely that platform is where we go to interact with family, or friends, or customers, or all of these

networked publics

a term danah boyd uses in her book It's Complicated, these are sets of people paying sustained attention to the same thing at the same time that intersect and connect online

Networked publics

these are sets of people paying sustained attention to the same thing at the same time that intersect and connect online

Ni Una Menos

translated from Spanish as "not one less", this is a hemispheric movement expressing outrage over violence against women in the Americas, this movement began in Argentina and led to an August 2016 demonstration in Lima that was characterized as the largest demonstration ever seen in Peru.

North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA)

An agreement between the US, Mexico, and Canada in the early 1990s forging interdependence between their economies, including subsidies for corporations taking over Mexican land to grow cheap crops.

online communities

a group of people, connected online, that share a common interest

online disinhibition effect

The psychology theory finding and predicting that people behave online in ways they would not in person. For more information see Suler, J. (2004). *The Online Disinhibition Effect. Cyberpsychology & behavior : the impact of the Internet, multimedia and virtual reality on behavior and society*, 7 3, 321-6

Open Educational Resources

According to Cheryl Cuillier of the UA Libraries, Open Educational Resources (OER) are "teaching and learning materials in the public domain or openly licensed that allow free reuse and remixing."

organizational layer

Political scientist David Karpf's term for the networked groups

of people responding together who he argues form the most important agents for change in American political advocacy today.

oversimplification

the threat faced by any spreading movement for complex causes to be reduced to a simplistic phrase or meaning as the movement spreads.

paradox of choice

psychologist Barry Schwartz's theory that the more selection we have, the less likely we are to choose something and feel satisfied with our choice

paratactic style

also called the additive style, this is a linguistic style in which elements are presented, one simple sentence after the other, and there are few elaborate sentences

Partial Identity

A subset of the characteristics that make up your identity. Example: Demographic information about you or any purchase history is stored in your account at a website.

performativity

This concept from Judith Butler's her 1990 book *Gender Trouble* asserts that roles like gender are only constructed through our performances of them; they would not exist without our acting them into existence.

persistence

the affordance that online content and expressions can last for a very long time

Persona

A partial identity created by you to represent yourself in a specific situation. Example: A social network account or your online blog

platform

An ecosystem that connects people and companies while retaining control over the terms of these connections and ownership of connection byproducts such as data

print media

a subcategory of older paper-based media such as newspapers, books, and magazines, that many users access individually.

privacy

a notion relating to self-determination that is too complicated to be reduced to one simple idea

private by default, public by design**Private: Context****privateers**

Individual cyclists without a team who compose their own program of sponsors and their own race/event schedule.

Profile

A selective presentation of your identity online. This term can also refer to information collected by others about your actions and characteristics and without your knowledge or intention, such as data drawn from a search you conduct or a series of websites you've visited.

public by default, private by design

a phrase used by danah boyd to emphasize the work required to controlling the privacy of social media posts - the opposite of face to face communication, which is private by default, public by design. (It's Complicated, p. 61.)

qualitative inquiry

using observations and conversations or interviews as human research instruments

searchability

content posted online can be searched for

selfies

a 21st-century genre of popular art and media production

Sexting as Media Production

a 2013 article by Amy Hasinoff promoting the idea that sexting can be empowering for young women, and unveiling the complications that arise when laws designed to punish people for circulating pornographic images and abusing children are applied to young people who are expressing sexuality over phones and online

sextortion

A serious crime that occurs when someone threatens to distribute your private and sensitive material if you don't provide them images of a sexual nature, sexual favors, or money. Sextortion is a serious crime that occurs when someone threatens to distribute your private and sensitive material if you don't provide them images of a sexual nature, sexual favors, or money. Often used through social media. (Student-contributed term)

slacktivism

coined by Evgeny Morozov, this concept relates to critiques of online activism as inferior to more traditional forms of activism, with organizing online perceived as so fast, easy, and risk-free, it results in insufficient gains or change.

social anxiety

fear of embarrassment or humiliation, leading to the avoidance of social situations

Social Network

a network of individuals held together by pre-established interpersonal relationships.

social networking sites

online platforms that allow users to create a public profile and interact with other users on the website

social stage

Sociologist Erving Goffman wrote in his 1956 book *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* that we are all actors on a "social stage," who play particular roles to create our identities, and that these roles change as we interact with different people and situations. Our selves can only really be understood when we look at all of the roles we play.

sociolinguistics

the study of how human beings use language and to what purpose

Sponsors

Companies or individuals that provide money, product, or other

benefits in exchange for naming rights of the team, ad space on team jersey, product testing or usage, etc.

- James Eby

spreadability

the affordance that it's nearly effortless to share content posted online; the ability for media to be spread to many people, who may then choose to use, modify, and/or spread it further

staircase thoughts

The affordance of social media to allow people who will be gathering in person also to get a sense of what others are thinking before they meet face to face, and continue sharing their ideas after they leave the meeting

symbolic center

Paulo Gerbaudo's term for a meaningful public place that serves as a theatrical stage for activism to be seen and performed, such as park at a city center, a football field, the Olympic medal ceremonies, or a memorial statue.

technological convergence

blending of old and new media. For example, cellular phones were once shaped more like analog (non-digital) phones.

technological determinism

the fallacy of believing that technologies are fully responsible for grand shifts in our world, instead of acknowledging the more complicated interplay of forces behind the phenomenon in question

the public

a construct; an idea of "everyone, everywhere" that people

imagine, and refer to when they want to add emphasis to the effects of one-to-many speech

The three I's

Algorithms' decisions become invisible, irreversible, and infinite.

theory of denunciation

the more a "called out" person has to lose – status, some important position, wealth, etc. – the more suspicious people are of those who call them out or denounced them, because they might believe that the denunciation is not completely disinterested

utopia

an idealized or perfect imaginary view of society

visibility

the affordance that many audiences and publics may be able to see what you post over time

Web 2.0

Named by O'Reilly Media in the early 2000s, this concept describes integration of user contributions such as likes and votes into online sites.

well-being

a state of happiness and contentment, with low levels of distress, overall good physical and mental health and outlook, or good quality of life.

wellness

a state of well-being with dimensions including physical, mental, and social health

why computers seem so smart today

cooperation from human software developers, and cooperation on the part of users.

Zapatistas

an army of mostly poor, rural, indigenous people rose up against the Mexican government in 1994, and successfully used the early internet to reach out for witnesses and support.