

# Humans R Social Media - 2024 "Living Book" Edition

# Humans R Social Media - 2024 "Living Book" Edition

*A living new media textbook for college  
learners and collaborators*

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## iVoices Media Collections

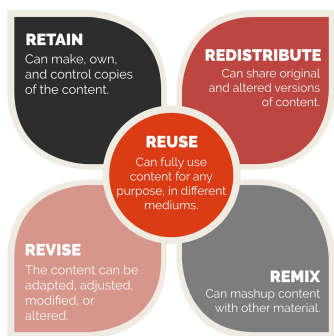
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# Preface: About this Book

Welcome to an evolving world, and an evolving “book”. This is a textbook on social media, new media, and participatory culture. What makes this book special is that the book itself is participatory, drawing on the insights and artistry of those immersed in social media cultures. We believe in channeling students’ “funds of knowledge” as we teach about social media technologies, because what students know about social media is essential in connecting with students in order to teach them, and in helping all of us learn about this ever-evolving digital world.

## Reuse this book, and more



*Diagram illustrating the 5 Rs of Open Educational Resources (OER).*

*Humans R Social Media* (HRSM) is an Open Educational Resource. That means it is designed not only for free access, but so anyone can do with it what are called the 5 R's: Reuse, Remix, Revise, Retain, and Redistribute. For students, a great part of using Open Educational Resources (OER) in a course is that OER are usually free of cost. For instructors, using OER gives them an opportunity to adapt a book for their own course without creating an

entirely new book. There are also even more collaborative possibilities with OER that we are exploring with this book.

We would love to know what you think of *Humans R Social Media*. Do you have an idea for a chapter? Do you see an error that needs to be fixed? Is there content that is outdated or offensive you'd like to alert us to? Are you interested in becoming more involved in editions of this book in the future? Fill out our survey to help us see HRSM from your perspective.

## New in this edition

This edition of HRSM is designed to be exciting for students, accessible for all learners, and socially aware. We remain rooted

in the Americas with a particular focus on English-speaking cultures in the United States, though we hope to invite broader perspectives as we move this book toward open governance. For now, we hope you enjoy and learn from this book including preexisting content and revisions including those listed below.

## Chapter Overviews and Key Points

We have added text boxes at the top of some chapters with overviews including chapter section headings, and lists of key points in the book.

## Glossary term updates

Glossary terms are still listed at the end of each chapter—now in alphabetical order, rather than order of appearance—and they are also listed all together at the end in Core Concepts (a Glossary).

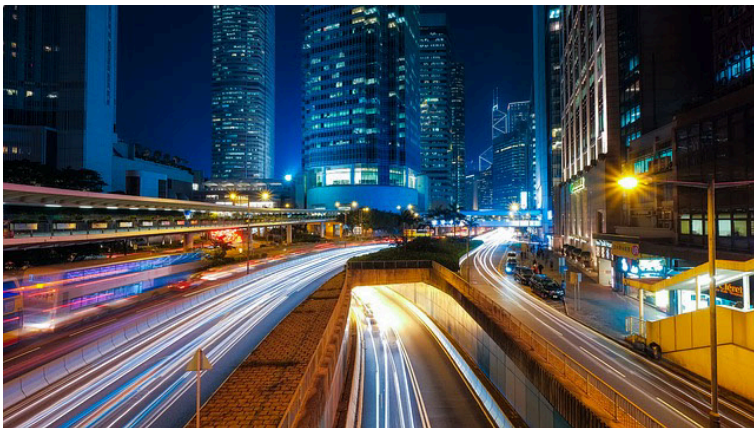
## Student insights updates

We have updated how we integrate student content to be more accessible and interactive for readers. Our Student Insights text boxes have been updated to be expandable and include transcripts of any spoken content. You will also find more audio and video stories and more graphics than in any previous version of HRSM.

## Galleries of iVoices student work

In this edition, we are presenting culminating work from our producing project, iVoices Media Lab. With iVoices, original HRSM author Diana Daly worked with teams of mostly undergraduate students in a media lab, producing imagery, audio, and video stories about their experiences with social media technologies. In this edition of HRSM, we present some of that work. This includes new audio, visual, and graphic student content integrated with the HRSM book text, and our Galleries at the end of the book.

## How we've made *Humans R Social Media* and the current edition



*Information is always in motion, so this book is changing too.*

I began writing this book on my own in 2017, and have updated it since as often as I could. (Future updates to this book will look different—read more about that [here](#).) 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 question is that any book or knowledge source remains relevant longer when it's dynamic, or embracing of continuous change.

This edition of *Humans R Social Media* is a culmination of work by the iVoices Student Media Lab (visit iVoices [here](#)), 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 (visit the [podcast here](#)). Then our iVoices student Media Lab workers helped 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 described, tagged, selected, and integrated 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. Throughout the book *Humans R Social Media*, you can find personal stories in video, audio, and writing. by students in the course the book was first designed for. In most chapters of the book, these student stories are presented as Case Studies followed by thought-provoking questions, to

which readers are invited to respond. Case studies are frameworks for learning from life in the social sciences, and these stories offer opportunities for observation and analysis.

## A Note on Impermanence



*Information can be impermanent, like sand on a beach.*

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.

## How to read this book

Today *Humans R Social Media* is technically a “webbook”, currently hosted on Pressbooks. It is designed so that 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.

## **More about the Student Insights case studies**

In our iVoices Media Lab days, we trained students to produce media stories and content, and then offered them the opportunity to openly license their work for future use. We depended on interns to organize all of that student content. Below, one of them introduces a story that made her smile.

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

Stories like the one Randi found are in textboxes like the one just below. Look out for them, learn, and enjoy.

## Student insights: My experience with a social media cleanse (audio by Noe Becerra, Fall 2020)



*Graphic of author.*



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

<https://opentextbooks.library.arizona.edu/humanssocialmedia/?p=23#h5p-1>



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

<https://opentextbooks.library.arizona.edu/humanssocialmedia/?p=23#h5p-343>

**Respond to this case study:** This creator describes going on a social media cleanse. What is the purpose of this type of exercise, and how does calling it a “cleanse” shape the expectations for this type of lifestyle change? Have you stopped using social media in this way, and if so, what did you learn?

## About the sections in this book

## The Intern Series Part 3: War Of The Worlds — And a bit about the Social Media and Ourselves podcast episodes

You will sometimes find an episode embedded in chapters of this book from the media including podcast *Social Media & Ourselves*. This podcast was produced with members of iVoices Media Lab including Diana Daly, Gabe Stultz, and Jacquie Kuru from 2021 to 2022. Here's one episode we produced, to give you a feel for it.



*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/humanssocialmedia/?p=23#oembed-2>

The Intern Series Part 3: War Of The

## Worlds

*Release Date: July 1st, 2021*

iVoices intern Randi Baltzer explores the differences in communication and connection between the tangible world and the digital world through student stories and her own experiences. Theme music and music backtracks by Gabe Stultz. Produced by Diana Daly, Jacquie Kuru and iVoices Media Lab.

LISTEN · LISTEN WITH TRANSCRIPT

**Respond to this podcast episode...**How did the podcast episode “The Intern Series Part 3: War Of The Worlds” use interviews, student voices, or sounds to demonstrate a current or past social trend phenomenon? If you were making a sequel to this episode, what voices or sounds would you include to help listeners understand more about this trend, and why?



## 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.

Please think beyond the specific definitions given to the meanings of these concepts, and try to understand what they mean in your own words.

## About each chapter's Core Questions

There are 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 and other interactive questions are also asked at the bottom of each chapter. Use these to test how well you have comprehended what you've read.



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In our Related Content sections, we embed content published in openly licensed publications including *The Conversation*. Most of these are articles by authors unaffiliated with *Humans R Social Media*, but we believe their work offers important perspectives on topics discussed in the chapter.



## Acknowledgments

The above caveats notwithstanding, this book has value, 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 class Social Media and Ourselves helped it grow. 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.

For audiovisual content, I am indebted to spectacular repositories offered via Creative Commons, Wikimedia Commons, Flickr, Pixabay, and especially the excellent online publication *The Conversation*. 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, which has funded this book's migration to Pressbooks and its opening of authorship to students. This edition of *Humans R Social Media* has been developed with plans for the future thanks to Nathan Schneider and Hibah Ahmad and the Media Economies Design Lab.

I would especially like to thank the many students who have made this edition of this book possible. This includes those who

worked with iVoices as interns or employees including Loren Aguilar, Lizette Arias, Randi Baltzer, Duo Bao, Crystal Brannen, Rose Bridges, Kaitlin Danielle Butler, Paige Carlson, Priscilla Castillo, Jordan Confrey, Zixuan Deng, Regan Elliott, Adam Fehse, Alexandria Fripp, Emily Jo Gammons, Arielle Garcia, Maria Jose Garcia, Abhiman Gupta, Lindy Hanson, Nadari Hockenhull, Neruda Hogrelius, Kailey Hurley, Molly Ingram, Shruti Jagadish, Jennifer Joyce Jones, Arianna Jones, Kristine Kelley, Jacquie Kuru, Anna Leach, Ryan Lenhart, Nuzhat Mastura, Jennifer McKernan, Kathryn Millar, Matt Ricker, Taylor Robeson, Gabriella Shriner, Kali Ann Stecker, Gabe Stultz, Eduardo Tocco Linares, Vanessa Jasmine Torrez, Brian Um, Liz Vilchynska, Mario Villa, Sam Winn, Gabby Worrell, and Wonkyun Yim. I am also indebted to the hundreds of students who openly licensed content created in iVoices media lab sessions.

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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This work was sponsored in part by the University of Arizona Center for University Education and Scholarship.



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# Introduction

## Key points

- Social media reflects life in systematically distorted ways.
- We are influenced by social media, and social media are influenced by us in turn.
- Phenomena happening online call back cultural patterns that are old and offline.
- Claims about the internet can be misleading, while personal reflection on what we see and do can lead to new knowledge.
- Information can come from data, and may even lead to knowledge.
- Computers can remember, and analyze through patterns, but knowledge is a human construct influenced by society and culture.

## In this chapter

- Section 1: A distorted mirror
  - Student Insights: Finding your voice in a connected democracy (writing by Trinity Norris, Fall 2020)
- Section 2: A relationship of mutual influence
- Section 3: Is this digital? Is this even new?
  - Student insights: Pulling out of the rabbit



hole (video by Abigail Becker, 2021)

- Section 4: Infinite data, interpreted information, and precious knowledge
  - Student Insights: Text [mis]communications (writing by Aidan Alperstein, Fall 2021)
- Interview with Stephen Rains — Social Media and Ourselves podcast
- Core Concepts
- Show your knowledge
- Consider It: What are the 'reopen' protesters really saying? (Diana Daly, 2020)

## Section 1: A distorted mirror



*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 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).

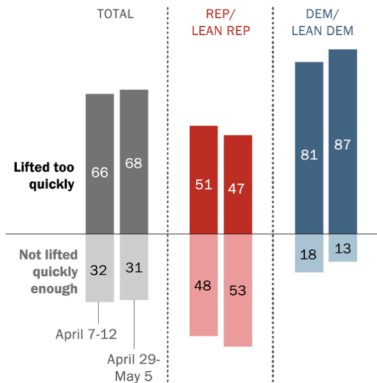
These mismatches signal important and often forgotten factors that distort social media's image of public life in America. Social media are *not* simply mirrors of society. Social media platforms, content, and algorithms influence societies,



*A misguided but widely spread Facebook poll drumming up conspiracy theories about George Floyd, who was killed by Minneapolis police in May 2020. A Facebook post labeling the killing of Floyd as a conspiracy.*

**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**

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.



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

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 the 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.

Student Insights: Finding your voice in a connected democracy (writing by Trinity Norris, Fall 2020)



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**Respond to this case study:** This student found both online and offline life led to disillusionment with government, until developing a strategy of targeted searching for civic organizations. How has strategic searching helped you feel differently about an issue, or find better information?

## Section 2: A relationship of mutual influence

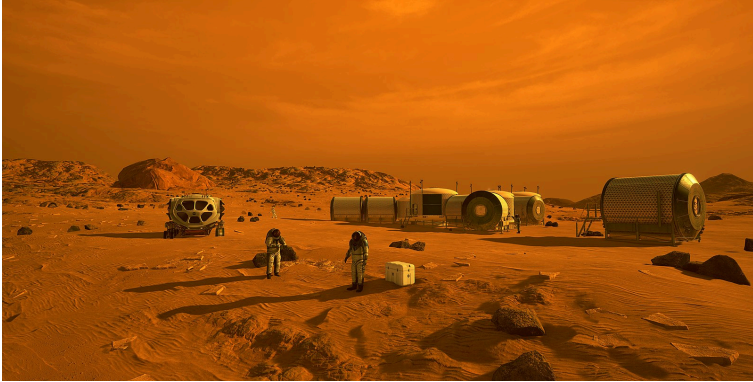
How are we influenced by social media? How is social media influenced by us? And why have this book title represent humans as social media? The swirl of life immersed in social media begins and ends with ourselves as active human players in it. We produce social media content, we consume it, and we create 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 2000's 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 is / 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.

## Section 3: Is this digital? Is this even new?



*Social media trends can seem as surprising and new as life on a future planet. But they often turn out to be part of familiar cultural patterns.*

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 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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*Click here for a captioned version of this video.*

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.*

A good example of hype around social media is in popular 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.

*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. In her research, she found that teens were using social media to cope with physical restrictions on their mobility, pursuing social relationships online from their homes. Yet despite the lack of evidence around addiction, social media is associated with health concerns for all users and especially youth, due to content that exists only and the dynamics of its circulation and our communications. As U.S. Surgeon General Dr. Vivek Murthy advised in 2023, "We don't have enough evidence to say it's safe, and in fact, there is growing evidence that social media use is associated with harm to young people's mental health."

## Student insights: Pulling out of the rabbit hole (video by Abigail Becker, 2021)



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**Respond to this case study:** This creator describes the influence of harmful ideologies on her younger self. What factors led to her deeper and deeper involvement in this content? What do experiences like these teach us?

*To learn the truth: Rely on the science you understand.*



*Meme by Ava Doubek, 2021*

Sweeping claims about social media often go to far, and leave out important nuances. So how do we navigate a world in which social media is everywhere, and science about it gives complicated answers? 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.

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 “rewiring” 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 its 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. On the other

hand, since the COVID-19 pandemic, in a 2023 study by the National Institutes of Health that simply asked respondents about loneliness and social media in an online survey, its use found to be associated with loneliness—sadly, for those attempting to use it to maintain relationships.

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 on social media in our lives? When we collect these accounts and analyze 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.

## **Section 4: Infinite data, interpreted information, and precious 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. The information is synthesized by considering it among all of our understandings and experiences in the world 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. On the other hand—as Hidden Brain host Shankar Vendantam discovers when Newport misses his first interview appointment for the podcast—not communicating with others can be a privilege, and may put those others at a disadvantage. This clues us in that knowing can be seen as an individual or a social state, and reminds us that **epistemologies**—ways of knowing, or how we know what we know—vary widely across cultures. Meanings



and knowledge are also socially and culturally constructed – learn more about that in our chapter on Information.

## Student Insights: Text [mis]communications (writing by Aidan Alperstein, Fall 2021)



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**Respond to this case study:** This storyteller is relaying signals online, and wondering if they mean what they appear to mean. What are some of the ways online communications like emojis can be subtle, double-meaning, or even misleading? How do you clarify these meanings in digital conversations?

Digital systems such as computers present us with a lot of new data points. Computers can sometimes even transform these data points into knowledge, such as by combining keywords from social media posts into news stories automatically emailed to you. However, to process what publics express on that social media platform 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 there 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?

Questions around different levels of knowledge and their value grow more acute with the rapid development of Artificial Intelligence (AI) technologies including generative AI programs like ChatGPT that generate new content in countless shapes and formats. (See our chapter *Me, Myself, and AI* for a deeper dive into how AI works.) However, even when driven by powerful neural networks as AI can be, computer algorithms and models rely on preexisting data and patterns to understand the world. Computers do not think, or have unpredictable or individual insights. Regardless of the immense power invested in computing algorithms and models today, computers cannot create knowledge in the way I conceptualize it, and I do not believe they will ever be capable of doing so. Only humans can, and only if we bypass the proliferating distractions in our lives and give ourselves time to think, study, question, and theorize.

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.

## Interview with Stephen Rains — Social Media and Ourselves podcast



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### Interview with Stephen Rains

*Release date: March 31st, 2019*

Sometimes we panic about the growing use of social media. For this episode we talk to someone who believes social media can help people. Featuring stories by students witnessing fat-shaming, confessing to cyberbullying, finding support online when they least expect it, and so much more. Guest: Dr. Stephen Rains, author of *Coping with Illness Digitally*.

LISTEN · LISTEN WITH TRANSCRIPT

***Respond to this podcast episode...*** How did the podcast episode “Interview with Stephen Rains” use interviews, student voices, or sounds to demonstrate a current or past social trend phenomenon? If you were making a sequel to this episode, what voices or sounds would you include to help listeners understand more about this trend, and why?

## Core Concepts

### ***Arab Spring***

an explosion of protests by people against their governments in the Middle East in 2011

### ***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

### ***dystopia***

an imagined society where everything is terrible

## ***fallacies***

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

## ***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

## ***qualitative inquiry (or qualitative research)***

using observations and conversations or interviews as human research instruments

## ***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

### ***utopia***

an idealized or perfect imaginary view of society

## Show your knowledge

### 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 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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## C. Game on!



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## Related Content

### Consider It: What are the ‘reopen’ protesters really saying? (Diana Daly, 2020)

*In April 2020, shortly after the threat of coronavirus transmission led to the shutdown of many US businesses, protests ensued. I (author Diana Daly) 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 was the online qualitative inquiry conducted? Describe the process in your own words based on what was written.
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 some kind of protests today.



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 on 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 to 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.



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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.



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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 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!”



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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.”



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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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# MAIN BODY

# Identity

*Identity, once an elusive concept, is now expressed overtly online.*

DIANA DALY

## Key points

- Identity online depends on what platforms allow you to express and what social norms influence you.
- Self-presentation often involves our performances of other people's performances, or "performativity".
- Authenticity is an ideal in self-presentation, but what appears to be authentic can be complicated, especially for people who are not part of dominant social, racial, and ethnic groups.
- We present ourselves differently in each context we are in. Social media collapses these contexts, which can cause problems.
- Social media intensifies our interactions by making them more persistent, visible, spreadable, and searchable.

## In this chapter

- Section 1 Creating a profile

- Student Insights: Observing social media as a placeholder (audio by Bella Villalpando, Spring 2021)
- Section 2: Who are you? Offline? Online? Across modalities?
  - Student Insights: The Snap Map Scandal (audio by Ally Hendricks, Fall 2021)
- Section 3 Self-presentation, Performativity, and Intersectionality
  - Student Insights: Stereotypes of the perfect man (audio by Mohith Reddy Vanukuri, Fall 2021)
- Section 4: Context collapse
- Section 5: Affordances of online communication
- Timelessness — Social Media and Ourselves podcast
- Core Concepts
- Core Questions
- Consider It: Social media still a closet for too many LGBTQIA+ employees (Amaral Lauriano, 2023 from The Conversation)

This book is about people, including you – all of you, through whom culture passes and takes new shape. You are a huge part of social media – but factors come together to make you, 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 the world.

## Section 1: Creating 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?" An audience or **a public** with whom you interact shapes your identity at any given time.

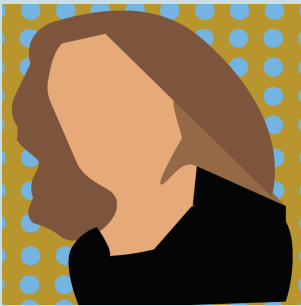
If the profile you are creating is simply for other students and instructors in the class you are taking, perhaps you'd craft the profile to reflect student teams or organizations you are part of; or perhaps you would keep it vague if the student community



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.

## Student Insights: Observing social media as a placeholder (audio by Bella Villalpando, Spring 2021)



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**Respond to this case study:** This student speaks about watching someone else curating their online profile, and interprets those actions to infer things about that person's life. Can the way someone uses online platforms tell us real

information about their offline life? What are some examples from your life that could be seen by others as not being the “real” you?

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 affords keeping a visible running count of two people’s interactions with one another. Affordances can also be expanded, as they often are by users on 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.

Another example of identity limitations online—and in offline systems relying on categorization—relates to race and ethnicity, which are related but distinct concepts. **Race** is the visible perception of whiteness, blackness, *Latinidad*, or other categorization related to people’s characteristics such as skin color, while **ethnicity** refers to shared cultural expression or history, potentially including elements like religion or language. The racial and ethnic identities of many online media users and particularly those in the US can be complex combinations of races and cultures that are inadequately reflected in categorization systems.

The decisions and challenges users face in creating online identities get even more complex when it’s time to post content. 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.

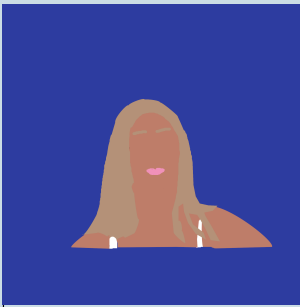
Identities online are associated with financial capital and social power, demonstrated most clearly by **influencers**—online celebrities and microcelebrities whose popularity is leveraged to sway the opinions, preferences, and purchasing decisions of their audience. Meanwhile, online audiences seem to crave the sense of "real"-ness, or **authenticity**, from online influencers and personal contacts alike, associating that quality with trust and closeness. As of 2023, the rising app BeReal was designed around one daily invitation to users to capture what they are doing during two-minute window, in a clear attempt to capture authentic moments. This design may not be built around simply wanting users to enjoy one another; authentic moments are big business to those who buy and sell user data. The pressure to be authentic can be particularly complicated for people of color, who can be challenged with meeting expectations online of what Mikaela Pitcan and coauthors refer to as a "vanilla self:" exhibiting the trappings of conservative whiteness, while simultaneously appearing to be authentically part of their racial group. This identity conundrum is not new—Signithia Fordham and John Ogbu found pressure to "act white" existed for black students in the 1980s, well before social networking sites existed—but social media's capacity to gather varieties of audiences means different expectations of how to behave "right" can all come together at once.

## Section 2: 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 to having one identity, but in life, both online and offline, we play many roles and thus have many identities.

## Student Insights: The Snap Map Scandal (audio by Ally Hendricks, Fall 2021)



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**Respond to this case study:** What people and contexts did the student seem to have in mind and *not* have in mind when they set up the Snap Map? How did the Snap Map collapse these contexts?

## Section 3: Self-presentation, Performativity, and Intersectionality

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, sociologist Erving Goffman put forward a new way of looking at identity in his 1956 book, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. 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 we can only really understand ourselves when we look at all of the roles we play.

The cultural critic and feminist theorist Judith Butler deconstructed the behaviors of identity roles expressing to gender in her 1990 book *Gender Trouble*. 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.

Also beginning in the later 1980s and early 90s, civil rights theorist, activist, and law professor Kimberle Crenshaw wrote about how the power dynamics related to gender, race, and other identity categorizations must be understood for how they intersect with one another. Crenshaw's theory of intersectionality has been crucial both as a tool in holistic identity presentation and in recognizing that racism, sexism, and other types of oppression do not take terms impacting people, but instead work in compound ways.

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 the 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 ourselves into existence. And so when we perform ourselves into being online, we carry much of that same old offline, embodied baggage with us.



## Student Insights: Stereotypes of the perfect man (audio by Mohith Reddy Vanukuri, Fall 2021)



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**Respond to this case study:** The author describes how others' "perfect" self-presentation on Instagram made him withdraw from life's activities until he deleted Instagram and then learned more about his own identity. Have you experienced these feelings when you view other people's posts? Have you thought about how it might be harmful when you create posts that appear "perfect"? What are our responsibilities to others when we post on social media about ourselves?

## Section 4: 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, friends, customers, or all of these – the more valuable it becomes.

*When my 'professor' and 'mother' roles overlap*



*Identities collapse, including those of author Diana Daly*

I (Diana Daly, an author of this chapter) 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.

## Section 5: Affordances of online communication

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.

## Timelessness — Social Media and Ourselves podcast



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### Timelessness (2021 Rerelease)

*Release date: October 1st 2021 (This is a rerelease of an episode produced in 2019.)*

Digital memory is perfect. Thanks to technology we remember so much more than we used to. And that's good...or is it? Featuring more stories by college

students about the once-cool outfits, hairstyles, and moments that bring shame on social media later; then a story of surviving a mass shooting only to relive it in response to a photo on Facebook; and an interview with Diana's sister about Diana's MC Hammer pants and her hideous blazer that mysteriously disappeared in middle school.

LISTEN · LISTEN WITH TRANSCRIPT

***Respond to this podcast episode...*** How did the podcast episode "Timelessness" use interviews, student voices, or sounds to demonstrate a current or past social trend phenomenon? If you were making a sequel to this episode, what voices or sounds would you include to help listeners understand more about this trend, and why?

## Core Concepts

### ***affordances***

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

### ***authenticity***

the sense of “real”-ness

### ***context collapse***

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

### ***ethnicity***

shared cultural expression or history, potentially including elements like religion or language



## ***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)

## ***identity***

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

## ***influencers***

online celebrities and microcelebrities whose popularity is leveraged to sway the opinions, preferences, and purchasing decisions of their audience.

## ***intersectionality***

Kimberle Crenshaw's theory that different identity

categories and associated forms of oppression intersect and must be taken into account

### ***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, friends, customers, or all of these. A shorthand definition is “the more, the merrier.”

### ***performativity***

Judith Butler’s concept in her 1990 book *Gender Trouble* that says that roles like gender are only constructed through our performances of them; they would not exist without our acting them into existence

### ***race***

the visible perception of whiteness, blackness, Latinidad, or other categorization related to people’s characteristics such as skin color

## 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? 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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## C. Game on!



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## Related Content

**Consider It: Social media still a closet for too many LGBTQIA+ employees (Amaral Lauriano, 2023 from *The Conversation*)**



shutterstock.

Lucas Amaral Lauriano, *IÉSEG School of Management*

Social media has revolutionised how we relate to our colleagues and higher-ups, offering us opportunities to showcase different aspects of our lives. Currently, three out of four employees are connected with their coworkers via social media platforms like Instagram

and Facebook. Be it in person or online, we all strive to present the best versions of ourselves, and social media allows us to filter these representations in ways that are specific to each platform. Twitter, for example, emphasises short, text messages, while Instagram focuses on images and videos. We also consider the diverse audiences and how they will interact with our content when determining our online behaviour.

But what happens when lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, intersex, or asexual (LGBTQIA+) employees, often marginalised in their workplaces, also need to decide whether or not to show their true selves online? As a management researcher interested in social issues, I recently delved into the experiences of gay male employees at the Brazilian subsidiary of a multinational automaker. My analyses of 480 hours of observation and 20 interviews with gay male employees uncover how they navigate online self-representation in the face of adversity.

## **When professionalism equals heteronormativity**

I found that LGBTQIA+ employees adjust their social media use to align with the platforms' functions and their professional lives. This was particularly the case with Instagram and Facebook. Many individuals I interviewed reported feeling that the traditional notion of professionalism, which favours heteronormativity, affects their online self-representation. As a result, some employees feel compelled to employ exhausting



tactics to hide or regulate their sexuality. The latter can broadly be divided in three main strategies:

**Fabrication**, or the use of social media to create counterfeit straight relationships. Gabriel (29, sales executive) pretended for years that he had a girlfriend named Paula. She was a friend who accompanied Gabriel and his same-sex partner to social events and frequently appeared in pictures with them. Gabriel intentionally fabricated this narrative to fit his view of professionalism on Facebook and Instagram, as he explains:

“When someone [from work] sent me a friendship request, I was like ‘Fuck, what am I going to do?. I thought that if I disclosed my sexuality I would be judged, professional doors would close, and colleagues would be talking about me all the time... So, I never posted anything about my real boyfriend.”

In his evaluation, colleagues and superiors would have access to information about his sexuality, impacting how he is seen as a professional. He decided to hide homosexuality as much as possible, leading to a spiral of fabrication online.

**Content control**, or the careful curation of pictures, comments, likes, and posts in a bid to tone down, or even erase, traces and evidence of their sexuality. Roberto (31, engineering coordinator) explains:

“I usually do not post anything that could

indicate that I am gay; I post mainly scenic pictures from my trips.”

Carlos (29, human resources analyst), on the other hand, steers clear from posting in general. Others prefer to change their profile names to avoid being found, such as Mario (28, marketing analyst), who uses only his initials:

“For years I kept my profile only with the letters ML, for Mario Lontra, my surname. I guess it was also a defence mechanism not to be found by colleagues at work.”

**Audience control** Through privacy configurations, individuals can target their posts at specific audiences, or limit the visibility of posts and comments on Instagram or Facebook. One of my interviewees, Diego, explains his reasons behind adopting the method:

“My colleagues screenshot pictures of other possible gay colleagues and send them to our chat group saying, ‘Look at what this faggot is doing.’ I’ve seen this happening, and I’d rather hide my profile to avoid them talking about me.”

## When professionalism and homosexuality co-exist

While some individuals strive to conceal or manage their homosexuality on social media, some of my

participants feel that being openly gay and professional is feasible. Through my research, I identified two strategies adopted by those who choose to publicly embrace their sexuality:

**Community support building** Rather than perceiving social media as a threat, these users make the most of it to network with other members of the LGBTQIA+ community, and downplay the idea of professionalism as heteronormativity online. This can be achieved by engaging with colleagues via comments, posts, and likes. Expressing opinions and engaging in gay discourse is less crucial for those who prioritise SNSs as a means of community support. Ravi (32, marketing executive) recognised the potential impact of being open about his sexuality on his LGBTQIA+ peers:

“I’m adopting a more activist posture. I met Mario at a meeting and he hugged me and said: ‘You don’t know how happy I am to see one of ours being promoted!’”

Mario and Ravi are from different departments but follow each other on Facebook and Instagram. Mario could see that Ravi expresses his homosexuality online and decided to talk to Ravi when he heard he had been promoted. Social media, in this case, had a community support building role for them.

**Activism** These individuals take advantage of social media to amplify their voices and destigmatise being gay, thereby also destigmatising their identities at work. Mario shares content on social issues affecting minorities and opposes Bolsonaro. He follows left-leaning LGBTQIA+ political profiles and drag queens,

often posting pictures with his boyfriend. Gabriel is becoming more open about his sexuality, expressing himself at work and on Facebook and Instagram. He comments:

“It was one of the best things I did. I changed my relationship status to “engaged to Luigi” on Facebook. If anyone had a doubt, it is very clear there. A lot of managers congratulated me on the engagement... when you are in a situation like that, you have to act so that others who suffer can see that they have support, and also that those who have prejudice see that it can end up badly for them.”

Open political activism has the notable advantage of helping dissociate professionalism from heteronormativity.

## **Testing the waters across different social media channels**

Overall, my study found that employees' behaviours are not static over time. Instead, employees adapt their online behaviour based on workplace experiences and external feedback, constantly “testing the waters” to strike the right balance. As social media audiences evolve, LGBTQIA+ employees may shift their self-representations to align with the new norms of popular platforms. For instance, Twitter might be perceived as a more “niche” social media channel today. If that changes, and colleagues and superiors start using the

platform, LGBTQIA+ employees might also behave differently.

Sadly, old-rooted ideas such as heteronormativity equalling professionalism are still pervasive. In an ideal world, sexual identity would not compromise professionalism, and there is still much work to be done before that is the case. Some positive examples to take inspiration from are IBM, Google and Deloitte, who have introduced structures for LGBTQ employees to “be outspoken”, “authentic” and “confident” about their sexuality.

Lucas Amaral Lauriano, Assistant Professor, *IÉSEG School of Management*

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## About the author



Diana Daly

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Dr. Diana Daly of the University of Arizona is the Director of iVoices, a media lab helping students produce media from their narratives on technologies. Prof Daly teaches about qualitative research, social media, and information quality at the University of Arizona.

# Old to New Media

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

**DIANA DALY**

## Key points

- Social media evolution bridges cultural practices and technological changes.
- Blending old and new technologies is evident, such as the iconic shutter sound of digital cameras.
- Diverse methods, beyond traditional media, have been historically used for broad communication.
- User-generated content challenges the traditional one-way flow of information.
- Major platforms like Google and Facebook profoundly influence industries, local economies, and cultures.
- Web 3.0, driven by Tim Berners-Lee's mission, aims to give users control over their data, challenging the current paradigm of data ownership on social networks.

In this chapter

- Section 1: Media convergence
  - Student insights: How I got my first phone (video by Aditya Kumar, Spring 2021)
- Section 2: The history of communicating with many at once
  - Student insights: My first encounter with technology (video by Anna, Spring 2021)
- Section 3: A millennial shift: Web 2.0 as user contributions
  - Student insights: Simpler times (video by Luis A. Ruiz, Spring 2021)
  - Student Insights: Generations on Social Media (writing by Jaden Fernandez, Spring 2021)
- Section 4: Dominating today: The platform economy
- Section 5: Future directions in the online world
  - Student Insights: Old vs. New Media (audio & writing by Tyler Amberg, Fall 2021)
- Virtuality 3.0: SXSW in Austin, TX — Social Media and Ourselves podcast
- Core Concepts
- Core Questions
- How will AI affect workers? Tech waves of the



past show how unpredictable the path can be

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.

## **Section 1: 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. (Image: Cell phone evolution by Anders, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mobile\\_phone\\_evolution.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Mobile_phone_evolution.jpg), Public Domain.)*

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.

## Student insights: How I got my first phone (video by Aditya Kumar, Spring 2021)



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**Respond to this case study:** What expectations went into your first desire for a networked device? How were they fulfilled, or not fulfilled, when you got one? What do you recognize about owning a connected device now that you didn't back then?

## Section 2: 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 pano 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.

## Student insights: My first encounter with technology (video by Anna, Spring 2021)



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## Section 3: 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

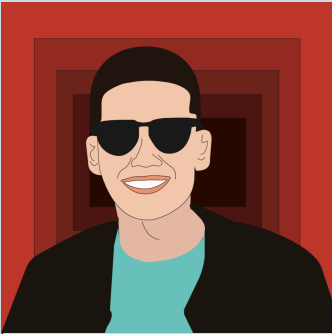
millennium. Rosen reminds us that broadcasters used to refer to viewers as “eyeballs.” Think about what that metaphor means. An eyeball has only two powers: To look, and to look away. There are plenty of media content creators who still only care about whether or not people are looking. But far more 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.



## Student insights: Simpler times (video by Luis A. Ruiz, Spring 2021)



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## 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 frequently visit. 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.

**Student Insights: Generations on Social Media (writing by Jaden**

## Fernandez, Spring 2021)

memes and internet culture that they do?"\n\nHe shrugged "You have a good point. I think you're probably correct, but we will know with time."\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.\n\nThen 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.\n\nI 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.\n\nI 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.\n\nIn 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="178 121 813 767">

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**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?

## Section 4: 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

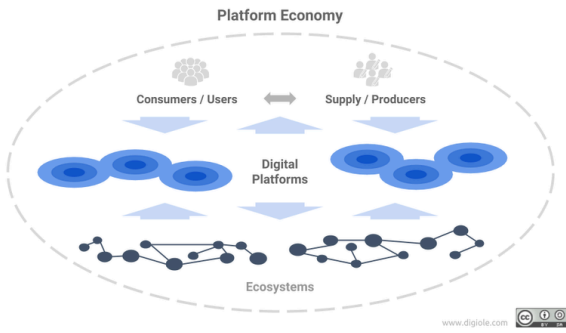
interdependencies are structured by a common set of mechanisms.”

– 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, the 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, customers, friends, and 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.



Visualization of platform economy key elements. (Image: Platform Economy by Vc20, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Platform\\_Economy.png](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Platform_Economy.png), CC BY-SA.)

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.

## Section 5: 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 World Wide Web (WWW) 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.”

## Student Insights: Old vs. New Media (audio & writing by Tyler Amberg, Fall 2021)



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**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?

## Virtuality 3.0: SXSW in Austin, TX — Social Media and Ourselves podcast



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### Virtuality 3.0: SXSW in Austin, TX

*Release date: April 1st 2022*

The SMO podcast team was at SXSW 2022 with the University of Arizona Wonder House. In this episode, Diana sets out to disentangle the culture of the city of Austin and the hyperconnected projection that is SXSW. Are they in a codependent relationship? What has SXSW done to Austin's music scene? Why do even tech-savvy people prefer f2f to online? And what does all this mean for the next frontier of tech experiences, Virtuality 3.0? Interviews with Austin residents and visitors include Thor Harris of Swans, Luke Savisky of

the 1990 film Slacker, and the crew of the food truck Cocina de Carnival aka Big Bertha.

LISTEN · LISTEN WITH TRANSCRIPT

**Respond to this podcast episode...** How did the podcast episode “Virtuality 3.0: SXSW in Austin, TX” use interviews, student voices, or sounds to demonstrate a current or past social trend phenomenon? If you were making a sequel to this episode, what voices or sounds would you include to help listeners understand more about this trend, and why?

## Core Concepts and Questions

### Core Concepts

#### ***analog***

not digital. This term technically refers to reliance on processes that are continuous rather than enacted

through specific values (digits), but it can be informally used to mean nearly anything that is not digital.

### ***broadcast media***

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

### ***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

### ***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

## ***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

## ***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



## 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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## C. Game on!



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## Related Content

**Consider It: How will AI affect workers? Tech waves of the past show how unpredictable the path can be**



Personal computers started an information technology revolution. Will AI bring similarly dramatic changes?

Bettmann via Getty Images

Bhaskar Chakravorti, *Tufts University*

The explosion of interest in artificial intelligence has drawn attention not only to the astonishing capacity of algorithms to mimic humans but to the reality that these algorithms could displace many humans in their

jobs. The economic and societal consequences could be nothing short of dramatic.

The route to this economic transformation is through the workplace. A widely circulated Goldman Sachs study anticipates that about two-thirds of current occupations over the next decade could be affected and a quarter to a half of the work people do now could be taken over by an algorithm. Up to 300 million jobs worldwide could be affected. The consulting firm McKinsey released its own study predicting an AI-powered boost of US\$4.4 trillion to the global economy every year.

The implications of such gigantic numbers are sobering, but how reliable are these predictions?

I lead a research program called Digital Planet that studies the impact of digital technologies on lives and livelihoods around the world and how this impact changes over time. A look at how previous waves of such digital technologies as personal computers and the internet affected workers offers some insight into AI's potential impact in the years to come. But if the history of the future of work is any guide, we should be prepared for some surprises.

## **The IT revolution and the productivity paradox**

A key metric for tracking the consequences of technology on the economy is growth in worker productivity – defined as how much output of work an

employee can generate per hour. This seemingly dry statistic matters to every working individual, because it ties directly to how much a worker can expect to earn for every hour of work. Said another way, higher productivity is expected to lead to higher wages.

Generative AI products are capable of producing written, graphic and audio content or software programs with minimal human involvement.

Professions such as advertising, entertainment and creative and analytical work could be among the first to feel the effects. Individuals in those fields may worry that companies will use generative AI to do jobs they once did, but economists see great potential to boost productivity of the workforce as a whole.

The Goldman Sachs study predicts productivity will grow by 1.5% per year because of the adoption of generative AI alone, which would be nearly double the rate from 2010 and 2018. McKinsey is even more aggressive, saying this technology and other forms of automation will usher in the “next productivity frontier,” pushing it as high as 3.3% a year by 2040.

That sort of productivity boost, which would approach rates of previous years, would be welcomed by both economists and, in theory, workers as well.

If we were to trace the 20th-century history of productivity growth in the U.S., it galloped along at about 3% annually from 1920 to 1970, lifting real wages and living standards. Interestingly, productivity growth slowed in the 1970s and 1980s, coinciding with the introduction of computers and early digital technologies. This “productivity paradox” was famously

captured in a comment from MIT economist Bob Solow: You can see the computer age everywhere but in the productivity statistics.

<https://datawrapper.dwcdn.net/i96wK/10/>

Digital technology skeptics blamed “unproductive” time spent on social media or shopping and argued that earlier transformations, such as the introductions of electricity or the internal combustion engine, had a bigger role in fundamentally altering the nature of work. Techno-optimists disagreed; they argued that new digital technologies needed time to translate into productivity growth, because other complementary changes would need to evolve in parallel. Yet others worried that productivity measures were not adequate in capturing the value of computers.

For a while, it seemed that the optimists would be vindicated. In the second half of the 1990s, around the time the World Wide Web emerged, productivity growth in the U.S. doubled, from 1.5% per year in the first half of that decade to 3% in the second. Again, there were disagreements about what was really going on, further muddying the waters as to whether the paradox had been resolved. Some argued that, indeed, the investments in digital technologies were finally paying off, while an alternative view was that managerial and technological innovations in a few key industries were the main drivers.

Regardless of the explanation, just as mysteriously as it began, that late 1990s surge was short-lived. So despite massive corporate investment in computers and the internet – changes that transformed the workplace –

how much the economy and workers' wages benefited from technology remained uncertain.

## Early 2000s: New slump, new hype, new hopes

While the start of the 21st century coincided with the bursting of the so-called dot-com bubble, the year 2007 was marked by the arrival of another technology revolution: the Apple iPhone, which consumers bought by the millions and which companies deployed in countless ways. Yet labor productivity growth started stalling again in the mid-2000s, ticking up briefly in 2009 during the Great Recession, only to return to a slump from 2010 to 2019.



Smartphones have led to millions of apps and consumer services but have also kept many workers more closely tethered to their workplaces.  
San Francisco Chronicle/Hearst Newspapers via Getty



## Images

Throughout this new slump, techno-optimists were anticipating new winds of change. AI and automation were becoming all the rage and were expected to transform work and worker productivity. Beyond traditional industrial automation, drones and advanced robots, capital and talent were pouring into many would-be game-changing technologies, including autonomous vehicles, automated checkouts in grocery stores and even pizza-making robots. AI and automation were projected to push productivity growth above 2% annually in a decade, up from the 2010-2014 lows of 0.4%.

But before we could get there and gauge how these new technologies would ripple through the workplace, a new surprise hit: the COVID-19 pandemic.

## **The pandemic productivity push – then bust**

Devastating as the pandemic was, worker productivity surged after it began in 2020; output per hour worked globally hit 4.9%, the highest recorded since data has been available.

Much of this steep rise was facilitated by technology: larger knowledge-intensive companies – inherently the more productive ones – switched to remote work, maintaining continuity through digital technologies such as videoconferencing and communications

technologies such as Slack, and saving on commuting time and focusing on well-being.

While it was clear digital technologies helped boost productivity of knowledge workers, there was an accelerated shift to greater automation in many other sectors, as workers had to remain home for their own safety and comply with lockdowns. Companies in industries ranging from meat processing to operations in restaurants, retail and hospitality invested in automation, such as robots and automated order-processing and customer service, which helped boost their productivity.

But then there was yet another turn in the journey along the technology landscape.

The 2020-2021 surge in investments in the tech sector collapsed, as did the hype about autonomous vehicles and pizza-making robots. Other frothy promises, such as the metaverse's revolutionizing remote work or training, also seemed to fade into the background.

In parallel, with little warning, "generative AI" burst onto the scene, with an even more direct potential to enhance productivity while affecting jobs – at massive scale. The hype cycle around new technology restarted.

## **Looking ahead: Social factors on technology's arc**

Given the number of plot twists thus far, what might we expect from here on out? Here are four issues for consideration.

First, the future of work is about more than just raw numbers of workers, the technical tools they use or the work they do; one should consider how AI affects factors such as workplace diversity and social inequities, which in turn have a profound impact on economic opportunity and workplace culture.

For example, while the broad shift toward remote work could help promote diversity with more flexible hiring, I see the increasing use of AI as likely to have the opposite effect. Black and Hispanic workers are overrepresented in the 30 occupations with the highest exposure to automation and underrepresented in the 30 occupations with the lowest exposure. While AI might help workers get more done in less time, and this increased productivity could increase wages of those employed, it could lead to a severe loss of wages for those whose jobs are displaced. A 2021 paper found that wage inequality tended to increase the most in countries in which companies already relied a lot on robots and that were quick to adopt the latest robotic technologies.

Second, as the post-COVID-19 workplace seeks a balance between in-person and remote working, the effects on productivity – and opinions on the subject – will remain uncertain and fluid. A 2022 study showed improved efficiencies for remote work as companies and employees grew more comfortable with work-from-home arrangements, but according to a separate 2023 study, managers and employees disagree about the impact: The former believe that remote working reduces productivity, while employees believe the opposite.

Third, society's reaction to the spread of generative AI could greatly affect its course and ultimate impact. Analyses suggest that generative AI can boost worker productivity on specific jobs – for example, one 2023 study found the staggered introduction of a generative AI-based conversational assistant increased productivity of customer service personnel by 14%. Yet there are already growing calls to consider generative AI's most severe risks and to take them seriously. On top of that, recognition of the astronomical computing and environmental costs of generative AI could limit its development and use.

Finally, given how wrong economists and other experts have been in the past, it is safe to say that many of today's predictions about AI technology's impact on work and worker productivity will prove to be wrong as well. Numbers such as 300 million jobs affected or \$4.4 trillion annual boosts to the global economy are eye-catching, yet I think people tend to give them greater credibility than warranted.

Also, "jobs affected" does not mean jobs lost; it could mean jobs augmented or even a transition to new jobs. It is best to use the analyses, such as Goldman's or McKinsey's, to spark our imaginations about the plausible scenarios about the future of work and of workers. It's better, in my view, to then proactively brainstorm the many factors that could affect which one actually comes to pass, look for early warning signs and prepare accordingly.

The history of the future of work has been full of surprises; don't be shocked if tomorrow's technologies are equally confounding.



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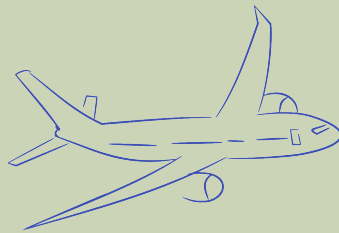
Bhaskar Chakravorti, Dean of Global Business, The Fletcher School, *Tufts University*

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## 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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*Social Media and Classics – An Facebook (18)*

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Dr. Diana Daly of the University of Arizona is the Director of iVoices, a media lab helping students produce media from their narratives on technologies. Prof Daly teaches about qualitative research, social media, and information quality at the University of Arizona.

# Regulation

NATHAN SCHNEIDER

## Key points

- Government regulations play an important (and often invisible) role in shaping the social media available in society.
- Regulation has been present throughout the history of mass media.
- Differing regulation of social media around the world is producing a “splinternet,” where people in different countries experience social media in increasingly different ways.
- Regulating social media always involves tradeoffs; achieving a certain benefit often comes with unintended costs.

## In this chapter

- Section 1: What media regulation does:
- Section 2: How regulation shaped early social media
- Section 3: A deepening “splinternet” around the world
- Section 4: Major tradeoffs of media regulation
- Core Concepts
- Core Questions
- Read It: Protect Elders! Ban Television!!



On February 8, 1996, from the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, an American rock lyricist and state legislator's son named John Perry Barlow issued a "Declaration of the Independence of Cyberspace."

Back home in the United States, Congress had recently passed the Communications Decency Act, in which the largely elderly and analog legislature asserted its power over the still nascent Internet. Barlow protested that they should keep out. He believed the Internet was a wholly new kind of place, one that Congress had no right to govern. Evoking language from the country's original Declaration of Independence, he wrote:

Governments derive their just powers from the consent of the governed. You have neither solicited nor received ours. We did not invite you. You do not know us, nor do you know our world. Cyberspace does not lie within your borders. Do not think that you can build it, as though it were a public construction project. You cannot. It is an act of nature and it grows itself through our collective actions.



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Despite Barlow's complaint, government regulation has

shaped the Internet in profound ways. The Internet itself was the product of a military research program, and government decisions made it publicly available in the first place. Since then, public policy (or the lack thereof) has affected users' daily experience of social media, as well as the fortunes of companies that reap profits from it.

Even in 1996, Barlow need not have been so worried. The following year the US Supreme Court struck down much of the Communications Decency Act for violating the First Amendment of the Constitution. One part of the law that remained standing has since become famous. It is known simply as **Section 230**. This provision protects online platforms from being sued for most of the content that users post, freeing the platform's owner to moderate as they see fit. Without this law, social media as we know it might not have been possible. Internet companies would have to behave more like offline newspapers and television stations, carefully vetting everything they publish. Section 230 meant that, at least in certain ways, the Internet could play by its own rules, just as Barlow had hoped.

Through the very law that he objected to, the Internet got a kind of declaration of independence. But that happened because of, not despite, government policy.

This chapter will explore how social media has been and continues to be shaped by the often invisible effects of legal regulation—in increasingly diverse ways around the world.

## **Section 1: What media regulation does**

Whenever media has had influence over cultural and political

life, governments have sought to regulate how media circulates. Pre-digital governments established rules about the production of manuscripts and required licenses for printing presses. The US news industry benefited early on from a postal subsidy, which reduced costs for delivery, along with the relatively expansive free speech allowed under the First Amendment. As telegraph lines enabled instantaneous communication across long distances, governments attempted to challenge the growing power of companies that controlled the lines.

The rise of radio and television came with new sets of rules about technological standards, political speech, and acceptable content. For instance, between 1949 and 1987 in the United States, the “fairness doctrine” required broadcasters to include diverse viewpoints on controversial social issues. Federal law prohibited content deemed obscene from public airwaves but was more permissive with private cable networks.

Some countries have regulated by creating high-quality, government-funded **public media** that retained independence from politicians in power. The best-known example is the British Broadcasting Corporation, or BBC, which was founded in 1922. This kind of public media can put pressure on private companies to meet higher standards of quality.

Meanwhile, governments have used **antitrust law** to prevent companies from becoming too powerful, and media companies have often been targets of antitrust action. For instance, US regulators used antitrust enforcement to break up the Bell telephone system in 1982, followed by actions against Microsoft in the 1990s and Google in the 2020s. Some scholars have argued more recently that antitrust law should have been used more for social media, such as by preventing Meta from acquiring Instagram and WhatsApp.

Media regulation enables and constrains the media available

to us in various ways. It limits what content is allowed, keeps corporate power in check, imposes technological standards, and establishes government-funded media outright. For many media consumers and producers, the role of regulation may not be obvious in their everyday lives if they never learn to see it, but it is touching their media lives nonetheless.



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## **Section 2: How regulation shaped early social media**

As online social media became increasingly mainstream in the 2000s, many of the major platforms were based in the United States, such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. The US government regulated the new social media with a light touch compared to broadcast media. Leading politicians and Silicon Valley entrepreneurs believed that important decisions should be left to the free market rather than to government. Ideas like the “independence of cyberspace” were influential. But regulation continued having far-reaching effects.

Section 230 became, in the words of legal scholar Jeff Kosseff, “the twenty-six words that created the internet.” Because of this law, content moderation was largely in the hands of platform companies, except in the most violent or abusive cases. Another legal scholar, Kate Klonick, argues that platforms became “the new governors,” usurping government’s traditional regulatory role. Section 230 has been widely criticized, both for giving platforms too much power to censor user posts and for not requiring them to censor more. But many experts also fear that without Section 230 the whole social media industry would be in peril.

One significant limit on Section 230’s protection of platform companies was the 1998 Digital Millennium Copyright Act, or DMCA. If you have ever experienced an automated removal after posting someone else’s copyrighted material, like a song or video clip, this is why. The DMCA raised the prospect of major fines for copyright infringement on the Internet. It also encouraged platforms to develop ways to pay copyright holders for the use of content that they own. The DMCA was a severe blow to the once-widespread belief that digital technology made copyright obsolete, that “information wants to be free,” as the early Internet advocate Stewart Brand once claimed.

Another important kind of regulation that has shaped social media might not seem relevant to media at all: the regulation of finance. Most major social media platforms grew thanks to a kind of financing called venture capital. This practice involves large, risky investments in companies that are expected to grow very quickly and take over entire markets. Changes to financial regulation in the 1970s and 1980s brought vast sums of money into venture capital, setting the stage for the growth-centered, all-or-nothing culture that dominates social media platforms today.

Finally, the regulation of work has also affected social media. In the early days of online communities it became a practice to compensate users with discounts for serving as moderators of chat rooms and forums. But labor regulators became concerned that this amounted to a violation of labor law, since the compensation typically did not reach the minimum wage and failed to include other benefits that employees are entitled to. Subsequently it became a norm that moderators of online communities are expected to serve as volunteers. More recently, the influencer economy has provided new ways for users to monetize their communities, such as through third-party sponsorships or revenue-sharing with the platforms.

As the social media economy has matured, leading companies have shifted from preferring to ignore government to spending many millions of dollars every year on influencing government. Much of this spending seeks to block changes that the industry sees as threatening.

Although US law has already shaped social media profoundly, the Internet has generated less ambitious regulation than radio and television did. At the same time, countries that have become dependent on US-based platforms are increasingly seeking ways to regulate their citizens' online lives more, as they see fit.

## **Section 3: A deepening “splinternet” around the world**

While media regulation usually takes place in the context of particular national governments, it is also an international concern. During the mass media era, for instance, people in many countries viewed the influx of Hollywood productions as a threat to local culture; some actively restricted the circulation

of Hollywood films to encourage homegrown entertainment industries. A 1980 United Nations report, *Many Voices, One World*, provided an international framework for policies to protect what came to be called **communication rights**—the rights of all people to express their cultures and beliefs, and to access the media necessary to be heard. This framework involved seeking a balance between the free flow of information and the ability for local communities to have collective control over their media ecosystems.

Similar concerns have returned in the age of the Internet. With most social-media platforms headquartered in just a few countries, critics have begun describing the online economy as **digital colonialism**: a situation where a wealthy few can dominate others politically, economically, and culturally. Just as earlier forms of colonialism extracted valuable raw materials from poorer countries, the argument goes, digital platforms make money from the social interactions of people whose societies do not control or benefit from those platforms. When the whistleblower Edward Snowden revealed the extent of US spying on the major platforms in 2013, both allied and adversary countries sought ways to protect their secrets and their citizens.



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The Internet is increasingly becoming what some have called a **splinternet**. A growing number of governments are asserting their sovereignty over digital space, resulting in an Internet that is more fragmented in how users experience it. The splinternet is producing social networks that are more diverse and more accountable to local societies, but it also raises the danger of greater censorship. This section will review some of the ways that the splinternet is splintering more deeply through regulation.

One type of regulation seeks consumer protection. This approach has been the focus of lawmakers in the European Union. The EU's 2016 General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), for instance, imposed a variety of rules on tech platforms for the management of their users' data. The GDPR requires foreign companies to keep data about EU citizens in the EU, and it expects platforms to obtain permission from users for all data collected. While the GDPR was mainly designed to affect EU citizens, it has shaped platforms' behavior globally. (Whenever you get a pop-up on a website asking you to let it track you with cookies, that might be because of the GDPR.) In 2022, the EU passed another sweeping regulation, the Digital Services Act, which seeks to reduce the spread of disinformation online. In these ways, European governments have become more active regulators of US-based social media giants than the US government has generally been.

Another strategy for regulation involves forms of taxation, which attempt to capture some of the value that foreign platforms generate from local economies. In Australia and Canada, governments have passed requirements that social media companies compensate news organizations when users post their content. Meanwhile, countries such as Uganda and Lebanon have tried (and ultimately failed) to impose laws on their own citizens for using social media platforms. While the



Australian and Canadian laws were attempts to fund domestic news production, the user taxes were widely seen as a form of censorship by discouraging communication that could lead to unrest.

Censorship has taken various forms across the emerging splinternet. Countries such as India and Iran have used Internet blackouts—simply shutting down the Internet for certain periods of time—to inhibit protest movements. India's government has also used the employees of foreign social media companies as leverage; if companies do not reply with the government's requests for the removal of content or accounts, the government has threatened local employees with arrest. In addition to blocking online speech, many countries have developed armies of humans and bots to flood networks with pro-government or distracting content, drowning out the dissent.

Perhaps the strongest force driving the splinternet is China's Great Firewall. This combination of technical and legal barriers has produced a Chinese Internet partially cut off from what most of the world can see. Major US platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and X, as well as Google and Wikipedia, are not available on the Chinese Internet. But **the great firewall** is not merely a tool of censorship, as Western critics tend to describe it. By preventing foreign access to its growing consumer market, China has developed the only major platform economy that poses a significant challenge to US-based companies. Chinese platforms such as WeChat have developed features that US platforms have sought—often in vain—to copy. Regulators in China have also developed rules for ensuring certain privacy protections, limiting corporate power, and overseeing the algorithms that choose what users encounter. China has also exported its Great Firewall techniques to other countries seeking more control over their Internet, such as Iran and Russia.

When TikTok became the first Chinese-owned social media platform to gain mass adoption in the US market, the US got a taste of its own medicine—a taste of what others had long been calling digital colonialism. Elected officials began to worry about how the popular app could become an asset for the Chinese government in a conflict, whether through its data on US users or its ability to manipulate flows of information. States and the federal government began restricting use of the app among government employees and, in some cases, entire populations. Although the US has often championed an open, unfettered Internet, it is revealing that its leaders have reacted in ways similar to those of other countries when faced with similar threats.

## Section 4: Major tradeoffs of media regulation

Regulating social media always involves tradeoffs. A **tradeoff** occurs when no course of action is perfect and decision-makers must find a balance among competing values. This chapter ends with a few of the major tradeoffs that seem to arise with every attempt to regulate social media.

Free speech vs. safety. Free speech sounds good in theory, but it can less so in practice. One person's free speech can result in harm to other people, making them feel less comfortable speaking the truth as they see it. At the same time, efforts to help users feel safe through rule-making can dampen the liveliness of an online community. Online networks are powerful precisely because they are less constrained than earlier forms of media. But truly free speech is only possible within the context of some constraints. To experience some of

these tradeoffs for yourself, try playing the free game Trust & Safety Tycoon.

Free enterprise vs. democratic oversight. The Internet as we know it arose through both government investment and private entrepreneurship. Startup companies have built the most successful social media platforms, exhibiting a kind of creativity and risk-taking that governments often lack. This is partly why Section 230 put a lot of trust in platform companies to moderate content based on the pressures they get from the market. Yet when startups become successful, their appetite for risk can have enormous consequences for society, mental health, the economy, and politics. Managing potential risks is why the GDPR sought to strengthen government control over platforms, especially foreign ones. Regulators seek to find the right balance—to foster a vibrant market of ideas and products while ensuring that the market plays by rules determined through democratic processes.

Local control vs. global standards. Part of the Internet's early promise was to bring people together across borders. In countries that have historically restricted free speech, social media platforms based abroad can give people a way to say what they otherwise could not. But as the advocates of communication rights might remind us, global flows of information can threaten local cultures. Governments have increasingly sought to assert local values and priorities over those of the major global platforms. But human rights advocates also worry that the quest for local control will result in losing the opportunity for a more free, interconnected world.

No genuine tradeoff is easy; it wouldn't be a tradeoff if it were. The major challenges of regulation involve trying to find balance in dilemmas where the answer is not obvious. Societies will have different ideas about what that balance should look

like—and those differences are splintering the Internet into many pieces.

Regulation has already, and always, shaped the social media we already experience. The effects of regulation can be hard to see. But learning to see regulation helps us recognize that the media ecosystems around us are the result of choices—choices with both intended and unintended consequences. To see the regulatory choices made in the past can help us see more clearly how our choices today might affect the future.

## Core Concepts and Questions

### Core Concepts

#### ***Antitrust law***

A form of regulation that challenges the power of companies when their behavior restricts the competitiveness of markets or harms consumers.

## ***Communication rights***

An application of human rights to media and communication, seeking to ensure that individuals and communities around the world have access to the free expression and the tools they need to be heard.

## ***Digital colonialism***

The belief that Internet platforms are means of domination and oppression, particularly for people far from where the platform companies are headquartered.

## ***The Great Firewall***

China's combination of technology and policy that cuts the country off from platforms that are dominant elsewhere in the world, used as both a tool for enabling local entrepreneurship and political censorship.

## ***Public media***

Media organizations that are funded by governments to pursue a social purpose, while retaining editorial independence from politicians.

## ***Section 230***

Part of the 1996 Communications Decency Act in the United States, protecting online platforms from liability for the content that their users post.

## ***Splinternet***

Coined by researcher Clyde Wayne Crews in 2001, the observation that the Internet is increasingly splintering into a set of distinct networks due to differing regulatory regimes.

## ***Tradeoff***

A situation where a problem requires finding a balance among competing ideals, and choosing to emphasize one value may cause harm to another.

## Core Questions

### A. Questions for qualitative thought:

1. What kinds of regulation shape your everyday social media use?
2. What kinds of regulation for social media do you think are missing? What rules would make your relationship to social media healthier? What tradeoffs could those rules require?
3. How is your experience with social media different from what people experience in other regulatory contexts?

### B. Review: Which is the best answer?



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## C. Game on!

<https://trustandsafety.fun/>



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## Related Content

### Read It: Protect Elders! Ban Television!!

(Some thoughts on the efforts to regulate children's use of social media)



Have you noticed how many people ages 65+ watch television every day? According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, almost 90% of those in this age bracket watch TV Every.Single.Day!!!! ::gasp:: And that data was collected before the pandemic! By <hand-waving logics of a moral panic>, it must be so much worse now!

And they don't just watch a little bit. According to Nielsen, before the pandemic, these elders were watching over 7 hours a day of television! Our elders are glued to their boob tubes.

Television is a *serious* problem! Their brains are wasting away. Their health is suffering. Their ability to maintain friends is declining. They're unable to recognize disinformation. Elders' brains are not fully baked anymore; they can't handle television. This foolish medium is making fools out of our elders, making them unable to participate responsibly in a democratic society. We must put a stop to this. We must stop TV!

And if we can't stop TV, we must prevent them from watching it!

It is time that we protect our elders by unplugging them. Clearly they won't do it themselves. And clearly we can't figure out how to regulate television. So we must regulate our elders' use of television. For their own good!

Going forward: Only those under 65 should be allowed to watch television.

Now, I know that our elders won't see how important it is that we do this to them for their own good so we need to develop newfangled surveillance technology to ensure that no one over 65 can turn on their television set. Sure, that technology might be a little creepy, but how bad can it be? It's not like age verification face scanning technologies could be racist, right?! And sure, some of those sneaky elders might think that they can trick the system by getting plastic surgery or wearing makeup, but we can put a stop to that too, right? We just need to collect more data from them. I mean, what could go wrong if we collected their name, date of birth, and social security number? That way we'll know that they're *really* who they say they are. Those sneaky elders.

Le sigh.

## What is New is Old



For over a decade, I studied how teenagers use social media. I had a front row seat to multiple moral panics. I even wrote an entire book dedicated to unpacking said moral panics: *It's Complicated: The Social Life of Networked Teens*. I was also a co-lead on a task force on internet safety where we were asked to identify the dangers that youth were facing and identify interventions that would help. With the help of an amazing advisory board, Andrew Schrock and I scoured the research space trying to map out the different risks teens faced vis-a-vis solicitation, harassment, and problematic content. Little did I understand at the time that my *real* job was to “prove” that age verification technologies were the “solution” to all online safety problems. I learned that lesson the hard way when our research led us to a different set of recommended interventions. This lesson was pounded into me when a

state Attorney General yelled at me to “go find different data” and when a Frontline reporter told me that she was encouraged to investigate my efforts to show that I was falsifying data to defend tech companies. (She concluded I was *not* falsifying data and the story never happened.)

But here we are again. A new moral panic is unfolding around teenagers’ use of social media. And once again, the “solution” seems to be to restrict access and use age verification technologies to enforce this approach. A few weeks ago, Utah took the first stab with a law that prohibits minors from accessing social media “without parental permission.” At first blush, this looks like an extension of the federal Children’s Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA) that requires for-profit websites that collect data about children under 13 to get permission from parents.

COPPA seemed like a good idea at the time it was passed back in the 1990s. In practice, COPPA is the reason why all sites require you to be 13+ to join. Of course, every social media company knows children under the age of 13 are lying about their age to get access to their sites. A decade ago, Eszter Hargittai, Jason Schultz, John Palfrey, and I decided to figure out what parents thought about this. We quickly discovered that parents teach their kids to lie to get access to social media. So much for that being effective. (Full disclosure: I created dozens of accounts for my kids for different sites during the pandemic. Over and over, I’ve been stymied by the processes of parental approval and just given up and given them a false birthdate.)

Utah's law goes beyond COPPA because it's not just worried about data privacy and advertisement. It's centered on a purported mental health crisis that kids are facing, supposedly because of social media.

All of this seems to connect back to a dubious interpretation of a Centers for Disease Control report on "Youth Risk Behavior." The report is super interesting. It turns out that teenagers are having less sex (although those who are might be engaged in more risky sex). It also turns out that bullying at school declined during the pandemic (duh) but that bullying online didn't go up or down even then.

But the thing that caught the eye of regulators was that mental health seems to have skyrocketed in recent years. I looked at this data and shook my head. My head swirled thinking about the pandemic, the rise in financial instability and food scarcity in some communities, the rising costs of college, the rise in visible hate speech, anti-trans and anti-abortion legislation, the fear kids have of a mass shooter at school, and a slew of other trends that I hear young people angst about. But apparently regulators preferred a different interpretation. They looked at this and went: "blame social media!!!"

Jessica Grose took many of these interpretations to task in her op-ed "Stop Treating Adolescent Girls as Emotionally Abnormal." I want to call particular attention to her colleague's remark: "The most predictable thing in the world is for people to respond to this article with their own reasons for why this is taking place based entirely on their own specific hills on which they have decided to die."

Still, most news coverage of these stories were full of sheer panic. WashPo responded to this study with a story titled “The crisis of student mental health is much vaster than we realize.” Their editorial board followed up with a note that “America’s teens are in crisis. States are racing to respond.” My immediate thought was: are they? They’re looking to ban social media as though that’s the *cause* of this crisis. As though if social media goes away, the problem will go away. A Financial Times reporter took it to the next level, conflating correlation and causation with the headline that “Smartphones and social media are destroying children’s mental health” (note: the story itself is full of hedge language like “may”). And then a writer at The New Yorker penned a piece entitled “The case for banning children from social media” that hinges on his own experiences as a parent.

I cringed. One basic rule of research is never to take one’s personal experiences as extrapolate based on them. And one thing I learned as a researcher of young people is that parents will always look for something to blame in a way that minimizes their own agency. And I get it. Parenting is haaaard. And emotionally exhausting. And guilt-inducing. It’s soooo much safer to justify the situation that’s frustrating you by blaming structural conditions that you can’t do anything about. But it’s not honest. And it doesn’t hold up empirically.

The CDC survey offers sound empirical evidence that young people are currently reporting higher levels of duress. There’s also a lot of other empirical signal that mental health struggles are on the rise. Those who follow these trends over decades aren’t be surprised.



Adults are also more anxious and more depressed right now. It turns out that tends to impact kids. Financial instability, political polarization, food scarcity, geopolitical conflict, and many other factors tend to correlate with anxiety and depression, even if causality is messier. Lots of trend lines are all over the place right now on lots of different measures.

Two “new” factors are harder to evaluate. One is the pandemic. Researchers generally expect this to have negative repercussions within community but it’ll take a lot of work to tease out what is the pandemic directly and what are ripple effects (e.g., financial instability). The other new one that has become the modern day boogie many is whatever the new technology is. Social media (and, more recently, mobile phones) have been favorites for the last decade.

My research consistently found that teens turn to these technologies to connect with others, especially when they were struggling. Surprise surprise, when kids were stuck at home during the pandemic, they wanted to talk with their friends via phone, social media, and in video games. When young people feel isolated, they look for others like them in various online fora. And so, yes, there will be a correlation between certain kinds of online behaviors and mental health states.

Where things get dicier concerns causality. Chicken and egg. Does social media *cause* mental health problems? Or is it where mental health problems become visible? I can guarantee you that there are examples of both. But here’s the thing.... Going to school and church are often a “cause” of mental health duress. Parents and siblings are often a source of

mental health duress. No one in their right mind would argue that we need to prevent all youth from attending school or church or living with their parents or siblings. We take a more tempered approach because there are also very real situations in which we need to remove *some* children from *some* environments (namely abusive ones).

So why do we want to remove ALL children from social media?

This is a story of control, not a story of protecting the well-being of children.

A century ago, we forced teenagers into compulsory high school to prevent them from being able to fraternize with older adults because we were afraid that 16yos would compete with adults for jobs as the Great Depression was unfolding. Fifty years ago, moral panics around comic books normalized a world in which we restricted children's access to content. Can we admit that much of this content was political in nature and those who restricted it opposed those politics? Now we're back to book banning and "don't say gay" frames. This is not about children's mental health. This is about preventing children from being active members of our contemporary political polis. This is about using rhetoric around children's "innocence" to ensure that they don't encounter views that politicians don't want them to have. This isn't new. This is as old of a strategy as it gets.

I care *deeply* about children's mental health. And there's a lot that can and should be done. Let's start with giving every child access to mental healthcare.

Let's make talking to a counselor free. Let's ensure that children can talk to a trained therapist without being surveilled by their parents (or even needing parental permission).

I am *deeeeeeeeply* worried about social and structural conditions that increase mental health crises. Let's eradicate food scarcity. Let's make it possible for parents to stay home with newborns and sick children without being docked pay or losing their jobs. Let's build a social safety net.

I also fully know how frustrating it is to see your own child struggling and escaping into a zombie state in front of a screen. But parents, please take a deep breath and look at the situation more holistically. Why is this giving them pleasure? What are they escaping? What social itch are they scratching? And are you able to create other paths for pleasure, escape, and socialization?

## Revisiting Our Collective Habits

I began this post satirically by focusing on elders and television. But let's also be real. Many elders *do* have a seriously unhealthy relationship with television at this point. We know that the answer is not to ban elders from accessing TV (even if some of us might really really want that). But what we can see in this unhealthy dynamic is an important lesson about habits, a lesson that applies to all of us.

Many elders got into the habit of watching TV years

ago. It may have started out with the nightly news or prime time TV, an opportunity to escape after an exhausting day of work. And it expanded from there. For many, the pandemic made it much worse. And as they watched more TV, it got harder to do other things. Other things were exhausting physically. Or mentally.

This is not the only bad habit we've seen adults develop over time. We have a better framework for talking about what happens when a glass of wine after work turns into a bottle of wine a day habit.

What we do know is that breaking habits is HARD. And it's hard for everyone. This is why, as parents, we don't want to see our kids develop bad habits. And, especially after the acute phase of the pandemic, many of us recognize that we — and our kids — have gotten into bad habits around technology. We used technology as a babysitter while we were trying to work from home. And we haven't broken that habit at all. But block our kids from accessing social media through regulation will not produce a healthy response to technology overnight. If we want to change our habits in relationship to technology because we don't like them, we need to be thoughtful about them.

When I was spending lots of time with teenagers, one of the things that they always told me was that parents were the real addicts. They couldn't let go of their phone (or Twitter or ...). I looked around and realized how true this is. Go to a kids' sports game or playground and you'll see a bunch of parents staring into their devices. So, parents, here's a thing you can do. Every time you pick up your device in front of your kids, verbalize what you're doing. "I'm looking up directions"

will be easy to say out loud. “You’re annoying me so I’m going to look at TikTok” will be far more uncomfortable. Set a new habit. Be visible about why *you* are using technology and ask your kids to do the same. Talk with them about *your* bad habits and ask them to hold *you* accountable. Then you can build trust and ask the same of them.

These bills aren’t tools to empower parents or address a very real mental health crisis. They’re a mechanism to control youth, enrich age verification vendors, and turn our kids into political pawns.

These laws sound good because we are worried about our kids and because there is deep and reasonable animosity towards Big Tech. (The geopolitical fight over TikTok is adding to the chaos.) Let’s pass data privacy laws that protect all of us (including our elders who are an identity theft nightmare!). Let’s build mental health infrastructure. Let’s increase our social safety net. But please please, let us not ban children from social media “for their own safety.” Cuz that’s just not what this is about.

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### **About the Author:**

My name is danah boyd and I’m a Partner Researcher at Microsoft Research and the founder/president of Data & Society. Buzzwords in my world include: privacy, census, context, algorithms, equity, justice. I use this blog to express random thoughts about whatever I’m thinking.

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## About the author



Nathan Schneider

# Privacy and Publics

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

DIANA DALY

## Key points

- Online norms regarding privacy are dynamic and carry significant consequences, particularly in the realm of social media
- The concept of “publics” is explored, emphasizing that online audiences aren’t a singular entity but diverse groups paying sustained attention to specific content.
- Networked publics, formed through social media connections, highlight the role of individuals as bridges connecting different publics.
- Privacy in online publics is complex; the oversimplified dichotomy of private vs. public fails to capture the intricacies of social relationships in digital spaces.
- Evolving nature of online norms and the challenges of defining and protecting privacy in the dynamic landscape of networked publics.

In this chapter

- Section 1: Not “the public” – They’re publics, and they’re networked
  - Student Insights: Navigating the ties and threats of networked publics (audio by Ibrahim Sadi, Fall 2020)
- Section 2: Privacy Norms in Online Publics
  - Student Insights: Different Cultural Publics (writing by Sofia Diaz, Fall 2020)
- Section 3: Civil inattention
- Section 4: Coordinated public attention online
  - Student insights: First encounter with social media (video by Brooke, Spring 2021)
- Section 5: Why privacy is such a tangled issue online
- Section 6: The value of human data
- Mary Louise and Sorority Surveillance — Social Media and Ourselves podcast
- Core Concepts
- Core Questions
- Your sense of privacy evolved over millennia – that puts you at risk today but could improve technology tomorrow

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.

## **Section 1: 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, and laughter.



*Statue of  
female  
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.

## Student Insights: Navigating the ties and threats of networked publics

(audio by Ibrahim Sadi, Fall 2020)



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## Section 2: 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.

## Student Insights: Different Cultural Publics (writing by Sofia Diaz, Fall 2020)



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### Section 3: 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 a 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.

## Section 4: Coordinated public attention online

### *Cancel Culture*



*Follow Your Dreams Cancelled in Chinatown, Boston by Chris Devers; Banksy, <https://www.flickr.com/photos/cdevers/4602805654/in/photostream/>, CC By-NC-ND*

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 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. Consider the mural by the artist Banksy. A painter stands beside the whimsical phrase “FOLLOW YOUR DREAMS” upon which the red label “CANCELLED” is affixed, serving as a vivid visual representation of Cancel Culture and the real economic and identity-level threats it poses. There is power in shaming, silencing, and censoring.

Partisan North American groups hold divided views on cancel culture, according to 2021 research by Pew. Fortunately, we do not all need to think in polarities or extremes. Cancel culture is not uniformly good or bad. It is an opportunity for all citizens to consider: How should such 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? I offer two well-reasoned perspectives to consider if you aren't sure: Jon Ronson's BBC podcast *So You've Been Publicly Shamed*, which views those called out with empathy; and this CTZNwell Substack on callout culture as accountability.

### *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.

Toxicity is technologically exacerbated or worsened, but not technologically determined. 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. However, development of theory related to the online disinhibition effect occurred in the 20th century, before most social media, and before participatory culture developed some of the systematic toxicity we see online today.

In the first decades of the 21st century, it has become clear that inequities including racism and gender bias are amplified in online publics, making online spaces much more fraught for attacks upon those identifying as women and those with non-dominant genders and racial identities. This dynamic has deep roots in social history, and is exacerbated by media manipulation, with groups coordinating attacks to maintain dominant cultural norms.

## Student insights: First encounter with social media (video by Brooke, Spring 2021)



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## Section 5: 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. Invasion of privacy and its potential consequences can be defined in many ways; 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."

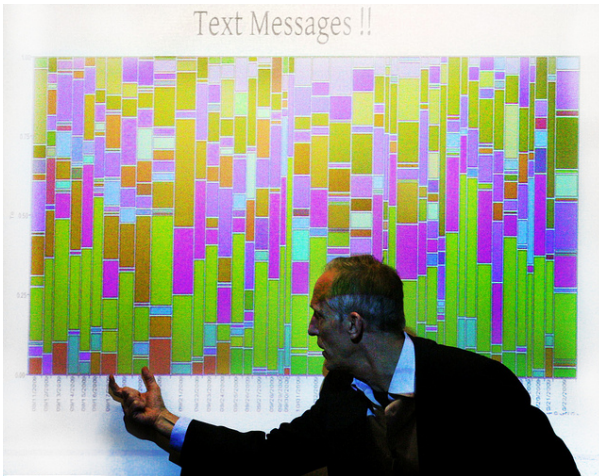
Privacy... is too complex a concept to be reduced to a singular essence. It is a plurality of different things that do not share any one element but nevertheless bear a

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.

## Section 6: 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.

# Mary Louise and Sorority Surveillance — Social Media and Ourselves podcast



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## Mary Louise and Sorority Surveillance

*Release date: January 1st 2022*

“There’s a lot of pressure on sorority girls in particular to perform and to act like a typical sorority girl. But in reality, they’re just being surveyed and watched over at every second.” Gabe Stultz and Prof Daly guide us through stories illustrating the three levels of sorority behavior policing and how they play out on Instagram, Snapchat, and Greek Rank. Produced by Diana Daly and Gabe Stultz, with deep thanks to the students who shared their stories.



LISTEN · LISTEN WITH TRANSCRIPT

**Respond to this podcast episode...** How did the podcast episode “Mary Louise and Sorority Surveillance” use interviews, student voices, or sounds to demonstrate a current or past social trend phenomenon? If you were making a sequel to this episode, what voices or sounds would you include to help listeners understand more about this trend, and why?

## Core Concepts and Questions

### Core Concepts

#### ***a public***

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

## ***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

## ***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

## ***civil inattention***

Sociologist Erving Goffman's term for the common understanding that in crowded spaces, you may politely acknowledge others, but you do not get into 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

## ***dynamic***

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

## ***networked publics***

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

## ***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

## ***privacy***

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

## ***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)

## ***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

## 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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## C. Game on!



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**Consider It: Your sense of privacy evolved over millennia – that puts you at risk today but could improve technology tomorrow**



People are good at avoiding prying eyes, but avoiding online snoops – not so much.

Donald Iain Smith/Moment via Getty Images  
Laura Brandimarte, *University of Arizona* and  
Alessandro Acquisti, *Carnegie Mellon University*

Many people think of privacy as a modern invention, an anomaly made possible by the rise of urbanization. If

that were the case, then acquiescing to the current erosion of privacy might not be particularly alarming.

As calls for Congress to protect privacy increase, it's important to understand its nature. In a policy brief in Science, we and our colleague Jeff Hancock suggest that understanding the nature of privacy calls for a better understanding of its origins.

Research evidence refutes the notion that privacy is a recent invention. While privacy rights or values may be modern notions, examples of privacy norms and privacy-seeking behaviors abound across cultures throughout human history and across geography.

As privacy researchers who study information systems and behavioral research and public policy, we believe that accounting for the potential evolutionary roots of privacy concerns can help explain why people struggle with privacy today. It may also help inform the development of technologies and policies that can better align the digital world with the human sense of privacy.

## **The misty origins of privacy**

Humans have sought and attempted to manage privacy since the dawn of civilization. People from ancient Greece to ancient China were concerned with the boundaries of public and private life. The male head of the household, or pater familias, in ancient Roman families would have his slaves move their cots to some

remote corner of the house when he wanted to spend the evening alone.

Attention to privacy is also found in preindustrial societies. For example, the Mehinacu tribe in South America lived in communal accommodations but built private houses miles away for members to achieve some seclusion.



According to Genesis in the Bible, Adam and Eve 'realized they were naked' and covered themselves. Cleveland Museum of Art via Wikimedia

Evidence of a drive toward privacy can even be found in the holy texts of ancient monotheistic religions: the Quran's instructions against spying on one another, the Talmud's advice not to place windows overlooking neighbors' windows, and the biblical story of Adam and

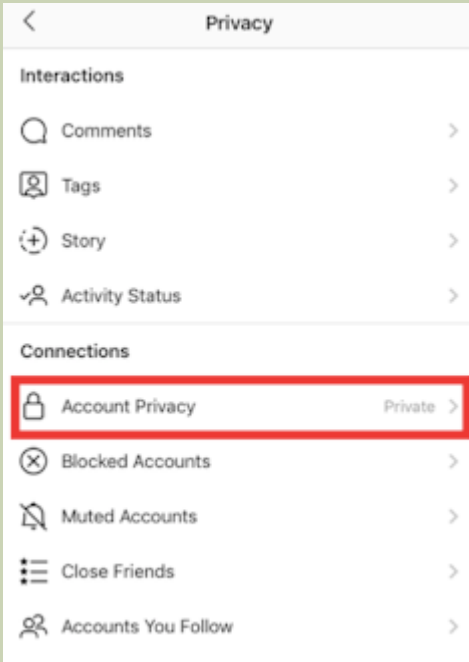
Eve covering their nakedness after eating the forbidden fruit.

The drive for privacy appears to be simultaneously culturally specific and culturally universal. Norms and behaviors change across peoples and times, but all cultures seem to manifest a drive for it. Scholars in the past century who studied the history of privacy provide an explanation for this: Privacy concerns may have evolutionary roots.

By this account, the need for privacy evolved from physical needs for protection, security and self-interest. The ability to sense the presence of others and choose exposure or seclusion provides an evolutionary advantage: a “sense” of privacy.

Humans’ sense of privacy helps them regulate the boundaries of public and private with efficient, instinctual mastery. You notice when a stranger is walking too close behind you. You typically abandon the topic of conversation when a distant acquaintance approaches while you are engaged in an intimate discussion with a friend.

## Privacy blind spots



People do not have an intuitive understanding of website and software privacy policies and settings. Scar8840/Wikimedia, CC BY-SA

An evolutionary theory of privacy helps explain the hurdles people face in protecting personal information online, even when they claim to care about privacy. Human senses and the new digital reality are mismatched. Online, our senses fail us. You do not see Facebook tracking your activity in order to profile and

influence you. You do not hear law enforcement taking your picture to identify you.

Humans might have evolved to use their senses to alert them to privacy risks, but those same senses put humans at a disadvantage when they try to identify privacy risks in the online world. Online sensory cues are lacking, and worse, dark patterns – malicious website design elements – trick those senses into perceiving a risky situation as safe.

This may explain why privacy notice and consent mechanisms – so popular with tech companies and for a long time among policymakers – fail to address the problem of privacy. They place the burden for understanding privacy risks on consumers, with notices and settings that are often ineffectual or gamed by platforms and tech companies.

These mechanisms fail because people react to privacy invasions viscerally, using their senses more than their cognition.

## **Protecting privacy in the digital age**

An evolutionary account of privacy shows that if society is determined to protect people's ability to manage the boundaries of public and private in the modern age, privacy protection needs to be embedded in the very fabric of digital systems. When the evolving technology of cars made them so fast that drivers' reaction times became unreliable tools for avoiding accidents and collisions, policymakers stepped in to drive

technological responses such as seat belts and, later, airbags.

*[The Conversation's science, health and technology editors pick their favorite stories. Weekly on Wednesdays.]*

Ensuring online privacy also requires a coordinated combination of technology and policy interventions. Baseline safeguards of data protection, such as those in the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development's Guidelines on the Protection of Privacy and Transborder Flows of Personal Data, can be achieved with the right technologies.

Examples include data analysis techniques that preserve anonymity, such as the ones enabled by differential privacy, privacy enhancing technologies such as user-friendly encrypted email services and anonymous browsing, and personalized intelligent privacy assistants, which learn users' privacy preferences.

These technologies have the potential to preserve privacy without hurting modern society's reliance on collecting and analyzing data. And since the incentives of industry players to exploit the data economy are unlikely to disappear, we believe that regulatory interventions that support the development and deployment of these technologies will be necessary.

Laura Brandimarte, Assistant Professor of Management Information Systems, *University of Arizona* and Alessandro Acquisti, Professor of Information Technology and Public Policy, *Carnegie Mellon University*

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## About the author



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Dr. Diana Daly of the University of Arizona is the Director of iVoices, a media lab helping students produce media from their narratives on technologies. Prof Daly teaches about qualitative research, social media, and information quality at the University of Arizona.

# Algorithms

## *Invisible, Irreversible, and Infinite*

DIANA DALY

### Key points

- Computers execute tasks through simple step-by-step instructions, breaking down complex actions.
- Human adaptability contrasts with computers' literal interpretation, evident in the need for explicit instructions.
- Human software developers significantly shape the capabilities of modern computers.
- Programming languages reflect biases, affecting the diversity of computer programming practitioners.
- The Three I's – Invisible, Irreversible, and Infinite – pose challenges in algorithmic decision-making, leading to opaque, permanent, and extensive biases.

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- Section 2: Two reasons computers seem so smart today

- Student Insights: (Anti-)Social Media Algorithms (writing by Omar, Fall 2020)
- Section 3: Programming and bias
  - Student insights: First experience with technology (video by Blaze Mutware, Spring 2021)
- Section 4: How can computers carry bias?
- Section 5: Exacerbating Bias in Algorithms: The Three I's
  - Student Insights: microcelebrity in the age of algorithms (writing by Lily, Spring 2021)
- Section 6: Fighting Unjust Algorithms
- Parasocial and Parasitical — Social Media and Ourselves podcast
- Core Concepts
- Core Questions
- Electronic Freedom Foundation's "Algorithms for a Just Future"
- Social media algorithms warp how people learn from each other, research shows

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

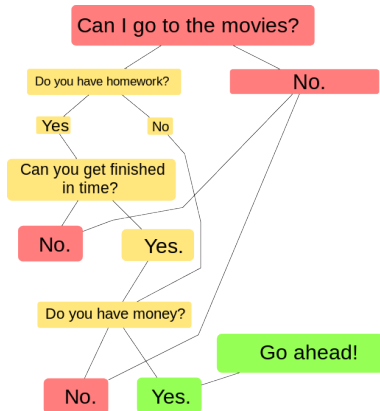
from point A to point B (or point Z). In this chapter, we will look into how computing algorithms work, who tends to create them, and how that affects their outcomes. We will also consider whether certain algorithms should be used at all.

## Section 1: 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.

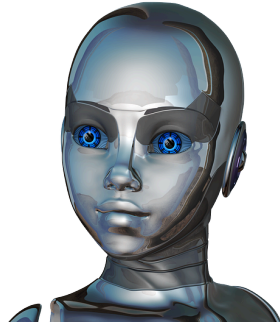
Computers don't know anything unless someone has already given them instructions that are explicit, with every step fully explained. Humans, on the other hand, can figure things out if they skip steps, and can make sense of tacit instructions. But give a computer instructions that skip steps or include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



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

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 third student, a



*A robot: Having a computer for a brain makes a robot a very simple-minded student. (Image: Robot graphic by DrSJS, [https://pixabay.com/p-320262/?no\\_redirect](https://pixabay.com/p-320262/?no_redirect), Public Domain.)*

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 telling 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 the 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.

## Section 2: 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.

```
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.

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

If only humans were always good teachers.

# Student Insights: (Anti-)Social Media Algorithms (writing by Omar, Fall 2020)

## Social Media During School



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**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.

## Teaching machines the best and worst about ourselves



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In 2016, Microsoft introduced Tay, an AI online robot they

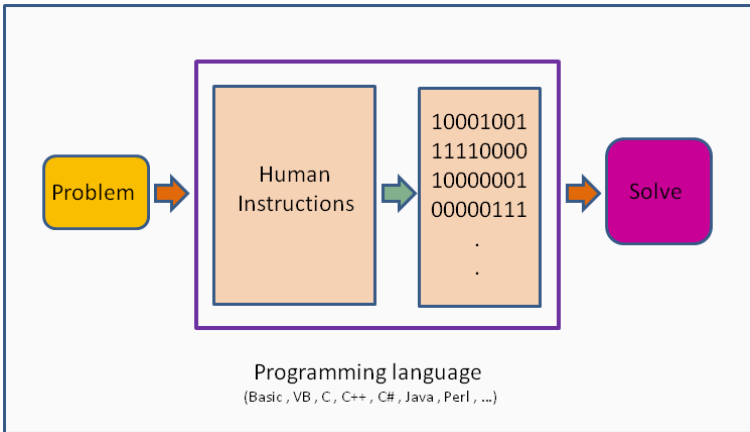
branded as a young female. Their intention was for Tay to learn to communicate from internet users who conversed with her on Twitter – and learn what she did. Within a few hours, Tay’s social media posts were so infected with violence, racism, sexism, and other bigotry that Microsoft had to take her 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.

## Section 3: 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.



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.

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.

## Student insights: First experience with technology (video by Blaze Mutware, Spring 2021)

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## Section 4: 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 the 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.”

### *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.





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*Click here for a captioned version of this video.*

## **Section 5: 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**.

## Student Insights: microcelebrity in the age of algorithms (writing by Lily, Spring 2021)

affordances of social media, our society has turned to using the platform for more selfish reasons- such as the fame granted when going viral.\n\nThere 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.\n\nAt 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.\n\nCurrently, 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.\n\nAs 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.\n\nUltimately 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.\n\nIt 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.\"

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**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?

## **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.



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Want to see more? There are four episodes in this series, available in full here. Following are links to these episodes with captions: Episode 2 – Episode 3 – Episode 4.

## Section 6: Fighting Unjust Algorithms

Algorithms are laden with errors. Some of these errors can be traced to the biases of those that 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, as 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 the 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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## Parasocial and Parasitical — Social Media and Ourselves podcast



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## Parasocial and Parasitical

*Release date: September 1st, 2021*

An interview with Dr. Victor Braitberg about the machinations by social media platforms that help us form online relationships – and help them profit from it all. Is this good? Bad? Or The Truman Show? Produced by Jacquie Kuru and Gabe Stultz.

LISTEN · LISTEN WITH TRANSCRIPT

***Respond to this podcast episode...****How did the podcast episode “Parasocial and Parasitical” use interviews, student voices, or sounds to demonstrate a current or past social trend phenomenon? If you were making a sequel to this episode, what voices or sounds would you include to help listeners understand more about this trend, and why?*

# 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)

### ***biases***

assumptions about a person, culture, or population

### ***black box algorithms***

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

### ***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

### ***The three I's***

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

### ***why computers seem so smart today***

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

## 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 for 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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## C. Game on!



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## Related Content

### 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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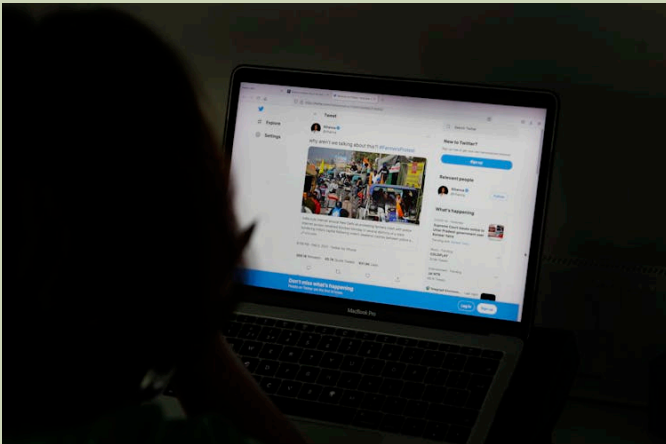
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## Read it: Social media algorithms warp how people learn from each other, research shows



Social media pushes evolutionary buttons.

AP Photo/Manish Swarup

William Brady, *Northwestern University*

People's daily interactions with online algorithms affect how they learn from others, with negative consequences including social misperceptions, conflict and the spread of misinformation, my colleagues and I have found.

People are increasingly interacting with others in social media environments where algorithms control the flow of social information they see. Algorithms determine in part which messages, which people and which ideas social media users see.

On social media platforms, algorithms are mainly designed to amplify information that sustains engagement, meaning they keep people clicking on content and coming back to the platforms. I'm a social psychologist, and my colleagues and I have found evidence suggesting that a side effect of this design is that algorithms amplify information people are strongly biased to learn from. We call this information "PRIME," for prestigious, in-group, moral and emotional information.

In our evolutionary past, biases to learn from PRIME information were very advantageous: Learning from prestigious individuals is efficient because these people are successful and their behavior can be copied. Paying attention to people who violate moral norms is important because sanctioning them helps the community maintain cooperation.

But what happens when PRIME information becomes

amplified by algorithms and some people exploit algorithm amplification to promote themselves? Prestige becomes a poor signal of success because people can fake prestige on social media. Newsfeeds become oversaturated with negative and moral information so that there is conflict rather than cooperation.

The interaction of human psychology and algorithm amplification leads to dysfunction because social learning supports cooperation and problem-solving, but social media algorithms are designed to increase engagement. We call this mismatch functional misalignment.

## Why it matters

One of the key outcomes of functional misalignment in algorithm-mediated social learning is that people start to form incorrect perceptions of their social world. For example, recent research suggests that when algorithms selectively amplify more extreme political views, people begin to think that their political in-group and out-group are more sharply divided than they really are. Such “false polarization” might be an important source of greater political conflict.

<https://youtube.com/watch?v=WLfr7sU5W2E%3Fwmode%3Dtransparent%26start%3D0>

Social media algorithms amplify extreme political views.

Functional misalignment can also lead to greater spread of misinformation. A recent study suggests that people who are spreading political misinformation leverage moral and emotional information – for example, posts that provoke moral outrage – in order to get people to share it more. When algorithms amplify moral and emotional information, misinformation gets included in the amplification.

## **What other research is being done**

In general, research on this topic is in its infancy, but there are new studies emerging that examine key components of algorithm-mediated social learning. Some studies have demonstrated that social media algorithms clearly amplify PRIME information.

Whether this amplification leads to offline polarization is hotly contested at the moment. A recent experiment found evidence that Meta's newsfeed increases polarization, but another experiment that involved a collaboration with Meta found no evidence of polarization increasing due to exposure to their algorithmic Facebook newsfeed.

More research is needed to fully understand the outcomes that emerge when humans and algorithms interact in feedback loops of social learning. Social media companies have most of the needed data, and I believe that they should give academic researchers access to it while also balancing ethical concerns such as privacy.

## What's next

A key question is what can be done to make algorithms foster accurate human social learning rather than exploit social learning biases. My research team is working on new algorithm designs that increase engagement while also penalizing PRIME information. We argue that this might maintain user activity that social media platforms seek, but also make people's social perceptions more accurate.

*The Research Brief is a short take on interesting academic work.*

William Brady, Assistant Professor of Management and Organizations, *Northwestern University*

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Dr. Diana Daly of the University of Arizona is the Director of iVoices, a media lab helping students produce media from their narratives on technologies. Prof Daly teaches about qualitative research, social media, and information quality at the University of Arizona.

# Equity and Gender

DIANA DALY

## Key Points

- The chapter lays a crucial foundation by delineating the distinctions between equity and equality, setting the stage for a nuanced exploration of women's rights activism.
- Online movements transcend borders, uniting local and global initiatives against systematic violence, fostering a sense of shared purpose.
- Social media serves as a catalyst, amplifying private struggles into public conversations, providing visibility and support for marginalized voices.
- Complexities arise from the close coexistence of individuals identifying as "men" and "women," impacting activism dynamics and communication patterns.
- Striking a balance between online privacy and visibility is explored, especially within the LGBTQIA+ community, shedding light on the challenges faced.
- Hashtags, exemplified by movements like #SaveDinaAli and #NiUnaMenos, play a pivotal role, fostering connectivity, spreading awareness, and sometimes succumbing to misinformation.

- The #MeToo movement, although not initially labeled creative online activism, prompts critical reflection on inclusivity and complexity amid its widespread impact.

In this chapter

- Section 1: What is equity? What is gender?
  - Student Insights: The dangers of social media (video by Sydney, Spring 2021)
- Section 2: Meming of hashtags and more
- Section 3: How social media can help women's causes in particular
- Section 4: Demonstrations online and across the Americas against gender violence
  - Student Insights: Experiencing targeted hate online (audio & writing by iVoices Media Lab Student, Spring 2021)
- Section 5: The #MeToo Movement in the U.S.
- Girl Meets Chud — Social Media and Ourselves podcast
- Core Concepts
- Core Questions
- Black Lives Matter protests are shaping how people understand racial inequality

This is a 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.

## Section 1: What is equity? What is gender?



*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.*

Stated simply, this chapter is about equity for women. Unlike equality, which means treating everyone the same, **equity** considers the different circumstances that may lead to different support needs, and adjusts support based on need. The concept of *equity* can be used when considering rights and resource allocation for many types of groups. It is used here, when referring to challenges women face that play out online, because those challenges can be invisible obstacles. 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**, drawing 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.

## Student Insights: The dangers of social media (video by Sydney, Spring 2021)

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## 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. The goal 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.

## 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. However, organizers started the #SaveDinaAli campaign to help her and women in similar situations and draw attention to Saudi women's human rights abuses. 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 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 public interest in women's right to drive, as did the account @SaudiWomenSpring on Facebook.

## **Section 2: 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.

*From the Social Media & Ourselves Podcast and iVoices:  
Hearing from gamers on #backtothekitchen and comebacks  
in online game spaces*

We produced the Social Media & Ourselves podcast with the iVoices project, with the goal of learning from students about online life. In late 2021, one particular student story led me and a team of students down a new path of research. The story was Girl Meets Chud, aired on December 1st, 2021.



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In the episode, a student named Kiersten describes how she was driven into an unhealthy online relationship by pandemic loneliness and a toxic gaming environment where girls were regularly told to “Go back to the kitchen.” I thought, wow, people are still saying that to girls and women? And it led me to wonder: How did young players describe and respond to this phrase in networked publics?

@superpink95

Where my girl gamers at 🔥 creds to @dessyc for the sound 🎧 #girlgamer #girlssupportgirls #fyp #rap #backtothekitchen

🎵 original sound – Dessy

@makingitwithabby

Burning questions @pearpopofficial #pearpop #womenwhobuild #gobacktothekitchen #diy #femalediy #femalediycollective

🎵 The Magic Bomb (Questions I Get Asked) [Extended Mix] – Hoàng Read

By May I was working with a research team of one undergraduate and one graduate research assistant to

analyze videos hashtagged #gobacktothekitchen and #backtothekitchen on TikTok. Work produced from this project was presented for the Association for Information Science and Technology annual conference. Here's the abstract:

*This research arose from the iVoices project collection of student technology experiences guiding research. In response to students being told to “go back to the kitchen” while gaming and reading as “female”, our team analyzed TikTok for videos hashtagged #gobacktothekitchen and #backtothekitchen across a one-year period. We also performed deeper analysis on comeback appeals eliciting or offering suggestions of responses to “Go back to the kitchen” and related misogyny and their responses. We found videos were typically created by “girl gamers” toward whom “back to the kitchen” misogyny had been directed, and who tagged them to assign networked meanings to their experiences, encapsulate their struggles for broad publics, and find validation with users sharing similar experiences. A salient theme in comeback appeal posts was performing positions of power to gain leverage over aggressors,*

*while comments frequently offered support from other “girl gamers” and reinforcement of misogynistic stereotypes by male-identified aggressors.*

### **Section 3: 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.

## **Section 4: Demonstrations online and**

## across the Americas against gender violence



*Ni Una Menos, Vivas Las Queremos. (Image: First march of #NiUnaMenos in Buenos Aires, June 2015 by AnitaAD, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Marcha\\_Ni\\_Una\\_Menos\\_en\\_Buenos\\_Aires.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Marcha_Ni_Una_Menos_en_Buenos_Aires.jpg), CC BY-SA)*

### Ni Una Menos, Vivas Las Queremos

Beginning in 2016, a new hemispheric movement was underway expressing outrage over violence against women in the Americas. **Ni Una Menos** began in the summer of 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.

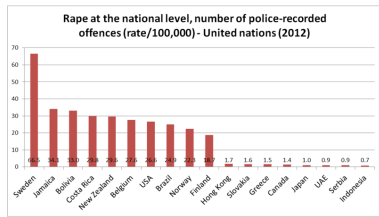
Hemispheric hashtags coordinating these movements include #NiUnaMenos (not one less or not one fewer) and #vivaslasqueremos (we want them alive) – proactively worded demands that not a single woman or girl be killed by systematic violence. This proactive framing makes every death cause for further protest.

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”



*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.*

approach – as in Michelle 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 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.

## Student Insights: Experiencing targeted hate online (audio & writing by iVoices Media Lab Student, Spring 2021)





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**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?

## Section 5: The #MeToo Movement in the U.S.

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.

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 performance and visibility skills to redirect their audiences’ attention 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.

## Girl Meets Chud — Social Media and Ourselves podcast



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<https://opentextbooks.library.arizona.edu/humanssocialmedia/?p=72#oembed-1>

### Girl Meets Chud

*Release date: December 1st 2021*

When Kiersten made a gamer friend during a Siege Grind, it seemed like a solution to lockdown loneliness. Then she got to know him better. Contains offensive language. Edited by Gabe Stultz. Produced by iVoices Student Media Lab, which is supported in part by the Center for University Education and Scholarship.

LISTEN · LISTEN WITH TRANSCRIPT

***Respond to this podcast episode...*** How did the podcast episode “Girl Meets Chud” use interviews,

*student voices, or sounds to demonstrate a current or past social trend phenomenon? If you were making a sequel to this episode, what voices or sounds would you include to help listeners understand more about this trend, and why?*

## Core Concepts and Questions

### Core Concepts

#### ***appropriation***

use for a different cultural purpose than originally intended

#### ***equity***

the goal of support through first considering the different circumstances that may lead to varying

support needs, and then adjusting support based on need

### ***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

### ***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



## *staircase thoughts*

the affordance of social media allows 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

## Core Questions

### 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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## C. Game on!



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## Related Content

Read It: Black Lives Matter protests are shaping how people understand racial inequality



Activists participate in a march urging Congress to pass voting rights legislation in Washington, D.C., on Aug. 28, 2021.

Tom Williams/CQ-Roll Call, Inc via Getty Images  
Jelani Ince, *University of Washington* and Zackary Dunivin, *Indiana University*

Considered to be the largest social justice movement since the civil rights era of the 1960s, Black Lives Matter

is more than the scores of street protests organized by the social justice group that attracted hundreds of thousands of demonstrators across the world.

From its early days in 2014 after Officer Darren Wilson killed Michael Brown, Jr. to the protests following the murder of George Floyd in 2020, Black Lives Matter has opened the door for social change by expanding the way we think about the complicated issues that involve race.

As sociologists who study how protests lay the groundwork for social change, we understand their necessity as a tactic to draw attention toward a movement's broader agenda.

In our study published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, we found that the Black Lives Matter was able to shift attention away from its protests and toward its agenda of building an anti-racist society.

Our report further revealed that Black Lives Matter has changed how people learn about specific issues that involve race, such as police violence, mass incarceration and other systemic problems in Black communities that would be intolerable in other communities.

## **Spikes in anti-racist searches**

Social change, such as the anti-slavery movement in the 19th century, is not represented only by new legislation or Supreme Court decisions. It is also found

in the public's ideas and conversations: what you and I think and talk about.

When people engage with a movement, such as joining a protest, they are more likely to learn about the movement's aspirations and plans to achieve their goals. In this way, protest opens the door for social change.



In this June 2020 photograph, a massive group of protesters is seated on the ground in New York City in a peaceful protest of the killing of George Floyd.

Ira L. Black/Corbis via Getty Images

In our digital age, researchers can measure what people are thinking about by analyzing activity on public internet platforms like Google, Wikipedia and Twitter. Social researchers can quantitatively measure social media activity and see how it changes over time and in response to particular events, such as Black Lives Matter protests.

Our study examined how street demonstrations

facilitated an important initial step in creating social change: changing the way people think. Based on our research, we found that people began thinking about racism from a broader and deeper perspective.

We conducted a large-scale quantitative analysis of news media, Google searches, Wikipedia page visits and Twitter from 2014 to 2020 to build a picture of the movement's impact on how Americans and the world understand the conditions of Black life in the U.S. over the past century.

Though Google doesn't share the actual number of people who search on its platform, the total number is estimated to be in the billions. For our data set of searched words and phrases, that number is likely to be as much as in the hundreds of millions.



Thousands of protesters march on World Anti-Racism Day on March 19, 2022, in London.

Guy Smallman/Getty Images

We found that during Black Lives Matter protests,

digital search users think and talk about racial ideas, such as systemic racism, Michelle Alexander’s book “The New Jim Crow” and white supremacy, up to 100 times more than they did in the weeks before the protests.

Over the years these spikes grew larger and included more diverse ideas.

In 2014 and 2015, for instance, we saw people using Google to search terms about police shootings and past victims of police homicide.

But in 2020 the search terms were much broader and included ideas like prison abolition and redlining – the discriminatory practice by banks, insurance companies and other financial institutions that resulted in segregated neighborhoods.

Importantly, the ideas that come into the public consciousness during protest don’t simply disappear. They stick around. We found that six months after the 2020 George Floyd protests, social media searches of terms such as systemic racism and white supremacy were considerably higher than before the protests.

[https://public.tableau.com/views/BLMmarchesandonlinesearches/Chart?:language=en-US&publish=yes&:display\\_count=n&:origin=viz\\_share\\_link&:showVizHome=no&:embed=true](https://public.tableau.com/views/BLMmarchesandonlinesearches/Chart?:language=en-US&publish=yes&:display_count=n&:origin=viz_share_link&:showVizHome=no&:embed=true)

## **Social change?**

After the murder of Floyd, journalists and researchers



alike proclaimed that the United States was experiencing a “racial reckoning.”

To understand the full scope of the reckoning and the possibility for change, it is important to know how people make sense of these events.

Large-scale digital data from platforms like Google, Wikipedia and Twitter shows us which ideas are attracting attention and when this attention is sustained.

In a sense, protests help create a “new normal,” in which anti-racism is an increasingly common way to talk about inequalities in American society.

The pathway toward change is not always simple.

Activists such as those in Black Lives Matter want people to rethink social problems, and many contemporary problems are rooted in historical failures to produce a just society.

The participants in the demonstrations of 2020 have an advantage that previous generations of activists did not: They witnessed the shortcomings of past civil rights movements, as well as the limits of modern-day efforts to teach diversity and inclusion in the workplace.

Certainly, increased attention does not always bring positive results.



Protesters demonstrate on Dec. 4, 2014, against the chokehold death of Eric Garner by a white police officer in New York City.

Timothy A. Clary/AFP via Getty Images

Our study also investigates the rise in opposition that overlapped with BLM attention.

On Twitter, hashtags such as “#AllLivesMatter” and “#WhiteLivesMatter” increased during BLM protests and periods of reactionary right-wing protest, such as the Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville, Virginia.

We found that countermovement activity did not decrease attention to the BLM movement and was always dwarfed by BLM-related social media activity. During the peak of the George Floyd protests in May and June 2020, for instance, there were about 750,000 #BlackLivesMatter tweets per day, compared with about 20,000 #AllLivesMatter or #BlueLivesMatter.

The trend continued as time passed. In December 2020, #BlackLivesMatter tweets were posted about

10,000 times per day, compared with fewer than 1,000 for #AllLivesMatter or #BlueLivesMatter.

The data suggests that the Black Lives Matter movement is having a lasting impact – as are the group’s ideas.

*[There’s plenty of opinion out there. We supply facts and analysis, based in research. Get The Conversation’s Politics Weekly.]*

Jelani Ince, Assistant Professor of Sociology, *University of Washington* and Zackary Dunivin, PhD Student in Sociology and Complex Systems, *Indiana University*

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## About the author



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Dr. Diana Daly of the University of Arizona is the Director of iVoices, a media lab helping students produce media from their narratives on technologies. Prof Daly teaches about qualitative research, social media, and information quality at the University of Arizona.

# Activism

DIANA DALY

## Key points

- The Zapatista movement creatively used online activism to counter the negative impact of NAFTA on indigenous communities in Mexico.
- The internet played a dual role for both activists and governments, with a focus on how the Zapatistas employed information warfare to gain global support.
- Drawing parallels between Zapatistas and contemporary movements like Black Lives Matter underscores the role of online activism in tackling issues of race, income inequality, and political decisions.
- Utilizing strategies such as speed, visuals, performances, inclusiveness, and “masked” leadership, both Zapatista and Black Lives Matter movements showcased effective online activism.
- Addressing critiques, concerns include the swift mobilization of movements, potential shallowness, and the notion of “slacktivism.”
- Acknowledging the intricate interplay between key figures and networked groups highlights the dynamic and evolving nature of

successful online activism.

In this chapter

- Section 1: The Zapatistas
- Section 2: Creative online activism in recent times
  - Student Insights: Political campaigning in the 21st century (video & writing by Jessica Nickerson, Fall 2020)
  - Student Insights: #SettleForBiden (audio by Lilly, Fall 2020)
- Section 3: The Black Lives Matter Movement
  - Student Insights: Social Media and the Right to Vote (video & writing by Trinity, Fall 2020)
- Section 4: Creative online activist strategies in Black Lives Matter and beyond
- Section 5: Advancing and complicating social activism through online engagement
- Hate and Power — Social Media and Ourselves podcast
- Core Concepts
- Core Questions
- As school students strike for climate once more, here's how the movement and its tactics have changed

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.



*Zapatistas in Chiapas used early social media to advance their cause and protect their lives.*

## Section 1: 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 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*

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 internet can be “a Janus machine, an engine of liberation and an instrument of repression.”*

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 a corporate investment. But ironically, in this case, the internet was what 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*

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 would make Mexico look evil – and risky as a

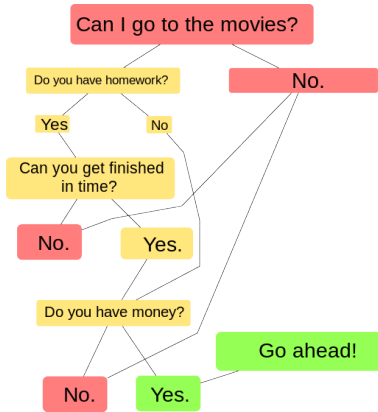
corporate investment destination. As a result, the Mexican government was forced to accept the EZLN ceasefire. They could not reverse NAFTA; it would take more than an awareness campaign to reverse such a powerfully backed agreement. But the EZLN protesters lived and continued their demands for social change.

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

## **Section 2: Creative online activism in recent times**

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.



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



*Arab Spring*

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.

## Student Insights: Political campaigning in the 21st century (video & writing by Jessica Nickerson, Fall 2020)



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**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.

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.

## Student Insights: #SettleForBiden (audio by Lilly, Fall 2020)



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**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?


## Section 3: The Black Lives Matter Movement



**Alicia Garza**  
July 13, 2013 · 88 ▼

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 · 88 ▼

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.

## Student Insights: Social Media and the Right to Vote (video & writing by Trinity, Fall 2020)



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Also by this author: Rock the Vote!



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**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.

## Section 4: Creative online activist

# strategies in Black Lives Matter and beyond



*A Black Lives Matter demonstration: Broad, inclusive online activism for the 21st century*

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*

## **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.*

## **2. Visuals**

In both the Zapatista and Black Lives Matter movements, campaign organizers gathered attention through the 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 Paolo 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 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 in a city center, a football field, the Olympic medal ceremonies, and 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 a masked activist*

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.

## Section 5: Advancing 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 affect, 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.

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 by 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.

## Hate and Power — Social Media and Ourselves podcast

### Hate and Power

*Release date: August 1st, 2021*

Our Media Lab student worker Jacquie Kuru explores her personal experience and understanding of Asian American hate through discussions with Professor Daly and fellow classmate Alicia Nguyen. Theme music by Gabe Stultz. Music backtracks and audio story by Jacquie Kuru. Produced by Jacquie Kuru, Diana Daly, and iVoices Media Lab.

[LISTEN](#) · [LISTEN WITH TRANSCRIPT](#)

***Respond to this podcast episode...****How did the podcast episode “Hate and Power” use interviews, student voices, or sounds to demonstrate a current or past social trend phenomenon? If you were making a sequel to this episode, what voices or sounds would*

*you include to help listeners understand more about this trend, and why?*

## Core Concepts and Questions

### Core Concepts

#### ***Black Lives Matter***

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

#### ***choreography of assembly***

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

## ***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

### ***Five strategies deployed by creative online activist movements:***

Speed, Visuals, Performances, Inclusiveness, Masked leadership

## ***information warfare***

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

## ***Janus Faced***

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

## ***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

## ***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

## ***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

## ***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 in a city center, a football



field, the Olympic medal ceremonies, or a memorial statue

## ***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

## **Core Questions**

### **A. Questions for qualitative thought:**

1. Design a hypothetical online activist campaign for a cause you care about. Utilize the strategies discussed in the chapter and consider the potential challenges and opportunities you might face in the current digital landscape.

2. Brainstorm ways to bridge the gap between online and offline activism, maximizing the collective impact of both spheres. How can online initiatives inspire on-the-ground action and vice versa?
3. Compare and contrast how the Zapatista and Black Lives Matter movements utilized the specific technological affordances of their respective eras (early web vs. social media) to achieve their goals. How did historical and cultural contexts influence their choices and the overall effectiveness of their online strategies?

## B. Review: Which is the best answer?



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## C. Game on!



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## Related Content

Read It: As school students strike for climate once more, here's how the movement and its tactics have changed



School Strike 4 Climate/Flickr, CC BY-SA

Eve Mayes, *Deakin University* and Ruchira Talukdar, *Deakin University*

On Friday, students will once again down textbooks and laptops and go on strike for climate action. Many

will give their schools a Climate Doctor's Certificate signed by three leading climate academics.

These strikes – part of a National Climate Strike – mark five years since school students started walking out of schools to demand greater action on climate change.

In 2018, the first students to strike defied calls by then prime minister Scott Morrison for “less activism” and to stay in school.

Last year, Australia voted out the Morrison government, in what was widely seen as a climate election. Teal independents won Liberal heartland seats on climate platforms, while the Greens recorded high votes. Labor came to office promising faster action on climate.

So why are school students still striking? Has the movement changed its focus? We have been researching these questions alongside young people involved in climate action in the ongoing Striking Voices project, as well as through the coauthor's Sapna South Asian Climate Solidarity project.

We found the movement has expanded its demands from climate action to climate justice, stressing the uneven and unfair distribution of climate impacts. The movement itself has also become more diverse.



Why are students still striking for climate justice?  
Because the job isn't anywhere near done. This march  
was in Warrang (Sydney) in May 2022.  
School Strike 4 Climate/Flickr, CC BY

## From climate action to climate justice

Across the world, young climate advocates such as those from School Strike 4 Climate are calling for “climate justice” alongside “climate action”.

Why? Because climate change doesn't impact everyone equally. As the Australian Youth Climate Coalition puts it, it's “often the most marginalised in our societies who are hit first and worst by climate impacts and carry the burden of polluting industries”.

Mere semantics? No. The idea of climate justice draws attention to existing social and ethical injustices which climate change amplifies. The phrase also points to the

need for climate solutions that work for people in a transformative way and help create collective and just societies.

In Australia, calls for climate justice are intimately connected with justice for First Nations people and to protecting, defending and “heal[ing] Country”, as Seed Mob write, with First Nations-led solutions.

Climate justice is central to the messaging of groups such as Pacific Climate Warriors diaspora, and Sapna South Asian Climate Solidarity.

In our conversations with young people, climate justice appears highly compelling. High-school student Yehansa Dahanayake explained:

I think I'd always thought of climate change as sort of a 2D thing. I thought about it as the temperature rise, deforestation, and sea caps melting – and while that is definitely true, I think [when] I started to learn about the justice aspects of climate change, [it] made me realise that there are many other factors that tie in, such as the Global North/ Global South difference and how that relates.

High-school student Emma Heyink told us about the importance of what she called a “justice-centred lens”:

You can't look at climate change without looking at all these other issues. It just becomes so much more interlinked and solutions become so much more obvious.



## Diversifying networks and strategies

So who are these young people, and what have they been doing in recent years?

Swedish student Greta Thunberg is frequently credited as sparking the youth-led climate movement.

But the movement is much larger – and more diverse – than one person, and increasingly so in recent years.

As a report by Sapna points out, Australia’s youth-led climate justice networks are more likely to be racially diverse than mainstream climate movements.

Yet climate justice networks are not immune from the oppressive dynamics they protest against. When the coauthor interviewed 12 now-graduated school strikers of South Asian heritage, they reported sometimes feeling sidelined in climate spaces – which are often white-dominated – as well as in media opportunities. As one young person put it, it seemed “hard to tell a brown person’s climate justice story”.

There are signs of positive change. The upheaval of the COVID pandemic saw stronger connections emerge between social movements, and clearer links between intersecting crises and injustices, both globally and in youth-led climate networks.

As recent high-school graduate and school strike organiser Owen Magee explained:

at our strikes, we are platforming First Nations

people, rural and regional people who've directly been affected by the climate crisis, directly being affected by fossil fuel greed and corporation greed. That in itself is focusing on the intersectional nature of climate justice.

You can see this cross-pollination in the support shown by young advocates across multiple climate justice networks in the Power Up gathering on Gomeri Country in northwestern New South Wales to show solidarity with Traditional Owners fighting coal and gas projects on their lands.

The targets and tactics of youth-led climate justice networks have shifted and proliferated in recent years – for example, to the banks that finance fossil fuel companies.



Targets, tactics and strategies have evolved since 2018.

Student Strike 4 Climate/Flickr, CC BY

When school strikers graduate, some move into different modes of climate-related action.

Some have taken part in strategic climate litigation in a bid to create legislation embedding a climate duty of care for young people in government decisions on issues such as fracking approvals.

Others are involved in non-violent direct actions, such as next week's Rising Tide People's Blockade of the world's largest coal port in Newcastle.

Young climate advocates are battling for climate justice on a wide range of fronts. They are calling on politicians to do the same.

*We would like to acknowledge and thank the Striking Voices project research associates, Natasha Abhayawickrama, Sophie Chiew, Netta Maiava and Dani Villafaña.*

Eve Mayes, Senior Research Fellow in Education, *Deakin University* and Ruchira Talukdar, Casual senior research fellow, *Deakin University*

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## Consider it: A new era in online activism?

First, read the article "The Second Act of Social Media

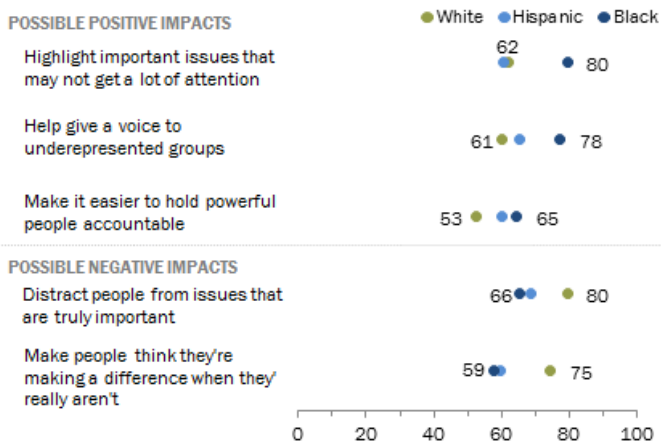
Activism” by Jane Hu, published in June 2020 in *New Yorker Magazine*.

Also, consider findings from the Pew Research Center’s 2018 study of American perceptions of the internet as a tool for social activism.

Techno-sociologist 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.

## Eight-in-ten blacks say social media help shed light on rarely discussed issues; the same share of whites say these sites distract from more important issues

*% of U.S. adults who say the following statements describe social media very or somewhat well*



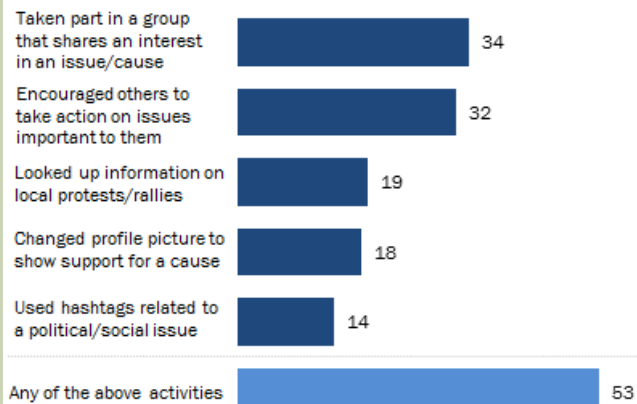
Note: Whites and blacks include only non-Hispanics; Hispanics are of any race. Respondents who gave other responses or who did not give an answer are not shown. Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted May 29-June 11, 2018.

"Activism in the Social Media Age"

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

## Roughly half of Americans have been civically active on social media in the past year

*% of U.S. adults who say they have done the following activities on social media in the past year*



Note: Respondents who gave other responses or did not give an answer are not shown.

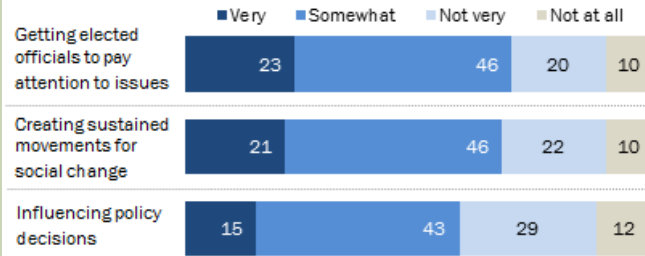
Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted May 29-June 11, 2018.

"Activism in the Social Media Age"

**PEW RESEARCH CENTER**

## 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"

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## About the author



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Dr. Diana Daly of the University of Arizona is the Director of iVoices, a media lab helping students produce media from their narratives on technologies. Prof Daly teaches about qualitative research, social media, and information quality at the University of Arizona.

# Mememes

DIANA DALY

## Key points

- The notion of content going viral suggests it spreads uncontrollably like a virus. However, content sharing is a deliberate act, driven by human agency and motivations.
- Spreadability, proposed by Jenkins, Bell, and Green, replaces the viral metaphor. It emphasizes the role of users in sharing content within their networks and explores the dynamic nature of online cultures.
- Crowdcultures, emerging from subcultures or art worlds, play a crucial role in making content spreadable. Advertisers must navigate and understand these cultures to create relevant and resonant content.
- Ken Bone became an internet sensation during the 2016 presidential debate due to factors like memeability, relatability as a regular guy, offering a national ceasefire, and being an undecided voter – a rare find during a polarized election.
- Holt's analysis of branding in the age of social media highlights the need for continuous innovation, understanding cultural flashpoints, and the challenge of remaining relevant.

Diversity is crucial for successful branding, as demonstrated by Pepsi's 2017 ad failure.

In this chapter

- Section 1: What is spreadability, and why is it important?
- Section 2: Ken Bone as meme, truce, and unicorn
  - Student insights: Early Instagram and Memes (video by Preston Kersting, Spring 2021)
- Section 3: Branding on social media
- Section 4: Failing at branding: Pepsi's 2017 "Black Lives Matter" ad
- Section 5: Losing Control of the Narrative: That Polar Bear and the Hot Mess of Spreadable Science Memes
  - Student insights: Social Trends (video by iVoices Media Lab Student, Spring 2021)
- Spiritual Narcissism — Social Media and Ourselves podcast
- Core Concepts
- Core Questions
- Memes about animal resistance are everywhere — here's why you shouldn't laugh off rebellious orcas and sea otters too quickly

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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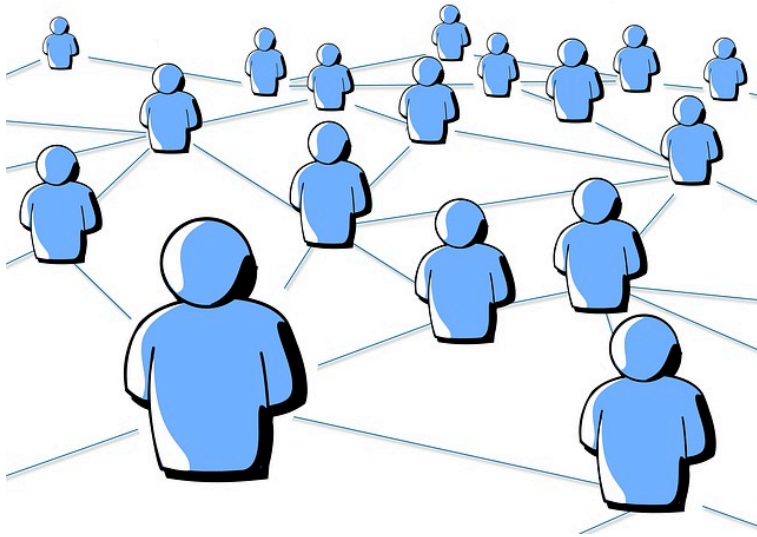
### *The Salt Bae meme, from Turkish chef Nurs\_et*

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.

## Section 1: 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 networks connecting individuals by 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. However, this definition is based on a metaphor rather than an 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;” Instead, they offer 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 networking contacts.

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 – although it is not a strategy any 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.

## Section 2: Ken Bone as meme, truce, and unicorn



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*Ken Bone during the 2016 presidential debate, from The New York Times*

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 that 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.

## Student insights: Early Instagram and Memes (video by Preston Kersting, Spring 2021)

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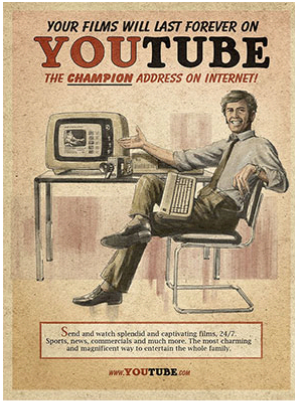
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## Section 3: Branding on social media



What each major social media platform can do and is known for, as well as how advertising has changed.



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 that branding requires paying attention to cultures online. Cultures are 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.

Holt breaks down the process of 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.

## Section 4: 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. The 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 in 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.

## Section 5: Losing Control of the Narrative: That Polar Bear and the Hot Mess of Spreadable Science Memes



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## *From National Geographic's YouTube Channel*

You probably saw it.

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 the 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 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.

## Student insights: Social Trends (video by iVoices Media Lab Student, Spring 2021)

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# Spiritual Narcissism — Social Media and Ourselves podcast



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## Spiritual Narcissism

*Release Date: June 1st 2022*

In this episode, Jacquie explores how religious figures known for their hate and intolerance affect society through social media. Join her to see the impact one nationalist monk had on Myanmar, one preacher had on a past president's safety, and one minister who reminds us preaching just scripture isn't enough to spread true tolerance and love.

To learn more about the hateful preachers in this episode as well as many others, please visit [preachersofhate.com](http://preachersofhate.com)

To learn more about Reverend Doctor Jacqui Lewis and other good-natured figures like her, please visit [www.americanprogress.org/article/21-f...-watch-2021/](http://www.americanprogress.org/article/21-f...-watch-2021/)

LISTEN · LISTEN WITH TRANSCRIPT

***Respond to this podcast episode...*** How did the podcast episode “Spiritual Narcissism” use interviews, student voices, or sounds to demonstrate a current or past social trend phenomenon? If you were making a sequel to this episode, what voices or sounds would you include to help listeners understand more about this trend, and why?

# Core Concepts and Questions

## Core Concepts

### ***art world***

an inspired, collaborative competition among artists and content creators

### ***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

### ***meme***

something culturally significant – a concept or a form



of media – that spreads from person to person, often being modified as it does so

### ***spreadability***

the ability for media to be spread to many people, who may then choose to use, modify, and/or spread it further

## Core Questions

### A. Questions for qualitative thought:

1. How can creators and consumers of online content balance agency and influence while avoiding cultural appropriation and harm?
2. How can scientists and other knowledge producers leverage meme-able content while maintaining accuracy and public trust?

3. What alternative models of online **spreadability** can foster meaningful engagement and cultural exchange?

## B. Review: Which is the best answer?



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## C. Game on!



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## Related Content

Read it: Memes about animal resistance are everywhere — here's why you shouldn't laugh off rebellious orcas and sea otters too quickly



It's tempting to envision orcas attacking yachts as the forward troops in an animal uprising.

Jackson Roberts/iStock via Getty Images Plus  
Alexandra Isfahani-Hammond, *University of California, San Diego*

Memes galore centered on the “orca revolution” have

inundated the online realm. They gleefully depict orcas launching attacks on boats in the Strait of Gibraltar and off the Shetland coast.

One particularly ingenious image showcases an orca posed as a sickle crossed with a hammer. The cheeky caption reads, “Eat the rich,” a nod to the orcas’ penchant for sinking lavish yachts.

A surfboard-snatching sea otter in Santa Cruz, California has also claimed the media spotlight. Headlines dub her an “adorable outlaw” “at large.”



Memes position the otter as a renegade revolutionary, modeled on Ché Guevara.

thesurfingotter via Instagram

Memes conjure her in a beret like the one donned by socialist revolutionary Ché Guevara. In one caption, she proclaims, “Accept our existence or expect resistance ... an otter world is possible.”

My scholarship centers on animal-human relations through the prism of social justice. As I see it, public glee about wrecked surfboards and yachts hints at a certain flavor of schadenfreude. At a time marked by drastic socioeconomic disparities, white supremacy and environmental degradation, casting these marine mammals as revolutionaries seems like a projection of desires for social justice and habitable ecosystems.

A glimpse into the work of some political scientists, philosophers and animal behavior researchers injects weightiness into this jocular public dialogue. The field of critical animal studies analyzes structures of oppression and power and considers pathways to dismantling them. These scholars' insights challenge the prevailing view of nonhuman animals as passive victims. They also oppose the widespread assumption that nonhuman animals can't be political actors.

So while meme lovers project emotions and perspectives onto these particular wild animals, scholars of critical animal studies suggest that nonhuman animals do in fact engage in resistance.

## **Nonhuman animal protest is everywhere**

Are nonhuman animals in a constant state of defiance? I'd answer, undoubtedly, that the answer is yes.

The entire architecture of animal agriculture attests to animals' unyielding resistance against confinement

and death. Cages, corrals, pens and tanks would not exist were it not for animals' tireless revolt.

Even when hung upside down on conveyor hangars, chickens furiously flap their wings and bite, scratch, peck and defecate on line workers at every stage of the process leading to their deaths.

Until the end, hooked tuna resist, gasping and writhing fiercely on ships' decks. Hooks, nets and snares would not be necessary if fish allowed themselves to be passively harvested.

If they consented to repeated impregnation, female pigs and cows wouldn't need to be tethered to "rape racks" to prevent them from struggling to get away.

If they didn't mind having their infants permanently taken from their sides, dairy cows wouldn't need to be blinded with hoods so they don't bite and kick as the calves are removed; they wouldn't bellow for weeks after each instance. I contend that failure to recognize their bellowing as protest reflects "anthropodenial" – what ethologist Frans de Waal calls the rejection of obvious continuities between human and nonhuman animal behavior, cognition and emotion.

The prevalent view of nonhuman animals remains that of René Descartes, the 17th-century philosopher who viewed animals' actions as purely mechanical, like those of a machine. From this viewpoint, one might dismiss these nonhuman animals' will to prevail as unintentional or merely instinctual. But political scientist Dinesh Wadiwel argues that "even if their defiance is futile, the will to prefer life over death is a primary act of resistance, perhaps the only act of

dissent available to animals who are subject to extreme forms of control.”

## **Creaturely escape artists**

Despite humans' colossal efforts to repress them, nonhuman animals still manage to escape from slaughterhouses. They also break out of zoos, circuses, aquatic parks, stables and biomedical laboratories. Tilikum, a captive orca at Sea World, famously killed his trainer – an act at least one marine mammal behaviorist characterized as intentional.

Philosopher Fahim Amir suggests that depression among captive animals is likewise a form of emotional rebellion against unbearable conditions, a revolt of the nerves. Dolphins engage in self-harm like thrashing against the tank's walls or cease to eat and retain their breath until death. Sows whose body-sized cages impede them from turning around to make contact with their piglets repeatedly ram themselves into the metal struts, sometimes succumbing to their injuries.

Critical animal studies scholars contend that all these actions arguably demonstrate nonhuman animals' yearning for freedom and their aversion to inequity.

As for the marine stars of summer 2023's memes, fishing gear can entangle and harm orcas. Sea otters were hunted nearly to extinction for their fur. Marine habitats have been degraded by human activities including overfishing, oil spills, plastic, chemical and sonic pollution, and climate change. It's easy to



imagine they might be responding to human actions, including bodily harm and interference with their turf.

## **What is solidarity with nonhuman animals?**

Sharing memes that cheer on wild animals is one thing. But there are more substantive ways to demonstrate solidarity with animals.

Legal scholars support nonhuman animals' resistance by proposing that their current classification as property should be replaced with that of personhood or beingness.

Nonhuman animals including songbirds, dolphins, elephants, horses, chimpanzees and bears increasingly appear as plaintiffs alleging their subjection to extinction, abuse and other injustices.

Citizenship for nonhuman animals is another pathway to social and political inclusion. It would guarantee the right to appeal arbitrary restrictions of domesticated nonhuman animals' autonomy. It would also mandate legal duties to protect them from harm.

Everyday deeds can likewise convey solidarity.

Boycotting industries that oppress nonhuman animals by becoming vegan is a powerful action. It is a form of political "counter-conduct," a term philosopher Michel Foucault uses to describe practices that oppose dominant norms of power and control.

Creating roadside memorials for nonhuman animals

killed by motor vehicles encourages people to see them as beings whose lives and deaths matter, rather than mere “roadkill.”

Political scientists recognize that human and nonhuman animals’ struggles against oppression are intertwined. At different moments, the same strategies leveraged against nonhuman animals have cast segments of the human species as “less than human” in order to exploit them.

The category of the human is ever-shifting and ominously exclusive. I argue that no one is safe as long as there is a classification of “animality.” It confers susceptibility to extravagant forms of violence, legally and ethically condoned.

<https://youtube.com/watch?v=2NHqmHFGnxE%3Fwmode%3Dtransparent%26start%3D0>

Otter 841 is the wild sea otter off Santa Cruz, California, who some observers suspect has had it with surfers in her turf.

## **Might an ‘otter world’ be possible?**

I believe quips about the marine mammal rebellion reflect awareness that our human interests are entwined with those of nonhuman animals. The desire to achieve sustainable relationships with other species and the natural world feels palpable to me within the memes and media coverage. And it’s happening as

human-caused activity makes our shared habitats increasingly unlivable.

Solidarity with nonhuman animals is consistent with democratic principles – for instance, defending the right to well-being and opposing the use of force against innocent subjects. Philosopher Amir recommends extending the idea that there can be no freedom as long as there is still unfreedom beyond the species divide: “While we may not yet fully be able to picture what this may mean, there is no reason we should not begin to imagine it”.

Alexandra Isfahani-Hammond, Associate Professor Emerita of Comparative Literature, *University of California, San Diego*

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diana-daly

Dr. Diana Daly of the University of Arizona is the Director of iVoices, a media lab helping students produce media from their narratives on technologies. Prof Daly teaches about qualitative research, social media, and information quality at the University of Arizona.

# Information

DIANA DALY

## Key points

- Social media transforms truth, information, and knowledge into tangible, actively debated entities online, tracked by metrics like page views and shares.
- The chapter explores the prevalence of “fake news” and “post-truth” in the social media era, contrasting traditional newspaper reliance with the instant dissemination through platforms.
- Objectivity, presenting universally valid truths, is contrasted with subjectivity, where individual perspectives shape event presentations, including subjective interpretations of historical events.
- Traditional views of knowledge as elitist are challenged by platforms like Wikipedia, emphasizing collective intelligence and negotiating multiple truths, leading to accurate knowledge production.
- The chapter delves into motivations for creating and spreading “fake news,” examining influences like profit, truth, and the democratization of content creation on the internet.

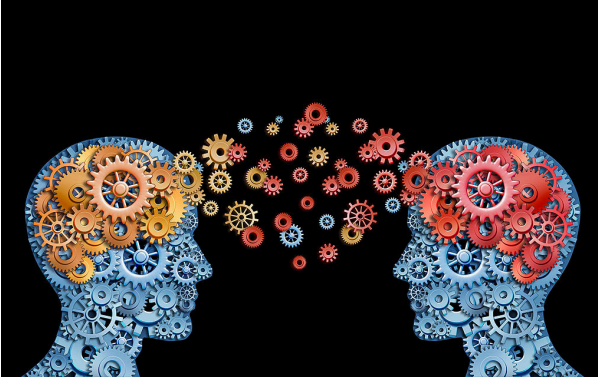
- Psychological factors like belief perseverance and confirmation bias contribute to the acceptance of misinformation, exacerbated by social media filter bubbles reinforcing existing beliefs.

In this chapter

- Section 1: “Fake news” and “post-truth”
  - Student Insights: From Horse Travel to Human Touch – Speedy News (writing by Jenna Wing, Spring 2021)
- Section 2: What are truths?
  - Student Insights: My journey with technology (video by Abby Arnold, Spring 2021)
- Section 3: Why people spread “fake news” and bad information
  - Student Insights: Searchability: The Helpful, but Inescapable Nature of Online Media (writing by Devon, Spring 2021)
- Section 4: Bugs in the human belief system
  - Student insights: Social media affordances (video by Kendall Peterson, Spring 2021)
- Section 5: Dr. Daly’s steps to “reading” social media news stories in 2020:

- @Reality — Social Media and Ourselves podcast
- Core Concepts
- Core Questions
- It's not just about facts: Democrats and Republicans have sharply different attitudes about removing misinformation from social media

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.*

## Section 1: “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.



## Student Insights: From Horse Travel to Human Touch – Speedy News (writing by Jenna Wing, Spring 2021)



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### 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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*Click here for a captioned version of this video.*

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. The results of a negotiation between multiple truths can be surprisingly accurate. A 2012 study by Oxford University comparing the accuracy levels of Wikipedia to other online encyclopedias found Wikipedia had higher accuracy than Encyclopedia Britannica.

## Section 2: 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.

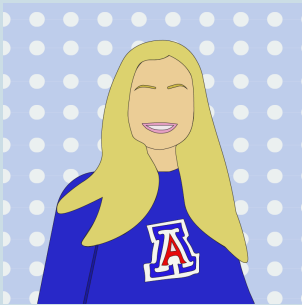
Truths are not always profitable, so they compete with a lot

of other types of content online. As a steward of the world of online information, you have to work to keep truths in circulation.

## Student Insights: My journey with technology (video by Abby Arnold, Spring 2021)

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# "LIES SPREAD FASTER THAN THE TRUTH"



~ 10 YEARS OF TWITTER DATA

(Vosoughi, Roy, & Aral, Science 2018)

## RETWEETS OF FACT



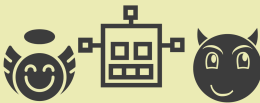
Factual inquiry is slow.



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: Lies Spread Faster Than Truth by Diana Daly, CC BY-NC-SA.)

## Section 3: 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.*


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 the 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. Examples include news generated by a fake news factory in Macedonia.

## Student Insights: Searchability: The Helpful, but Inescapable Nature of Online Media (writing by Devon, Spring 2021)



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**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?

## Section 4: Bugs in the human belief system



*Fake news and bad information are more likely to be believed when they confirm what we already believe*

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.

## Student insights: Social media affordances (video by Kendall Peterson, Spring 2021)

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## Tips for “reading” social media news

## stories:



*Reading today means ingesting multiple levels of a source simultaneously.*

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 with Filipovic's interpretation.)
5. **Before you share, consider fact-checking.** Reliable fact-checking sites at the time of this writing include:
  - [politifact.com](http://politifact.com)
  - [snopes.com](http://snopes.com)
  - [factcheck.org](http://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.

## @Reality — Social Media and Ourselves podcast



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### @Reality

*Release date: November 1st 2021*

The internet can seem like a faraway place. It can seem fictional and like it cannot affect you. But today we see relationships, politics, and cultural movements echoing attitudes that originate on the web. How can this be? In this episode, we listen to stories from people who thought they were impervious to the internet's influence. Instead, they found their realities perturbed by things they first saw on-screen. Produced and narrated by Gabe Stultz with support from Jacquie Kuru and Diana Daly of iVoices Media Lab at the



University of Arizona. All music in this episode by Gabe Stultz.

LISTEN · LISTEN WITH TRANSCRIPT

**Respond to this podcast episode...** How did the podcast episode “@Reality” use interviews, student voices, or sounds to demonstrate a current or past social trend phenomenon? If you were making a sequel to this episode, what voices or sounds would you include to help listeners understand more about this trend, and why?

## Core Concepts and Questions

### Core Concepts

#### ***belief perseverance***

the human tendency to want to continue believing what you already believe

## ***bullshit***

information spread without concern for whether or not it's true

## ***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

## ***disinformation***

information intended to deceive those who receive it

## ***fake news***

a term recently popularized by politicians to refer to stories they do not agree with

## ***knowledge construction***

the negotiation of multiple truths as a way of understanding or "knowing" something

## ***misinformation***

inaccurate information spread without the intention to deceive

## Core Questions

### A. Questions for qualitative thought:

1. How can individuals maintain critical thinking skills and resist confirmation bias in an age of “**fake news**” and “**bullshit**”?
2. How can platforms like Wikipedia and other collaborative models of information creation address issues of power and bias while fostering accurate and diverse knowledge?
3. What ethical considerations should guide our engagement with online information and the

stories we choose to share?

4. How can educators prepare young people for the challenges and opportunities of online information while recognizing their potential advantages in navigating this complex landscape?

## B. Review: Which is the best answer?



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## C. Game on!



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## Related Content

**Read It: It's not just about facts:  
Democrats and Republicans have  
sharply different attitudes about  
removing misinformation from social  
media**



Your political leanings go a long way to determine whether you think it's a good or bad idea to take down misinformation.

Johner Images via Getty Images

Ruth Elisabeth Appel, *Stanford University*

Misinformation is a key global threat, but Democrats

and Republicans disagree about how to address the problem. In particular, Democrats and Republicans diverge sharply on removing misinformation from social media.

Only three weeks after the Biden administration announced the Disinformation Governance Board in April 2022, the effort to develop best practices for countering disinformation was halted because of Republican concerns about its mission. Why do Democrats and Republicans have such different attitudes about content moderation?

My colleagues Jennifer Pan and Margaret E. Roberts and I found in a study published in the journal *Science Advances* that Democrats and Republicans not only disagree about what is true or false, they also differ in their internalized preferences for content moderation. Internalized preferences may be related to people's moral values, identities or other psychological factors, or people internalizing the preferences of party elites.

And though people are sometimes strategic about wanting misinformation that counters their political views removed, internalized preferences are a much larger factor in the differing attitudes toward content moderation.

## **Internalized preferences or partisan bias?**

In our study, we found that Democrats are about twice as likely as Republicans to want to remove

misinformation, while Republicans are about twice as likely as Democrats to consider removal of misinformation as censorship. Democrats' attitudes might depend somewhat on whether the content aligns with their own political views, but this seems to be due, at least in part, to different perceptions of accuracy.

Previous research showed that Democrats and Republicans have different views about content moderation of misinformation. One of the most prominent explanations is the “fact gap”: the difference in what Democrats and Republicans believe is true or false. For example, a study found that both Democrats and Republicans were more likely to believe news headlines that were aligned with their own political views.

But it is unlikely that the fact gap alone can explain the huge differences in content moderation attitudes. That's why we set out to study two other factors that might lead Democrats and Republicans to have different attitudes: preference gap and party promotion. A preference gap is a difference in internalized preferences about whether, and what, content should be removed. Party promotion is a person making content moderation decisions based on whether the content aligns with their partisan views.

We asked 1,120 U.S. survey respondents who identified as either Democrat or Republican about their opinions on a set of political headlines that we identified as misinformation based on a bipartisan fact check. Each respondent saw one headline that was aligned with their own political views and one headline that was



misaligned. After each headline, the respondent answered whether they would want the social media company to remove the headline, whether they would consider it censorship if the social media platform removed the headline, whether they would report the headline as harmful, and how accurate the headline was.

## Deep-seated differences

When we compared how Democrats and Republicans would deal with headlines overall, we found strong evidence for a preference gap. Overall, 69% of Democrats said misinformation headlines in our study should be removed, but only 34% of Republicans said the same; 49% of Democrats considered the misinformation headlines harmful, but only 27% of Republicans said the same; and 65% of Republicans considered headline removal to be censorship, but only 29% of Democrats said the same.

Even in cases where Democrats and Republicans agreed that the same headlines were inaccurate, Democrats were nearly twice as likely as Republicans to want to remove the content, while Republicans were nearly twice as likely as Democrats to consider removal censorship.

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

We didn't test explicitly why Democrats and Republicans have such different internalized preferences, but there are at least two possible reasons.

First, Democrats and Republicans might differ in factors like their moral values or identities. Second, Democrats and Republicans might internalize what the elites in their parties signal. For example, Republican elites have recently framed content moderation as a free speech and censorship issue. Republicans might use these elites' preferences to inform their own.

When we zoomed in on headlines that are either aligned or misaligned for Democrats, we found a party promotion effect: Democrats were less favorable to content moderation when misinformation aligned with their own views. Democrats were 11% less likely to want the social media company to remove headlines that aligned with their own political views. They were 13% less likely to report headlines that aligned with their own views as harmful. We didn't find a similar effect for Republicans.

Our study shows that party promotion may be partly due to different perceptions of accuracy of the headlines. When we looked only at Democrats who agreed with our statement that the headlines were false, the party promotion effect was reduced to 7%.

## **Implications for social media platforms**

We find it encouraging that the effect of party promotion is much smaller than the effect of internalized preferences, especially when accounting

for accuracy perceptions. However, given the huge partisan differences in content moderation preferences, we believe that social media companies should look beyond the fact gap when designing content moderation policies that aim for bipartisan support.

Future research could explore whether getting Democrats and Republicans to agree on moderation processes – rather than moderation of individual pieces of content – could reduce disagreement. Also, other types of content moderation such as downweighting, which involves platforms reducing the virality of certain content, might prove to be less contentious. Finally, if the preference gap – the differences in deep-seated preferences between Democrats and Republicans – is rooted in value differences, platforms could try to use different moral framings to appeal to people on both sides of the partisan divide.

For now, Democrats and Republicans are likely to continue to disagree over whether removing misinformation from social media improves public discourse or amounts to censorship.

Ruth Elisabeth Appel, Ph.D. Candidate in Communication, *Stanford University*

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## About the author



Diana Daly

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Dr. Diana Daly of the University of Arizona is the Director of iVoices, a media lab helping students produce media from their narratives on technologies. Prof Daly teaches about qualitative research, social media, and information quality at the University of Arizona.

# Relationships

DIANA DALY

## Key points

- Technology, especially mobile apps, reshapes love and sexuality, converging online dating with love, sex, loneliness, and marketing.
- Historical parallels show a gradual shift from past “sexting” to modern expressions through selfies, emphasizing the enduring nature of intimate communication.
- Selfies redefine romance, empowering women in sexting, yet introducing complexities related to legal implications and societal norms.
- A personal narrative highlights social media’s influence on self-perception, body image, and insecurities, leading to self-obsession and a quest for a curated online identity.
- Explores interconnected relationships in online dating, influenced by biases, societal norms, and the high-stakes nature of dating.
- Examines the shift from social media connections to direct communication, speculating on contemporary college students’ approaches, emphasizing human choices in shaping dating experiences.

## In this chapter

- Section 1: Sexting and selfies
- Section 2: Connecting to the network and infiltrating the tribe
  - Student insights: Balancing Connectivity and Distractions (video by Valentina, Spring 2021)
- Section 3: The sequence for seeking someone special
- Section 4: Do dating apps do what we did before?
- Section 5: Mobile dating apps
- Section 6: The paradox of choice
  - Student insights: Digital Acculturation (video by iVoices Media Lab Student, Spring 2021)
- The Intern Series Part 2: Vulnerability — Social Media and Ourselves podcast
- Core Concepts
- Core Questions
- When texts suddenly stop: Why people ghost on social media

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.

## Section 1: 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.



*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.

## Section 2: Connecting to the network and infiltrating the tribe

A significant part of human social life is organized around who we form lasting romantic relationships. 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 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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*Click here for a captioned version of this video.*

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.

## Student insights: Balancing Connectivity and Distractions (video by Valentina, Spring 2021)



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## Section 3: 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](https://pixabay.com/photos/cell-phone-791365_640/), [kaboompics](https://pixabay.com/photos/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, 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.

## Section 4: 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](http://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 connections? 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 is still conducted in person.

## Section 5: 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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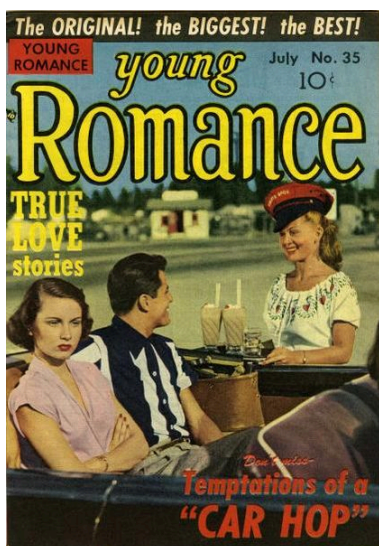
And then there is Tinder, the most popular in the US (although not the world) at the time of this writing, which has taken the heterosexual dating world by storm. There are many critiques of Tinder’s effect on heterosexual dating, however, including studies finding that it favors men’s usage norms over women’s. Tinder faces strong competition from numerous competitors in the US market, however, including a direct challenge – with

a grudge – from a Tinder cofounder’s site, Bumble, discussed more below.

## Section 6: 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



*Young Romance: Many have blamed Tinder for a terrible modern dating culture that leaves young women dissatisfied.*

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.



## Student insights: Digital Acculturation (video by iVoices Media Lab Student, Spring 2021)



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## The Intern Series Part 2: Vulnerability — Social Media and Ourselves podcast



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### The Intern Series Part 2: Vulnerability

*Release date: June 1st, 2021*

Three stories of young people putting themselves out there on social media, leading to a range of situations from the uncomfortable to the sublime. Storytelling

and collection by iVoices Intern Taylor Robeson. Music by Gabe Stultz. Produced by Diana Daly.

LISTEN · LISTEN WITH TRANSCRIPT

**Respond to this podcast episode...** How did the podcast episode “The Intern Series Part 2: Vulnerability” use interviews, student voices, or sounds to demonstrate a current or past social trend phenomenon? If you were making a sequel to this episode, what voices or sounds would you include to help listeners understand more about this trend, and why?

## Core Concepts and Questions

### Core Concepts

#### ***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

### ***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

### ***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

## Core Questions

### A. Questions for qualitative thought:

1. 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?
2. How has the evolution of technology influenced the perception and experience of intimacy in romantic relationships over time, particularly considering the transition from erotic photographs to contemporary practices like sexting and selfies?
3. Building on the discussion of biases in vetting potential partners, could you share personal insights or observations on how societal norms, including biases related to race or other factors, impact the online dating experience and the formation of romantic connections?
4. Reflecting on the content discussing dating apps, particularly the idealization of self-presentation and the potential influence on traditional dating

norms, how do you perceive the balance between personal agency and platform-driven expectations in the context of online dating? Share examples from your own experiences or observations.

## B. Review: Which is the best answer?



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## C. Game on!



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## Related Content

### Read It: When texts suddenly stop: Why people ghost on social media



Research suggests that many people prefer ghosting rather than open and honest conversations that might lead to conflict and stress.

Yifei Fang/Moment via Getty Images  
Royette T. Dubar, *Wesleyan University*

Check your phone. Are there any unanswered texts, snaps or direct messages that you're ignoring? Should you reply? Or should you ghost the person who sent them?

Ghosting happens when someone cuts off all online communication with someone else, and without an explanation. Instead, like a ghost, they just vanish. The phenomenon is common on social media and dating sites, but with the isolation brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic – forcing more people together online – it happens now more than ever.

I am a professor of psychology who studies the role of technology use in interpersonal relationships and well-being. Given the negative psychological consequences of thwarted relationships – especially during the emerging adulthood years, ages 18 to 29 – I wanted to understand what leads college students to ghost others, and if ghosting has any impact on mental health.

To address these questions, my research team recruited 76 college students through social media and on-campus flyers. The sample is 70% female. Study participants signed up for one of 20 focus groups, ranging in size from two to five students. Group sessions lasted an average of 48 minutes each. Participants provided responses to questions asking them to reflect on their ghosting experiences. Here's what we found.

<https://youtube.com/watch?v=QW7rPif2RBQ%3Fwmode%3Dtransparent%26start%3D0>

Millions have been ghosted by romantic partners, friends or potential employers.

## The results

Some students admitted they ghosted because they lacked the necessary communication skills to have an open and honest conversation – whether that conversation happened face to face or via text or email.

From a 19-year-old female: “I’m not good at communicating with people in person, so I definitely cannot do it through typing or anything like that.”

From a 22-year old: “I do not have the confidence to tell them that. Or I guess it could be because of social anxiety.”

In some instances, participants opted to ghost if they thought that meeting with the person would stir up emotional or sexual feelings they were not ready to pursue: “People are afraid of something becoming too much ... the fact that the relationship is somehow getting to the next level.”

Some ghosted because of safety concerns. Forty-five percent ghosted to remove themselves from a “toxic,” “unpleasant” or “unhealthy” situation. A 19-year-old female put it this way: “It’s very easy to just chat with total strangers so [ghosting is] like a form of protection when a creepy guy is asking you to send nudes and stuff like that.”

One of the least-reported yet perhaps most interesting reasons for ghosting someone: protecting that person’s feelings. Better to ghost, the thinking goes, than cause

the hurt feelings that come with overt rejection. An 18-year-old female said ghosting was “a little bit politer way to reject someone than to directly say, ‘I do not want to chat with you.’”

That said, recent data suggests that U.S. adults generally perceive breaking up through email, text or social media as unacceptable, and prefer a person-to-person conversation.

And then there’s ghosting after sex.

In the context of hookup culture, there’s an understanding that if the ghoster got what they were looking for – often, that’s sex – then that’s it, they no longer need to talk to that person. After all, more talk could be interpreted as wanting something more emotionally intimate.

According to one 19-year-old female: “I think it’s rare for there to be open conversation about how you’re truly feeling [about] what you want out of a situation. ... I think hookup culture is really toxic in fostering honest communication.”

But the most prevalent reason to ghost: a lack of interest in pursuing a relationship with that person. Remember the movie “He’s Just Not That Into You”? As one participant said: “Sometimes the conversation just gets boring.”

<https://youtube.com/watch?v=nirKw3mWB3I%3Fwmode%3Dtransparent%26start%3D0>

Breaking up is hard to do.

## The consequences

Attending college represents a critical turning point for establishing and maintaining relationships beyond one's family and hometown neighborhood. For some emerging adults, romantic breakups, emotional loneliness, social exclusion and isolation can have potentially devastating psychological implications.

Our research supports the idea that ghosting can have negative consequences for mental health. Short term, many of those ghosted felt overwhelming rejection and confusion. They reported feelings of low self-worth and self-esteem. Part of the problem is the lack of clarity – not knowing why communication abruptly stopped. Sometimes, an element of paranoia ensues as the ghostee tries to make sense of the situation.

Long term, our study found many of those ghosted reported feelings of mistrust that developed over time. Some bring this mistrust to future relationships. With that may come internalizing the rejection, self-blame and the potential to sabotage those relationships.

However, just over half the participants in our study said being ghosted offered opportunities for reflection and resilience.

“It can be partly positive for the ghostee because they can realize some of the shortcomings they have, and they may change it,” said an 18-year-old female.

As for the ghoster, there were a range of psychological

consequences. About half in the focus groups who ghosted experienced feelings of remorse or guilt; the rest felt no emotion at all. This finding is not entirely surprising, given that individuals who initiate breakups generally report less distress than the recipients.

Also emerging from our discussions: The feeling that ghosters may become stunted in their personal growth. From a 20-year-old male: “It can [become] a habit. And it becomes part of your behavior and that’s how you think you should end a relationship with someone. ... I feel like a lot of people are serial ghosters, like that’s the only way they know how to deal with people.”

Reasons for ghosting out of fear of intimacy represent an especially intriguing avenue for future research. Until that work is done, universities could help by providing more opportunities for students to boost confidence and sharpen their communication skills.

This includes more courses that cover these challenges. I am reminded of a psychology class I took as an undergraduate at Trent University that introduced me to the work of social psychologist Daniel Perlman, who taught courses about loneliness and intimate relationships. Outside the classroom, college residential life coordinators could design seminars and workshops that teach students practical skills on resolving relationship conflicts.

In the meantime, students can subscribe to a number of relationship blogs that offer readers research-based answers. Just know that help is out there – even after a ghosting, you’re not alone.

Royette T. Dubar, Professor of Psychology, *Wesleyan University*

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diana-daly

Dr. Diana Daly of the University of Arizona is the Director of iVoices, a media lab helping students produce media from their narratives on technologies. Prof Daly teaches about qualitative research, social media, and information quality at the University of Arizona.



# Our Transformed Selves

DIANA DALY

## Key points

- The microcelebrity phenomenon shapes online identities by strategically managing profiles, turning ordinary individuals into potential influencers.
- Reflecting on the transformative journey of social media, particularly Instagram, over the past decade, and its influence on how people engage and present themselves in the digital realm.
- Exploring the role of social media in college life, especially within Greek organizations, and observing how individuals tailor their profiles to conform or stand out in distinct cultures.
- Embracing the concept of desired media, where individuals purposefully share content to evoke positive emotions and connections, rather than solely seeking attention or fame.
- Navigating the dynamic landscape of social media culture, which includes the rise and fall of platforms and the evolving motivations of users, underlining the importance of fostering

positive online cultures.

- Acknowledging the reciprocal relationship between humans and social media, emphasizing the necessity for purposeful engagement, genuine care, and the cultivation of a positive online culture when navigating the digital landscape.

In this chapter

- Section 1: Managing our publics
  - Student insights: The standards of Instagram over time (video by Nellie Youssef, Spring 2021)
- Section 2: Paradoxes in microcelebrity
  - Student Insights: How to be different on social media (writing by iVoices Media Lab Student, Fall 2020)
- Section 3: Visibility labor
  - Student Insights: Posting for Yourself (writing by iVoices Media Lab Student, Fall 2020)
- Section 4: Digital ethnography, thanks to the students in this book
- Section 5: Conclusion
- Looking Back — Social Media and Ourselves podcast
- Core Concepts

- Core Questions
- How fitness influencers game the algorithms to pump up their engagement

## Section 1: Managing our publics

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 **influencers**: Those figures, now ubiquitous in online spaces, whose popularity is leveraged to sway the opinions, preferences, and purchasing decisions of their audience.

Influencers can be celebrities, but they can also be regular people. **Microcelebrity**, a term introduced by Theresa Senft in her book on “Camgirls” published in 2008, is 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, regardless of their level of fame, to apply marketing perspectives to their 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 curating them.

## Student insights: The standards of Instagram over time (video by Nellie Youssef, Spring 2021)



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Here are a few of the characteristics of microcelebrity:

**Niche Content:** Microcelebrities often focus on niche topics or interests, catering to specific communities. This targeted approach helps them stand out and attract like-minded followers.

**Authenticity:** Unlike traditional celebrities who may maintain a curated public persona, microcelebrities often emphasize authenticity and relatability. Followers appreciate the unfiltered and genuine nature of microcelebrity content.

**Engagement:** Microcelebrities actively engage with their followers, fostering a sense of community and connection. This two-way communication distinguishes microcelebrity from traditional, one-sided celebrity-fan relationships.

**DIY Approach:** Microcelebrities frequently employ a do-it-yourself (DIY) approach to content creation. This self-produced content often resonates with audiences looking for a more personal and grassroots connection.



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](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/9/99/First_Lady_Michelle_Obama_and_Ryan_Seacrest_selfie_Jan_2014.jpg), Public Domain)

## Section 2: Paradoxes in microcelebrity

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.

Microcelebrity can be understood as a form of online fame that transcends traditional celebrity boundaries. Unlike mainstream celebrities who achieve fame through mass media and entertainment industries, microcelebrities gain recognition within specific online communities or platforms. These individuals amass followers, often numbering in the thousands or tens of thousands, by creating content that resonates with niche audiences.

Early social media influencers paved the way for microcelebrities by connecting with audiences through personal narratives, relatable content, and niche expertise. Platforms like Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube have become breeding grounds for microcelebrity, allowing individuals to build personal brands and cultivate communities around shared interests.



## Student Insights: How to be different on social media (writing by iVoices Media Lab Student, Fall 2020)



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## Section 3: Visibility labor

Media scholar Crystal Abidin has conducted numerous studies of microcelebrities and influencers; one example is in her article “Visibility Labour: Engaging with Influencers’ Fashion Brands and #OOTD Advertorial Campaigns on Instagram,” which explores the concept of visibility labor within the context of influencers’ engagement with fashion brands and Outfit of the Day (#OOTD) advertorial campaigns on Instagram. The term “visibility labor” refers to the effort influencers invest in curating and maintaining their online presence to attract and retain followers. The study examines how influencers contribute to the promotion of fashion brands and campaigns, shedding light on the dynamic relationship between influencers, brands, and the platform. The focus is on the role of Instagram as a space where influencers perform and negotiate visibility labor to establish themselves as influential figures in the realm of fashion.

The labor of microcelebrities and influencers, though often portrayed as glamorous, comes with hidden challenges. The constant pressure to create content leads to potential burnout, and the invasion of privacy blurs the line between public and private life. Online harassment is a significant issue, impacting mental health, and dependency on algorithms can result in unpredictable income. Short-lived fame, the pressure to monetize, and a culture of comparison contribute to anxiety and self-doubt. Overall, the negative impacts extend beyond the surface of the seemingly glamorous influencer lifestyle.

Microcelebrity, at its best, showcases the power of individuals to create meaningful connections and influence positive change through authentic content. Many microcelebrities leverage their influence to raise awareness about social issues and promote charitable causes. For instance, beauty and

lifestyle microcelebrities have been known to use their platforms to advocate for inclusivity and body positivity, contributing to broader societal conversations. This aligns with the idea that microcelebrity culture has the potential to be a force for positive social change, as explored in the work of Senft and Baym (2015).

Additionally, microcelebrities often serve as relatable role models, breaking away from the unattainable perfection associated with traditional celebrities. Abidin's study above highlights that audiences appreciate the authenticity and approachability of microcelebrities, finding inspiration in their stories and experiences. This aspect of microcelebrity culture fosters a more intimate and genuine connection between content creators and their followers, emphasizing the democratization of fame and influence in the digital age.



**Student Insights: Posting for Yourself  
(writing by iVoices Media Lab  
Student, Fall 2020)**



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## **Section 4: Digital ethnography, thanks to the students in this book**

In my chapters in this book, I have included students' compositions about their lives through photos, writing, audio, and video. This work is part of the larger iVoices Media lab project, which included hundreds of student's media stories and artifacts about technologies in their lives. I designed

iVoices to be a **digital (or virtual) ethnography**, teaching us about the digital world through stories about people.

So what is digital ethnography more conventionally? It's a qualitative research method that involves the study of online communities, cultures, and behaviors through immersive and participatory observation. It adapts traditional ethnographic methods to the digital realm, aiming to understand how people interact, communicate, and form communities in online spaces. This Digital Ethnography Reading List is an excellent guide to understanding how culture understood through online presence.

There are many ways to conduct digital ethnography, but I often draw on these methods:

#### **Participant Observation:**

- *Example:* An anthropologist might join an online gaming community, actively participating in the game, observing interactions, and documenting the culture, social norms, and communication styles within that digital space.

#### **In-Depth Interviews:**

- *Example:* A researcher might conduct virtual interviews with members of an online forum dedicated to a specific interest, exploring their motivations, experiences, and the role of the digital community in their lives.

#### **Content Analysis:**

- *Example:* Studying the content shared on a social media platform or blog to analyze the language, themes, and trends within a particular online

community, providing insights into the community's values and interests. iVoices students created digital artifacts: memes, hashtags, or user-generated content, which we collected and analyzed to understand how cultural expressions manifest within a digital community and how they contribute to identity formation.

Qualitative research methods like digital ethnography are conducted through the researcher as the “human instrument”. So how do we make sure that instrument is working correctly? **Ethics**, or considerations of how to minimize harm right thing, are a crucial consideration in studying the lives of people. Researchers consider ethical concerns such as privacy and consent when studying people. To be ethical in the study of culture, researchers must be reflexive, reflecting on their own experiences and biases, and the practice of **reflexivity** works to ensure that we as researchers are finding is not misunderstood through our own biases.

Every iVoices participant gave permission for their work to be openly licensed, and our team combed through their content to make sure their privacy was protected beyond whatever identifying information they chose to present. If you have found the student work in my chapters of this book valuable and you are a student, I hope you will take your experiences with social media seriously as knowledge, and consider how you can change with world with that knowledge in your pocket.

If you are an instructor using this book in your course, I hope you invite your students to teach you what they know.

## Section 5: Conclusion

Social media changes so rapidly, a book is difficult to maintain. How can we contain social life online enough to capture it in one volume? One solution is shared governance of a textbook, with many authors rather than one. To conclude this edition of this book, I invite you to consider becoming an author of a chapter in the next version. Learn more in the front matter, Inviting Coauthors in Shared Governance of this OER Textbook.

### Looking Back — Social Media and Ourselves podcast



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## Looking Back

*Release date: March 1st 2022*

In this episode, Professor Diana Daly, Gabe Stultz, and Jacquie Kuru take a look back on the podcast, sharing their favorite episodes, moments, and challenges so far. Stay tuned for an additional episode this month – recorded at SXSW!

LISTEN · LISTEN WITH TRANSCRIPT

***Respond to this podcast episode...****How did the podcast episode “Looking Back” use interviews, student voices, or sounds to demonstrate a current or past social trend phenomenon? If you were making a sequel to this episode, what voices or sounds would you include to help listeners understand more about this trend, and why?*



# Core Concepts and Questions

## Core Concepts

### ***"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)

### ***digital (or virtual) ethnography***

a qualitative research method that involves the study of online communities, cultures, and behaviors through immersive and participatory observation

### ***ethics***

considerations of how to minimize harm and do the right thing

## ***influencers***

online celebrities and microcelebrities whose popularity is leveraged to sway the opinions, preferences, and purchasing decisions of their audience

## ***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

## ***reflexivity***

reflecting on one’s own experiences and biases

## ***visibility labor***

the effort influencers invest in curating and maintaining their online presence to attract and retain followers

## Core Questions

### A. Questions for qualitative thought:

1. 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?
2. In the context of **microcelebrity**, how has the phenomenon influenced your own identity construction on social media platforms, and to what extent do you find yourself applying marketing perspectives to curate your online brand?
3. Reflecting on the "**the demotic turn**" in **celebrity culture**, how do you perceive the blurring of lines between the everyday and celebrity culture on social media platforms? Can you share personal examples or observations where ordinary individuals have achieved microcelebrity status, and do you believe this has impacted the way society views fame?
4. How have you observed individuals tailoring their

online profiles to conform to or stand out within specific cultural contexts? In your own experience or observations, does social media play a significant role in shaping the identity and perception of individuals associated with Greek Life or other college communities?

## B. Review: Which is the best answer?



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## C. Game on!



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## Related Content

**Read It: How fitness influencers game the algorithms to pump up their engagement**



The best influencers regularly highlight their competence.

Kilito Chan/Moment via Getty Images

Ashley Roccapiore, *University of Tennessee* and Tim Pollock, *University of Tennessee*

Social media and misrepresentation can go hand in hand – and that’s especially the case in the loosely regulated fitness and nutrition industry.

We both have experience with personal training, but from different perspectives.

To improve his fitness regimen, Tim has sought out experienced trainers, while Ashley ran an online fitness and nutrition company before getting her doctorate.

She went through all the hoops to obtain credentials – training as a bodybuilder, obtaining certifications from the National Strength and Conditioning Association and studying nutrition through the National Academy of Sports Medicine. She also used Instagram to grow her business.

And yet both of us realized that individuals with no credentials or expertise were building their own brands on social media – sometimes making more money than those who were credentialed.

It made us wonder: How is this possible?

To explore this, we followed 488 fitness and nutrition influencers on Instagram for six months, analyzing over 50,000 posts, 8 million follower comments and 620,000 influencer replies to figure out how they used words and images to attract and interact with followers.

In our recent article for the *Academy of Management Journal*, we explain how just establishing a social media presence doesn't mean a would-be influencer can easily reach clients, as the social media platform's algorithm determines who sees what posts, and when. And even if influencers do attract large followings, social media users shouldn't necessarily buy what the influencers are selling.

## The rise of the influencer

Social media use has more than tripled in the past decade, and many young people now aspire to become successful influencers. A Morning Consult poll from 2019 found that 54% of Americans ages 13 to 38 said they would become an influencer if given the chance.

But what exactly does it mean to be an influencer?

Influencers are people who use social media to sell products or services – either their own or those of another company or brand. Successful influencers gain better placement in their followers' social media feeds, obtain brand endorsements, facilitate networking opportunities and cultivate other revenue streams.

They do this by getting social media users to engage with their accounts – to follow their profiles, like their posts and write comments.

Although the algorithms social media platforms use to decide what users see are shrouded in mystery, it's generally understood that algorithms will boost accounts that have a lot of followers and regularly interact with these followers.

## Gaming the algorithm

Successful influencers will leverage these different degrees of user engagement to build and grow their



businesses. But they need to be strategic about which images and words they use, since each can influence different parts of the algorithm.

Images generally attract someone's attention before text, and they're also processed more quickly than text. So influencers must choose their images wisely.

We found that images that reinforce the influencers' competence – in the case of fitness influencers, photos and videos highlighting their physiques and ability to perform exercises, or “before and after” photos of themselves and their clients – had the largest effect on their number of followers.

Our data showed that for every image post signaling their competence, fitness influencers boosted their followers by almost 3%. That's significant when you consider that each additional follower can result in more revenue from sponsors and sales. According to the music licensing site Lickd, Instagram users with 5,000 followers can earn about US\$350 per sponsored post, and influencers with 100,000 followers can earn double that.

The trick, of course, is attracting sponsors.

But amassing lots of followers isn't the only path to ensuring success on social media. Influencers also need their followers to interact with their posts. This is typically much more time-intensive for users than clicking “follow” and mindlessly scrolling. But this sort of engagement can easily sway the algorithm.

Most social media users want to feel they're building a community, not just spewing their thoughts into a digital void. So successful influencers can cultivate

connection by regularly replying to their followers' comments.

This can be something as simple as “Hey @instagram\_girl292, I love that you tried our new product. We are so excited to hear what you think about the next one!”

We found that influencers who project warmth and reply to comments garner 21% more positive replies from current and new followers.



Whether you're selling workout plans or beauty products, it's important to regularly interact with your followers.

Alistair Berg/DigitalVision via Getty Images

## Buyer beware

It's important to remember that influencers can project competence without actually having it – and that

regular engagement with followers says little about the quality of the product they're selling.

In the sample we used for our study, fewer than 20% of the influencers reported having any credentials.

The fitness industry is especially prone to manipulation. While brick-and-mortar gyms traditionally require their personal trainers to have advanced credentials, such as certifications in fitness or nutrition, there is no industry governing body ensuring that people who call themselves trainers have the necessary background and experience. Therefore, anyone can become a trainer and sell their products and services online and through social media.

In fact, many fitness influencers doctor their images, giving themselves unrealistic and unattainable bodies.

Worse, they may not ever follow through on their promises.

For example, social media influencer Brittany Dawn was sued by thousands of her followers in February 2022 after they claimed she sold them fitness and meal plans she never delivered. Pitching herself as someone who could help people rebuild their relationship with food, Dawn had attracted followers and customers who had struggled with eating disorders. Responding to the criticism, Dawn, whose trial is set to begin on March 6, 2023, said, "I jumped into an industry that had no instruction manual."

Providing custom meal plans is outside most personal trainers' scope of expertise, unless they also happen to be nutritionists. But given the lack of industry oversight, few customers knew this. Instead, Dawn, like

many other social media influencers, lured followers by posting attention-grabbing photos and interacting with customers in ways that made them feel like they had a personal relationship with her.

That means that it's up to everyone to do their homework on what they're buying – and not be blinded by shapely legs, an alluring smile and six-pack abs.

Ashley Roccapiore, PhD Candidate in Business, *University of Tennessee* and Tim Pollock, Haslam Chair in Business and Distinguished Professor of Entrepreneurship, *University of Tennessee*

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Dr. Diana Daly of the University of Arizona is the Director of iVoices, a media lab helping students produce media from their narratives on technologies. Prof Daly teaches about qualitative research, social media, and information quality at the University of Arizona.

# Art

JACQUIE KURU

## Key points

- Creating digital art is fun and transformative.
- Creating art with Artificial Intelligence can mean correcting AI's biases.
- Art online cultivates relationships, including parasocial relationships between fans and artists online.
- Online creation and streaming of identities offers great flexibility in self-presentation.
- Collaborative projects online can reach extraordinary complexity.

## In this chapter

- Section 1: Art with AI, and bias correction
  - Student Insights: "Me, Myself, and AI" (About the cover image of this book, by Jacquie Kuru, Fall 2023)
- Section 2: Expanding what it means to make art
  - Student Insights: Art is Dope! (video by Emily Gustafson, Spring 2021)
- Section 3: Vtubers: Me, Myself, and My New

Design!

- Section 4: r/place: Art Through Community Collaboration
- Section 5: Unus Annus: Challenging the Permanence of Internet Content
- Section 6: FanArt, FanFic, and Fandoms: Respecting and Disrespecting The Source Material
  - Student Insights: Forays in Fan Fiction (video by Lizzie Agnew, Spring 2021)
- Section 7: It is All About Relationships
- Metas And MasterChef — The Social Media & Ourselves Podcast
- Core Concepts
- Core Questions
- How r/place – a massive and chaotic collaborative art project on Reddit – showcased the best and worst of online spaces

*This is a new chapter created in 2023. Jacquie Kuru, a student and then media lab worker in iVoices since 2021, is coauthor along with original Humans R Social Media author Diana Daly. We begin with Diana's voice and then Jacquie's takes over, along with stories by other students. Enjoy.*

## **Section 1: Art with AI, and bias**

## correction

*Objective:*

*Make Jacquie a new profile picture.*

Artist and Technologist Jacquie Kuru has created cover images for Humans R Social Media since 2022. For this edition, she created the cover image using tools based on **Artificial Intelligence** or AI, the development of computing systems to perform intelligent tasks. Creating art with AI is a process based on trial and error, machine learning and human intelligence. In technical terms, she fed a combination of text and images to an AI using a deep learning model called Stable Diffusion. In human terms, she negotiated with a set of digital tools trained in old biases to create something meaningful. To help you understand how Jacquie generated the cover, we'll walk you through a project Jacquie undertook that started with her own profile picture.

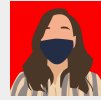


*1. The photo*

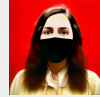
Jacquie began with a photo of herself (Image 1), and created a graphic profile picture using her own graphic design skills (Image 2), a simple image with no eyes. Then she decided to see what would happen when she asked AI to recreate her from just that eyeless graphic image. Image 3 is the AI's first output. The figure looks alert, machine-generated,



and white. After Jacquie gave the AI more information including her ethnicity (Turkish-Asian), it returned the more detailed image (Image 4), which was closer to what she wanted. What happened? First, some background. Stable Diffusion is a program of sorts, found on an open-source Github repository and downloaded as a .bash file. Jacquie suggests thinking of it like a bicycle: The start button is the pedal, and when you hit that start button it starts moving. It opens a server, which shows you a new browser window. In this window, you can prompt the server with text or images to create whatever you want. It works with **Natural Language Processing** or NLP, the science of how computers can understand what is asked of them through language. For text, you can assign heavier or lighter weight to words, like an emphasis. If you double the weight on angry, it will make the face look more like a look of rage; or decrease it and it looks like an annoyance. For images, you can tell the server to focus on different aspects, such as depth of field, or how close or far the subject is from the camera. Or you can add different weights and



2. *The graphic*



3. *AI output 1*



4. *AI output 2*

Jacquie's profile picture project: Generating images in AI can be fast and appear miraculous, at first. But as artists like Jacquie have discovered, creating an image that is truly what you

want can be a slow and problematic exchange.

significance to various aspects of the image. So after Jacquie writes a prompt, she can tinker with it and teach the AI what it doesn't know—teach it out of its assumptions.

*Creation Prompt:*

*an Asian-Turkish girl with brown flowy hair wearing a surgical mask, RAW candid cinema, woman, studio, 16mm, ((color graded portra 400 film)) ((remarkable color)), (ultra realistic), textured skin, remarkable detailed pupils, ((realistic dull skin noise)), ((visible skin detail)), ((skin fuzz)), (dry skin) shot with cinematic camera*

In next section, in principle of NLP, *not* means negative weight. So *not smiling* would be a negative of *smiling*. To get a sad face she could write *happy face* with a high weight for very happy, or *sad* with a negative. So the negative prompt is all the things you want the output *not* to be.

*Negative prompt:*

*B&W, logo, Watermark, bad artist, blur, blurry, text, b&w, 3d, bad art, poorly drawn, ...extra limbs, ugly hands, extra fingers, canvas frame, cartoon, 3d, disfigured, bad art, deformed, extra limbs, weird colors, duplicate, morbid, ...cloned face, disfigured, out of frame, ...extra arms, extra legs, mutated hands, fused fingers, too many fingers, long neck, Photoshop, video game, ...tiling, poorly drawn hands, poorly drawn feet, poorly drawn face, out of frame, ...body out of frame, bad art, ...3d render*

There is also a slider that was set with the following settings:

*Steps:*

*20, Sampler: Euler a, CFG scale: 7, Seed: 2613249707, Face restoration: CodeFormer, Size: 512×512, Model hash: 44f90a0972, Model: protogenX34Photorealism\_1, Denoising strength: 0.75, ControlNet-0 Enabled:*

```
True, ControlNet-0 Module: canny,  
ControlNet-0 Model: control_sd15_canny  
[fef5e48e], ControlNet-0 Weight: 0.45,  
ControlNet-0 Guidance Start: 0,  
ControlNet-0 Guidance End: 1 Time  
taken: 6.06s Torch active/reserved: 3843/  
4160 MiB, Sys VRAM: 6303/8192 MiB  
(76.94%)
```

That last step with the slider gave Jacquie what she wanted. How? She first learned how that deep learning model “thinks”, including its biases. Then she did the work to correct them.

Will the AI learn from this exchange? Maybe, a little—but a *lot* of people will have to push back against those initial outputs for the model to learn in any meaningful way.

## Student Insights: “Me, Myself, and AI” (About the cover image of this book, by Jacquie Kuru, Fall 2023)



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[https://opentextbooks.library.arizona.edu/  
humanssocialmedia/?p=1071#h5p-342](https://opentextbooks.library.arizona.edu/humanssocialmedia/?p=1071#h5p-342)

The rest of this chapter is written by Jacquie.

## Section 2: Expanding what it means to make art

By Jacquie Kuru

Art is a fluid concept, constantly shaped and redefined by new ideas, tools, and avenues for creative expression. Thanks to the internet, these elements have converged to create a unique platform where art flourishes in unexpected ways. From the ability to adopt different identities with VTubing to the collaborative canvas of r/place, the ephemeral journey of Unus Annus, and the thriving world of fanart and fan fiction, the internet has become a transformative space for artistic exploration.

VTubing has opened doors to a new realm of self-expression. In this digital landscape, individuals have the freedom to embody different character models, transcending their physical selves and embracing the limitless possibilities of virtual identities. People can fluidly change appearances while maintaining a consistent online persona, allowing for dynamic and diverse forms of creative expression.

Meanwhile, in the expansive canvas of r/place, millions of participants around the world came together to collaboratively create a shared artwork. This social experiment showcased the power of collective creativity and community collaboration, as individuals strategically placed pixels to form a sprawling collage of images and patterns. It demonstrated how the internet can foster a sense of unity and inspire collaborative endeavors that transcend geographical boundaries.

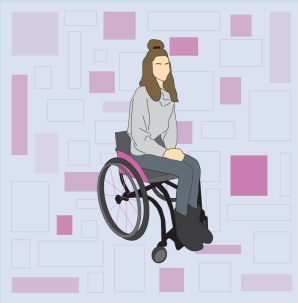
Unus Annus emerged as a time-limited project that challenged the notion of permanence in digital content. Within the span of a year, the creators explored the fleeting

nature of existence and the impermanence of art itself. The project prompted contemplation on the passage of time and the preciousness of each moment, leaving a lasting impact on those who engaged with its content.

Finally, fanart and fan fiction have become integral components of online art communities. Fans form parasocial relationships with artists, content creators, and fictional characters, fostering a deep sense of connection and admiration. Through these emotional bonds, fans are inspired to create their own artistic interpretations, paying homage to the source material while adding their unique perspectives. Fanart and fan fiction celebrate and expand upon beloved narratives, preserving fandoms and fostering communities united by shared passion.

In this chapter, we will explore the dynamic interplay between art and the internet, delving into the transformative nature of VTubing, the collaborative spirit of projects like *r/place*, the ephemeral journey of *Unus Annus*, and the profound influence of fanart and fan fiction. Through these sections, we will witness how the internet has revolutionized the artistic landscape, providing new means of self-expression, community collaboration, and the preservation of creative endeavors.

## Student Insights: Art is Dope! (video by Emily Gustafson, Spring 2021)



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<https://opentextbooks.library.arizona.edu/humanssocialmedia/?p=1071#h5p-304>

**Respond to this case study:** The author describes how



she feels about art, and how she has amassed knowledge in creating digital art including graphic design. Analyze the video she has made. What do the visuals and sounds do to support or play with her message? How can these skills aid social communications

## Section 3: Vtubers: Me, Myself, and My New Design!



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*here:*

*<https://opentextbooks.library.arizona.edu/humanssocialmedia/?p=1071#h5p-300>*



*Jacquie's Online Persona/Vtuber Character: Amber. (Used with artist's permission.)*

**VTubers** have opened up a new realm of self-expression online by allowing individuals to embody different models of the same character. This ability to adopt diverse appearances provides a level of flexibility and creativity that was previously unattainable in traditional forms of self-presentation.

One of the key advantages of VTubing is the freedom to explore various identities while maintaining a consistent persona. VTubers



*Jacquie's Actual Appearance in the Tangible World*

can seamlessly switch between different character models, each representing a distinct visual style or concept. For instance, an individual may choose to depict themselves as an anime-inspired character one day and transform into a fantasy creature or even an anthropomorphic object the next. The

versatility of VTubing allows for a dynamic expression of one's personality and interests, offering a more fluid and adaptable form of self-representation.

This fluidity is not limited to predefined character designs. VTubers can also commission artists to create unique and personalized renditions of their characters, ensuring that their online identity evolves and remains fresh over time. This collaborative approach to character design fosters a vibrant ecosystem of artistic expression, where creators collaborate with talented artists to bring their envisioned appearances to life. The result is a rich tapestry of visual interpretations that showcase the diversity and creativity of the VTubing community.

Famous VTubers like IronMouse actively engage with artists to commission new and distinctive character designs. By collaborating with different artists, she can explore various artistic styles and reimagine her character in exciting and unique ways. This process not only keeps her online presence visually stimulating but also allows her to tap into the immense talent and creativity within the artist community.

Furthermore, some VTubers take the creative process into their own hands, developing and refining their own character designs. This level of autonomy empowers creators to fully express their artistic vision and create an identity that aligns with their personal preferences and aspirations. By crafting their own character models, VTubers can showcase their artistic skills, explore different art styles, and establish a stronger connection between their online persona and their creative abilities.

However, it's important to note that while VTubing offers a unique platform for self-expression and creativity, it is not without its challenges. The line between the VTuber's authentic self and the character they portray can sometimes

become blurred, leading to questions about authenticity and the potential for misrepresentation. It is crucial for VTubers to maintain transparency and ensure that their online identities are a reflection of their genuine selves, even if presented through the lens of a character avatar.

VTubers have revolutionized online self-expression by offering a dynamic and fluid way for individuals to embody different models of the same character. This ability to adopt diverse appearances enables a range of creative possibilities, allowing VTubers to express themselves authentically while exploring unique visual styles and collaborations with talented artists. VTubing serves as a testament to the ever-evolving nature of online art and the exciting opportunities it brings for individuals to express themselves in a truly flexible and creative manner.

## **Section 4: r/place: Art Through Community Collaboration**

Interactive Break down of 2022 canvas: <https://place-atlas.stefanocoding.me>

The relationship between art and the internet has evolved significantly in recent years, with social platforms providing new avenues for creative expression and community engagement. One notable example being r/place, a Reddit social experiment that harnessed the collective creativity and collaboration of its users. Launched on April 1, 2017, this subreddit brought together millions of participants from around the world to collectively create a shared digital canvas. The canvas consisted of a 1000×1000 grid of pixels, and each user could place a single colored pixel on the canvas every

five minutes. The simplicity of this interaction allowed users to contribute to the artwork easily, resulting in a sprawling collage of various images and patterns. The canvas became a vibrant display of diverse artistic creations, ranging from pixel art representations of famous characters and logos to national flags and abstract designs. Reddit users worked together, coordinating efforts through subreddit communities, Discord servers, and other communication channels to bring their visions to life. This event was so successful it was brought back at a larger scale in 2022 with a 2000×2000 pixel grid and double the color choices (32 colors).

One fascinating aspect of r/place was the formation of alliances and the emergence of territorial battles on the canvas. As users invested time and effort into creating and maintaining their artwork, they sought to protect their creations from unwanted modifications or destruction. Alliances formed to establish designated areas and protect specific patterns or images. These collaborations ranged from informal agreements between individuals to elaborate coalitions between subreddits and online communities. Users defended their territory by placing pixels strategically, coordinating efforts to outmaneuver competing factions, and sometimes engaging in negotiations or diplomacy to avoid unnecessary conflicts. The formation of alliances not only showcased the competitive nature of human interactions but also highlighted the social dynamics that can arise in online spaces. Users forged connections, built trust, and developed intricate systems of governance to maintain order and protect their shared artistic endeavors.

After the 2017 event ended, academic researchers studied the evolution of the canvas. It was found that quantitative methods in visual artifact analysis can identify boundaries in the artwork and generally predict users' "collaboration" (Rappaz et al., 2018). However, the reason collaboration is in quotes is because these

quantitative methods could not discern between imagery created by collaboration verse conflict. Thus, Litherland & Mørch(2021) used qualitative and quantitative methods in their attempt to understand the evolution of the r/place canvas – focusing specifically on the development of the Mona Lisa painting. They studied two types of artifacts: visual and social which are defined as followed:

- **Visual Artifact:** physical objects found in a particular culture or context that have been created or shaped by humans, refers to images created during this event.
- **Social Artifact:** products of social beings and their social relationships, refers to the social interactions and relationships formed during the event.

According to their findings, the examination of social interaction within online communities can be seen as a dialectic process, influenced by artifacts that change at various levels of abstraction and time scales. The different levels serve two important purposes: preserving history by capturing the lower level's history in a more lasting manner, and managing complexity by controlling the lower level's growth rate. The connection between two levels of the same artifact is established through object transformation, where an object from a lower level may reappear on a higher level in a modified form. This concept of reconstruction, borrowed from the analysis of symbolic communication in face-to-face interactions (Mead, 1932, 1934), draws inspiration from biological processes (Litherland & Mørch, 2021). The free, complete pdf of Litherland's and Mørch's work is linked here: Collaborative Theory Paper.

As the canvas grew in popularity, users began to employ automated scripts, commonly known as “**bots**,” to assist with the placement of pixels. These bots automated the process of monitoring the canvas, identifying available spaces, and

strategically placing pixels according to predefined patterns or instructions. Bots played a crucial role in optimizing efficiency and precision, as they could rapidly respond to changes on the canvas and work around the clock. By leveraging bot assistance, participants could achieve complex designs that would have been impractical or time-consuming to create manually. However, the use of bots also sparked debates about the balance between human creativity and automated intervention in the artistic process. Additionally, bots were controversial because a network of them could destroy entire communities' works within seconds.

*The total collection of all r/place canvas can be found here:*  
[https://www.reddit.com/r/place/comments/u1gy8t/all\\_20172022\\_rplace\\_projects/](https://www.reddit.com/r/place/comments/u1gy8t/all_20172022_rplace_projects/)

## **Section 5: Unus Annus: Challenging the Permanence of Internet Content**

<https://twitter.com/MochaMage/status/1619264921296048128>

*Above: A retrospective YouTube documentary thumbnail image featuring The two founders of Unus Annus, Ethan Nestor (left) and Mark Fischbach (right).*

<https://twitter.com/PickleBearSimp/status/1659641379977564161>

*Above: The Unus Annus' logo/symbol chosen to represent the passing of time.*

The digital age has brought forth the notion that everything on the internet lasts forever. However, in a world where content is often preserved indefinitely, Unus Annus, a YouTube channel created by Markiplier (Mark Fischbach) and CrankGameplays (Ethan Nestor), emerged as a bold experiment to defy this notion. With its one-year lifespan, Unus Annus aimed to explore the fleeting nature of existence and the impermanence of digital content.

Unus Annus, Latin for “One Year,” was a collaborative YouTube project launched on November 15, 2019, and concluded exactly one year later. The channel’s purpose was to create and curate content that celebrated the passage of time, with the understanding that once the year elapsed, the entire channel would be permanently deleted. This experiment captivated audiences worldwide, accumulating millions of subscribers and fostering an active and dedicated fan base. The channel’s unique premise intrigued viewers, who eagerly followed the creators’ journey as they explored a wide range of topics, from bizarre experiments and challenges to thought-provoking discussions on mortality and the fleeting nature of life, albeit mostly done in a humorous manner.

The limited time frame added an element of urgency and exclusivity, intensifying the desire to experience and cherish the content while it lasted. Fans actively engaged with the channel, participating in live streams, submitting fan art, and sharing their interpretations of the channel’s messages. Unus Annus became more than just a YouTube channel; it became a shared experience and a community united by the impending end.

When the one-year mark arrived, Markiplier and CrankGameplays remained true to their initial intent. Without hesitation, they followed through on their promise and permanently deleted the entire Unus Annus channel, erasing



all its videos, comments, and interactions. The act of deletion symbolized the acceptance of the ephemeral nature of digital content, emphasizing that even creations with substantial impact can be fleeting and transient. However, while the majority of fans respected the deletion, there are a few who downloaded and reloaded the videos from the channel in their entirety. Even those who did respect the deletion also in many ways kept the channel alive after its deletion with fanart and parody videos. These actions, the deletion, and even the sale of merchandise raises questions about the value and legacy of digital content.

*Fandom Wiki-page of the Unus Annus:*  
[https://markiplier.fandom.com/wiki/Unus\\_Annus](https://markiplier.fandom.com/wiki/Unus_Annus)

## Section 6: FanArt, FanFic, and Fandoms: Respecting and Disrespecting The Source Material

Online, **fanart** and **fan fiction** have emerged as powerful expressions of creativity. They not only contribute to the rich tapestry of art but also play a significant role in the preservation of **fandoms** (online communities surrounding a creative project or something similar) and other art projects. However, it is important to acknowledge that while fandoms can be vibrant and supportive, they can also be negative through blatant disrespect of the source material, such as the imagining or compelling non-canonical relationships, intentionally misinterpreting key messages, and fostering toxicity towards the original creators.

<https://twitter.com/par0llel/status/1457332183287283713>



*Fanart of  
Jacquie  
Kuru's  
Vtuber  
Amber  
created  
collaborativ  
ely by her  
community  
on Discord,  
used with  
permission*

What is Fan Art? Fan Art (fanart) refers to artistic creations produced by fans, often inspired by existing works of literature, films, television shows, video games, or other forms of media. The internet has become a vast gallery for fanart, enabling artists to showcase their talent and pay tribute to the source material that inspires them. Fanart allows fans to reinterpret characters, settings, and narratives, offering fresh perspectives and expanding the visual representation of beloved stories. Through fanart, online communities thrive by sharing, appreciating, and engaging with artists' creations. Fanart provides a sense of connection and camaraderie, fostering conversations and collaborations among fans. It amplifies the impact of the original work, extending its reach and leaving a lasting impression on both creators and audiences.

Fan Fiction or fanfic, on the other hand, involves writing stories that feature characters or settings from existing works of fiction. It allows fans to explore alternative narratives, expand upon existing storylines, or delve into unexplored aspects of the source material. Fan fiction serves as a platform for fans to engage in imaginative storytelling, experiment with different genres, and explore character dynamics beyond what is

presented in the original work. Similar to fanart, fan fiction thrives within online communities, fostering collaboration, feedback, and discussions among readers and writers. It provides an outlet for creative expression, allowing fans to contribute their unique voices and interpretations to the larger tapestry of the fandom. Fan fiction helps preserve and expand upon the world of the source material, keeping fandoms alive long after the original content has ended. Additionally, many creative writers establish their own audiences through fan fiction before writing and promoting their own original concepts.

A list of well-known authors who started as fanfic writers:

<https://lplks.org/blogs/post/21-published-authors-who-write-fanfiction/>

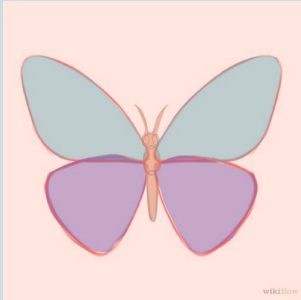
While both fanart and fan fictions can help preserve and expand online fandoms, they can pervert the source material in the process causing more harm than good. On one hand, fandoms create a sense of belonging and support, providing spaces for fans to engage in meaningful discussions, celebrate their favorite works, and showcase their creative talents. Fandoms often organize events, conventions, and online initiatives that further contribute to the growth and appreciation of the art they cherish. The other hand, fandoms can exhibit behaviors that disrespect the source material and its creators. The imagining or compelling of non-canonical relationships, commonly referred to as “**shipping**,” can sometimes overshadow the original intent and narrative of the work. This can lead to toxicity within fandoms, as fans argue passionately in favor of their preferred pairings and engage in heated debates, sometimes directing negativity towards the creators themselves. Additionally, some of these characters being shipped can be real people who are either actors in the project or online personalities such as Youtubers and Twitch

streamers. Fans of these real world based-fandoms, can harass these creators or original participants of the source material with unsolicited sexualized fanart and fanfiction.

It is crucial for fandoms to strike a balance between expressing their creativity and respecting the original creators' vision. While fanart and fan fiction provide avenues for reinterpretation and exploration, it is important to maintain an understanding of the source material's boundaries and to engage in respectful dialogue with both fellow fans and the creators themselves. Constructive engagement ensures that fandoms continue to contribute positively to the art and foster an inclusive and supportive environment.



**Student Insights: Forays in Fan  
Fiction (video by Lizzie Agnew, Spring  
2021)**



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**Respond to this case study:** The video creator talks about using an online platform to connect with others. How is using an app for creating fan fiction different than simply using a common social media network? What affordances does the fan fiction app offer that might strengthen social connections?

## Section 7: It is All About Relationships

In writing this section, I (Jacquie Kuru) realized there was an underlining theme to all of these new expressions of art – relationships. Whether it is an ever changing relationship with the self, as expressed through vtubing, or the collaborative and combative dynamics of r/place, the relationships formed in these realms shape and define the art created within them. Even in the fleeting existence of Unus Annus and the parasocial connections nurtured by fanart and fan fiction, relationships underpin the very essence of these online art projects.

VTubing offers a unique relationship with the self, allowing individuals to explore and express different facets of their identity through diverse character models. The fluidity of appearance fosters a dynamic connection with creativity, empowering artists to embrace new forms of expression and engage with their audiences in innovative ways.

In the collaborative canvas of r/place, relationships emerged as users joined forces, formed alliances, and protected their creations, showcasing the power of collective effort and the strength of communal bonds. Simultaneously, the combative nature of territorial battles demonstrated the complexities of human interactions, highlighting both the collaborative spirit and the occasional conflicts that arise within online communities.

Unus Annus challenged our relationship with the concept of time and permanence, urging viewers to contemplate the impermanence of existence itself. The ephemeral nature of the project emphasized the fleeting nature of art, leaving a lasting impact on those who participated and observed. Through the collective experience of Unus Annus, relationships with the idea of impermanence and the preciousness of time were

fostered, urging reflection on the transitory nature of our own lives and the art we create.

Within the realm of fanart and fan fiction, parasocial relationships emerged as fans formed deep connections with artists, content creators, and fictional characters. These one-sided emotional bonds inspired fans to express their love and appreciation through creative mediums, shaping a vibrant community of artists and enthusiasts. The interconnectedness of these relationships nurtured a cycle of inspiration and artistic production, fueling the growth and evolution of fandoms and online art communities.

In conclusion, relationships lie at the heart of online art. Whether they manifest as relationships with the self, collaboration and conflict among communities, connections with profound ideas, or parasocial bonds, these relationships shape and drive the creative expressions that flourish within digital spaces. They inspire artists, foster collaboration, and provide a sense of belonging and identity within online communities. Through these relationships, the dynamic and ever-evolving landscape of online art continues to thrive, weaving together a tapestry that celebrates the diverse range of human experiences and creative expressions.

## Metas And MasterChef — The Social Media & Ourselves Podcast



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<https://opentextbooks.library.arizona.edu/humansrsocialmedia/?p=1071#oembed-1>

### Metas And MasterChef

*Release Date: February 1st 2022*

In this episode, Gabe Stultz gives us an introduction to the world of Twitch. A site that dominates the live streaming world, the platform itself becomes subject to changing “metas,” or trends in popular programming dictated by popular creators. With boundaries being pushed to create the hottest new trend, we run into the latest meta: the “react” meta, in which streamers are baiting DMCA strikes. Will they bring the wrath of copyright holders down upon all of Twitch, or is there no reason to panic? SMO theme composed by Gabe



Stultz. Music in this episode by PRISM. Produced by Gabe Stultz with a deep thanks to Dr. Daly for this episode's interview.

LISTEN (uncensored) • LISTEN WITH  
TRANSCRIPT (censored)

***Respond to this podcast episode...***How did the podcast episode “Metas And MasterChef” use interviews, student voices, or sounds to demonstrate a current or past social trend phenomenon? If you were making a sequel to this episode, what voices or sounds would you include to help listeners understand more about this trend, and why?

## Core Concepts and Questions

### Core Concepts

**Artificial Intelligence** or AI

the development of computing systems to perform intelligent tasks

**fan art or fan fiction**

creative work made by a fan of a particular piece of media such as a TV series, video game, etc. featuring characters from said piece of media. These creative works are the backbones of online communities called fandoms

**fandom**

the collective name for the fan community of a particular piece of media

**Natural Language Processing** or NLP

the science of how computers can understand what is asked of them through language

**VTuber**

an individual who has adopted a virtual avatar to represent them online, usually as online entertainers on platforms such as YouTube

## Core Questions

### A. Questions for qualitative thought:

1. In your experience, how has the internet specifically impacted the way artists create and share their work? Beyond the examples you mentioned, can you elaborate on other ways in which VTubing allows individuals to explore and express themselves creatively?
2. How do the collaborative and combative aspects of online art projects, like r/place, influence the final outcome and the overall experience for participants?
3. In your opinion, how can fan art and fan fiction contribute positively to the source material and the communities surrounding it?
4. Looking towards the future, what are your thoughts on the potential evolution of online art forms and the role that technology will play in shaping them?

## B. Review: Which is the best answer?



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## C. Game on!



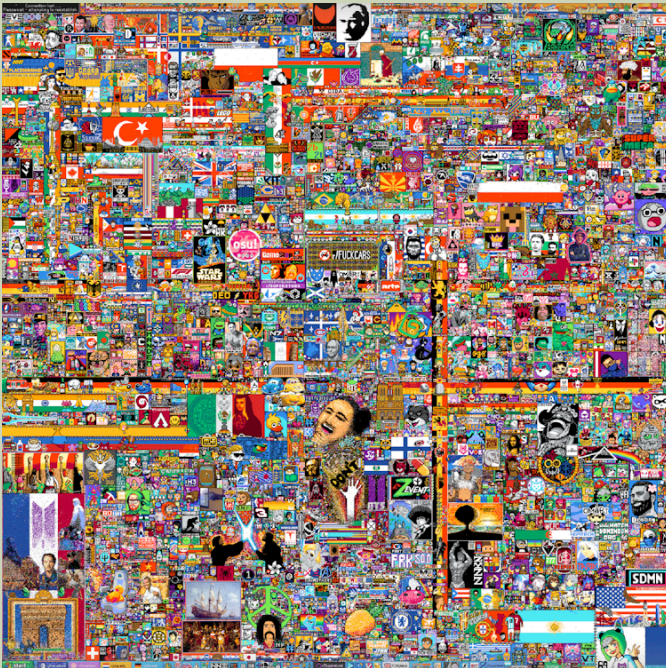
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humanssocialmedia/?p=1071#h5p-316](https://opentextbooks.library.arizona.edu/humanssocialmedia/?p=1071#h5p-316)*

## Related Content

Read It: How r/place – a massive and chaotic collaborative art project on Reddit – showcased the best and worst of online spaces



Screenshot, Author provided

Andrew Childs, *Griffith University*

Many would be familiar with Reddit as one of the largest social networking sites, with a large group of forums (“subreddits”) catering to almost any interest.

Since the beginning of April, Reddit has played host to a massive collaborative art project called r/place that simultaneously shows us some of the best and worst attributes of cybercultures.

Originally launched in 2017, r/place ran for 72 hours. The lifespan of the new r/place was also short – ultimately lasting for just five days. Beginning initially as a blank canvas, r/place allows users to place one coloured pixel every five minutes (or 20 minutes for unverified accounts) as they attempt to build a collective art piece.

Traversing through r/place takes you for a journey through time, memes and cultures.

At any one moment you might be looking at a Nine Inch Nails logo, the flags of various countries, a QR code linking you to a YouTube video titled The Most Logical Arguments AGAINST Veganism (In 10 Minutes), and a homage to Zyzz – a popular bodybuilding figure who passed away in 2011.

Some artworks on r/place don’t seem to represent anything at all. The sole mission of The Blue Corner is (you guessed it) to have a blue corner depicted on the final art piece.

The artwork constantly changes over its short lifetime. But even if the drawings of some communities may not go the distance, the time lapse videos depicting

the ongoing mutation of the canvas has become a key part of this art piece, ensuring all contributions play a vital part in the lifecycle of r/place.

<https://youtube.com/watch?v=XnRCZK3KjUY%3Fwmode%3Dtransparent%26start%3D0>

## Collaboration – and opposition

r/place shows us the collaborative nature of humans in online spaces. After its emergence in 2017 it was hailed as “the internet’s best experiment yet” and praised for capturing “the internet, in all its wonderful glory”.

This collaborative online art project allows people to express their individuality as well as collective identities formed through interactions with online spaces.

This year’s iteration of r/place, in contrast to the previous version, demonstrates the interconnectivity of communities in digital spaces. No longer is r/place solely reserved for Reddit users. Now, there is clear power in drawing on communities distributed across Twitch, Discord and Twitter.

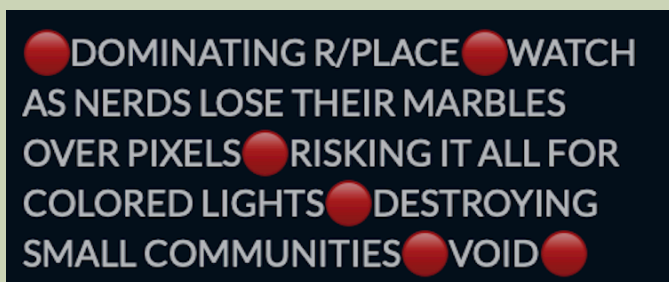
This influx of communities from all over the internet has not been well-received by all.

There is a belief Twitch streamers are ruining the work of smaller communities and are attempting to sabotage the project.

Instead of being a democratic representation of online communities and their art, the argument goes, Twitch



streamers are encouraging their fans, numbered in the hundreds of thousands, to capture hotly contested territory.



Twitch's xQc has up to 200,000 viewers on his streams where he is encouraging a take-over of r/place.

Screenshot

Factions – such as those formed between Spanish streamers and BTS fans – have become the primary way to ensure power and influence over the art project.

Smaller communities are driven out at the expense of larger influencers with more bargaining power in this pixel warfare.

It is not just individuals taking part in this art project. Many believe “bots” are running rampant, performing automated tasks in a way that is antithetical to the idea of this artwork as a representation of human achievement as opposed to technical prowess.

These examples are just a fraction of the chaos over the internet in the last few days: 4chan operated coordinated attacks on the Trans flag and LGBTQ+ panels, and streamers are receiving an influx of death threats.

## The best and worst of us

At its best, r/place is a powerful illustration of strangers coming together about their passions online and the collaborative nature of the internet.

At its worst, it represents everything we have come to dislike about the internet: the exclusion of smaller voices at the expense of influencer cultures, factions between communities, and the toxicity of some cybercultures.



The end of r/place.  
Screenshot

Whatever the case, this project has been great for boosting Reddit's publicity as the company goes public.

In its final moments earlier today, users could only place white tiles and watch the spectacle of a once vibrantly coloured collaborative art piece that caused so much chaos among online communities simply transform back into a blank canvas.

Andrew Childs, Lecturer, *Griffith University*

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## About Jacquie, the author of this chapter



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*here:*

*<https://opentextbooks.library.arizona.edu/humanssocialmedia/?p=1071#h5p-106>*

*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!*



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## About the author



Jacquie Kuru

# Wellness

ALEXANDRIA FRIPP

## Key points

- Wellness is defined as a dynamic state of physical, mental, and social well-being, with a focus on low distress levels, overall good health, and a positive outlook.
- Social media's influence on physical health ranges from positive aspects like nutrition advice to negative effects such as body image concerns, with platforms like Instagram linked to issues like anxiety and depression.
- Social media's role in mental health is complex; it can be a tool for wellness, but also a source of damage, impacting emotional regulation, anxiety, and depression.
- The importance of social health is highlighted, especially during the pandemic, where technology serves as a lifeline for connection, despite potential links between social media and social anxiety.
- Online platforms play a crucial role in connecting individuals dealing with illness, emphasizing communication technology's affordances, such as control, anonymity, visibility, and availability.
- Practical tips for maintaining a healthy

relationship with social media are outlined, addressing the intentional design choices, self-reflection on the relationship, and active participation in curating online content.

In this chapter

- Section 1: Dimensions of Wellness and Well-being
- Section 2: Mental Health
  - Student insights: Darkness that Stems from Light (by Kyra Tidball, Spring 2021)
  - Student insights: Toxic Social Media (by Perla, Spring 2021)
- Section 3: Social Health
- Section 4: Personal Conclusion
- The Intern Series Part 1: Why the Hate? — The Social Media & Ourselves Podcast
- Core Concepts
- Core Questions
- Why it's important to think about social media use as a form of dissociation, rather than addiction

Student insights: Toxic Social Media (by Perla, Spring 2021)“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.

## Section 1: 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 TikTok 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.

## **Section 2: 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.

## Student insights: Darkness that Stems from Light (by Kyra Tidball, Spring 2021)



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**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?

## Student insights: Toxic Social Media (by Perla, Spring 2021)



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**About the Video Creator:** This video was created by Perla in iVoices Media Lab workshops in Spring 2021

## Section 3: 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.

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 behaviors can actively and positively contribute to the virtual landscape.

## Connecting through Illness

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.

## Tips for a healthy life with social media

Read more about life balance and social media from NPR<<https://www.npr.org/2021/07/16/1016854764/social-media-balance-relationship-boundaries>>.

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.

## Section 4: 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.

## The Intern Series Part 1: Why the Hate? — Social Media and Ourselves podcast



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### The Intern Series Part 1: Why the Hate?

*Release date: May 1st, 2021*

iVoices intern Kris Kelley explores her experience being cyberbullied after appearing in a Disney commercial, to understand why trolls spread hate online. Music by Jonatha Chance and Airtone. Theme music by Gabe Stultz. Produced by Diana Daly and iVoices Media Lab.

**LISTEN** · **LISTEN WITH TRANSCRIPT**

***Respond to this podcast episode...***How did the podcast episode “The Intern Series Part 1: Why the

*Hate?" use interviews, student voices, or sounds to demonstrate a current or past social trend phenomenon? If you were making a sequel to this episode, what voices or sounds would you include to help listeners understand more about this trend, and why?*

## Core Concepts and Questions

### Core Concepts

#### ***wellness***

“a dynamic state of physical, mental, and social well-being,” according to the American Psychological Association (APA)

## ***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,” according to the American Psychological Association (APA)

## ***Emotional regulation***

a vital part of mental health, this is a skill developed in childhood and adolescence by experiencing strong emotions and developing internal regulatory processes

## ***Social anxiety***

fear of embarrassment or humiliation, leading to the avoidance of social situations

## Core Questions

### A. Questions for qualitative thought:

1. 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?
2. Reflect on a moment when you encountered an image on social media that made you question your own body image. How did you navigate those feelings, and did it influence your subsequent online interactions?
3. Look back an experience where you turned to social media for emotional support during a challenging time. How did the online community respond, and did it impact your emotional well-being?
4. Think about a time when you used social media to connect with others during the pandemic. How did this digital connection influence your sense of social health, and did it bring any unexpected challenges or benefits?

## B. Review: Which is the best answer?



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## C. Game on!



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## Related Content

## Read It: Why it's important to think about social media use as a form of dissociation, rather than addiction



When you dissociate, you become so absorbed in an activity that you lose track of time.

Marc Dufresne/Getty Images

Amanda Baughan, *University of Washington*

In the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic, I had an unfortunate Saturday routine. I would wake up in my studio apartment and immediately turn to my phone, telling myself that I would get breakfast after quickly checking Twitter.

An hour or so later, I would look up and realize what

time it was – and how ravenous I'd become. I had become totally absorbed in looking at memes, snark and the 24 hour news cycle.

This experience sparked an idea: What if, instead of people becoming “addicted” to social media – as users often characterize their excessive engagement – they're actually dissociating, or becoming so engaged that they lose track of time?

I've researched people's social media use for four years as a Ph.D. student at the University of Washington, and my collaborators and I decided to design a study to test this theory.

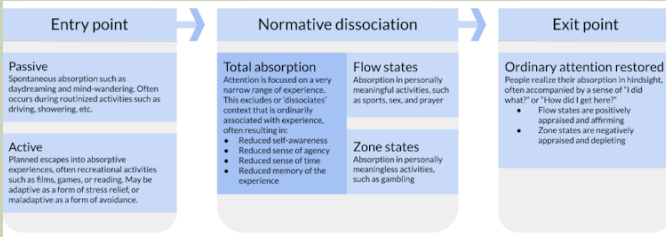
## **What is dissociation?**

Many researchers think dissociation occurs on a spectrum. On one end, there is the kind of dissociation that is spurred by trauma and associated with PTSD flashbacks.

Then there are common, everyday experiences of dissociation, which involve attention being limited to a narrow range of experience. Everyday dissociation can be passive or active. Spontaneous daydreaming is a form of passive dissociation, while reading a book is an example of active dissociation. In both cases, you can become so immersed in a fantasy or story that time falls away and you lose track of your surroundings. You might not be able to hear someone calling your name from another room.

Dissociation is part of healthy cognitive functioning, as

mind-wandering helps you learn, and combating stress though deeply engaging in hobbies can boost your mood.



Dissociation is a process that is defined by focused attention that leads to a reduced sense of the passage of time and reduced self-awareness.

Amanda Baughan, CC BY

## What does dissociation look like online?

When online, however, dissociation can reflect zombie-like behavior – scrolling for hours without realizing it, not being aware to one's surroundings while scrolling, or scrolling on autopilot and then realizing you haven't actually paid any attention to what you've read. Have you ever seen someone so absorbed in their phone that they start walking across a street, oblivious to oncoming traffic? They're likely dissociating.

Typically, behavior like this is classified as smartphone or internet addiction.

However, researchers have begun to push back against the narrative of addiction to describe excessive

smartphone use, explaining that the behavior – even if it’s a source of distress – should not be considered addiction if it’s better explained by an underlying disorder, is a willful choice, or is part of a coping strategy.

I am of the belief that choosing to play Candy Crush for three hours a day is not necessarily “addiction.” I do, however, think that the complete disconnect people experience from their surroundings and sense of time passing is an interesting phenomenon to explore. Therefore, I wanted to understand if people are dissociating during their phone use.

In our study, we recruited volunteers to use a custom mobile app alternative to Twitter, called Chirp. Forty-three people used Chirp for four weeks, cycling through four different design interventions, coupled with in-app surveys. We then selected 11 of them to interview about the experience.

We found dissociation occurred in nearly half of our participants, and they often expressed a sense of disappointment afterwards, saying that they would have rather have engaged in a different activity with the amount of time they had spent online. However, some said their time on social media was meaningful to them, and the fact that they were connecting with real people was valuable, even as they dissociated.

## **Cultivating online agency**

Understanding social media overuse as a byproduct of

dissociation, rather than addiction, can help destigmatize social media use while empowering users. This framing also helps explain why social media sits in a paradoxical position: people have frustrating relationships with social media platforms that they are simultaneously unwilling to quit.

Seeking escape from the present moment through deep absorption – including absorption in social media – is a natural, common, and often beneficial thing to do. However, when users spend much more time dissociating online than they would have consciously chosen for themselves, they become frustrated and conflicted. And many social media platforms exploit this tendency by keeping people “on the hunt” for new content through algorithmic design.

This suggests that it is possible for users to have healthy and satisfying relationships with social media – even when dissociating is involved – if the platforms can also help their users disengage.

## **How design can reduce dissociation**

In our study, we deployed several interventions to help pause or reduce dissociation while scrolling on Chirp. One intervention that was particularly effective was requiring our participants to sort their content into lists by topic – say, news, sports and reality TV – rather than having all subjects appear as an avalanche of information on one main feed. People could then click different tabs to view their lists. We found that many

users would only scroll through one or two tabs before exiting the app.

We paired this intervention with a “reading history” label that informed our users when they were “all caught up” with previously viewed tweets. Participants said that this helped them feel more in control and less likely to lose track of time.

Of course, many current social media companies, such as TikTok, rely on algorithmically-determined, constantly updating content. Similarly, on Instagram and Twitter, popular and trending content gets inserted into a feed of followed content. This makes it impossible to ever get “all caught up.”

In these cases, past research shows that many people would appreciate reminders to log off before 30 minutes of use. Otherwise they become disappointed with the time they’ve spent. These reminders could be inserted into regular content, which is something TikTok already does.

Users can do this for themselves by becoming familiar with the suite of digital well-being tools at their disposal. Viewing usage page statistics and setting timeouts is already available across many sites, although many of these settings are turned off by default.

However when more people use these tools, it signals to the companies that they should continue to invest time and resources into developing them.

Amanda Baughan, PhD Student in Computer Science & Engineering, *University of Washington*

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## About the author



Alexandria Fripp





# IVOICES MEDIA COLLECTIONS

Complete information about iVoices and our complete media collections are accessible through the iVoices website. The galleries here reflect the content our teams of students had time to organize before this edition was published.

## Galleries in this book:

Gallery of iVoices Graphic Profile Pictures

Gallery of Spring 2021 Audio Stories

Gallery of Video Stories

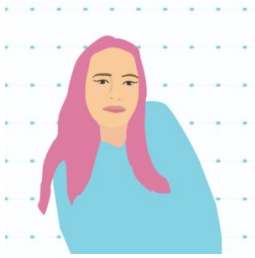
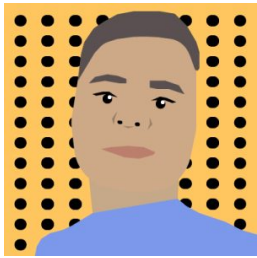
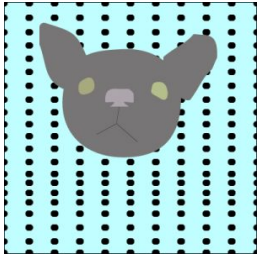
# Gallery of iVoices Graphic Profile Pictures

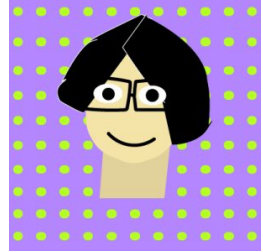
JACQUIE KURU; EDUARDO TOCCO; LIZETTE ARIAS; AND  
MARIA JOSÉ GARCIA

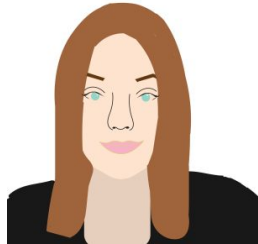
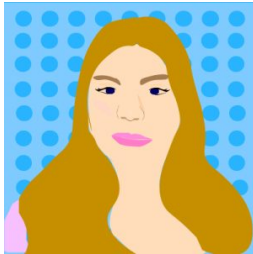
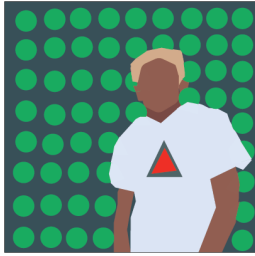
**For full collections, transcripts, and other information, view the iVoices collections.**

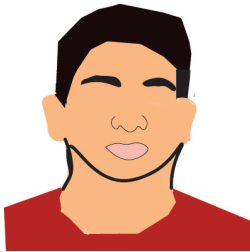
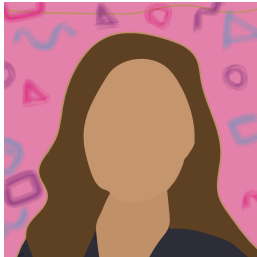
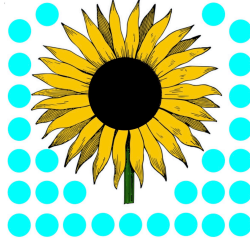
Big thanks to Lizette Arias and Maria José Garcia for creating and teaching this excellent assignment. Here is a Video Story lesson plan<<https://edex.adobe.com/teaching-resources/make-a-video-story-with-adobe-premiere-pro>> by Lizette Arias. Scroll down for attributions.

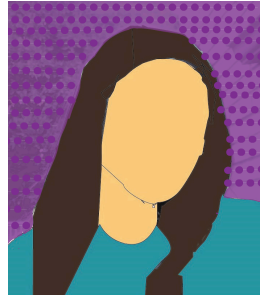
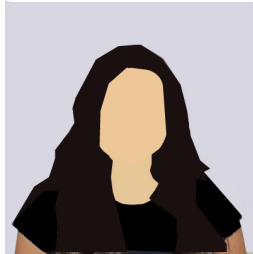
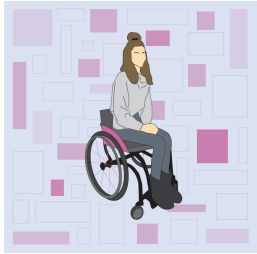
Here is an excellent Graphic Profile Pic lesson plan<<https://edex.adobe.com/teaching-resources/make-a-graphic-profile-pic>> by Maria José Garcia.



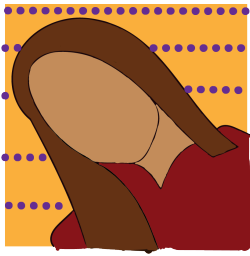
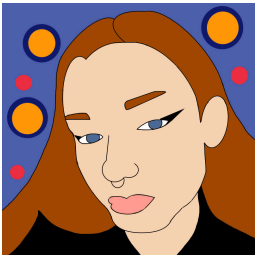
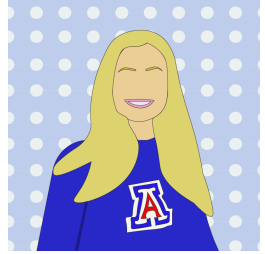


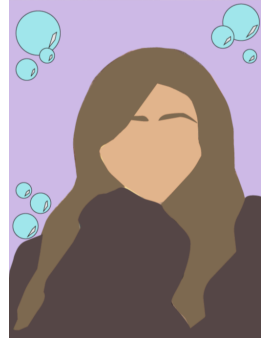
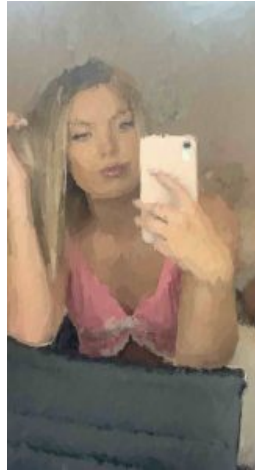
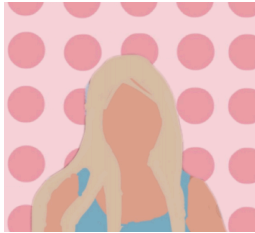


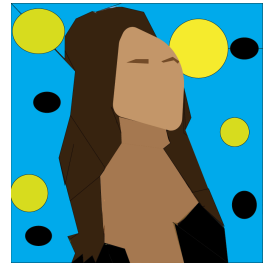
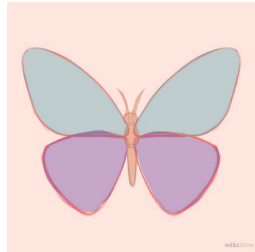
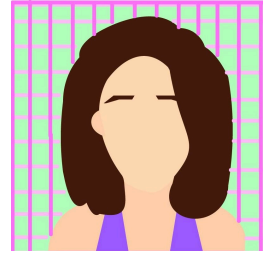


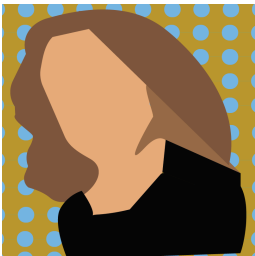
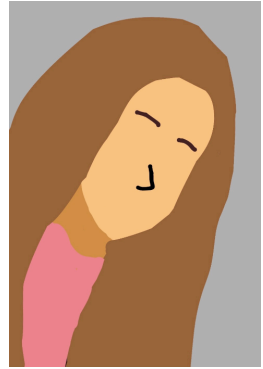
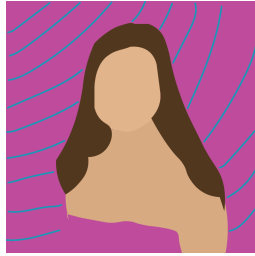


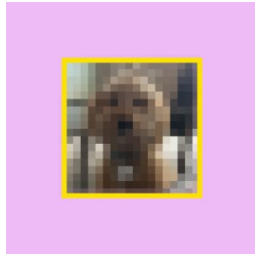
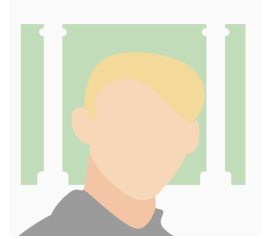


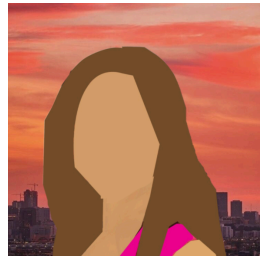
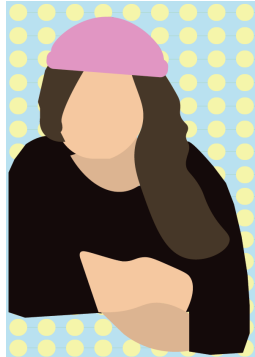
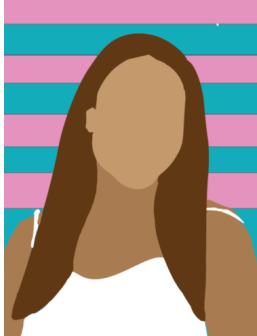
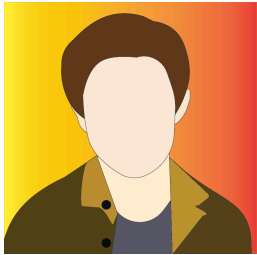
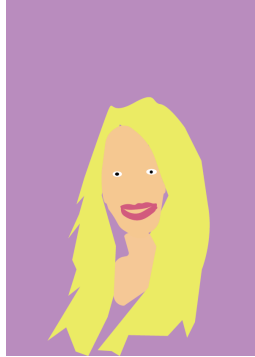
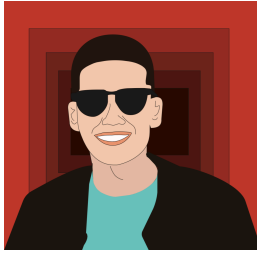


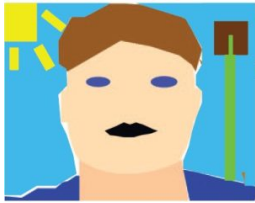


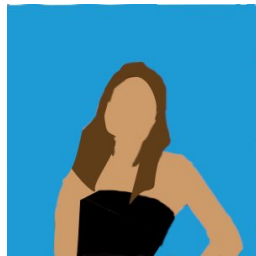
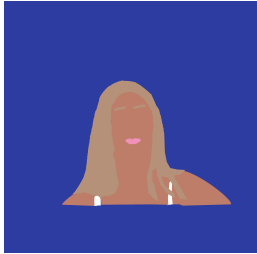




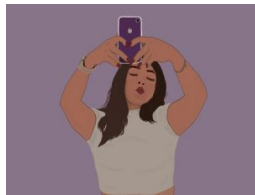
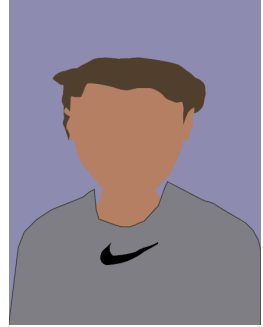
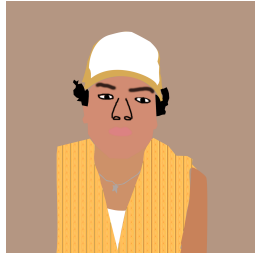


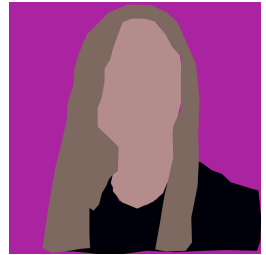
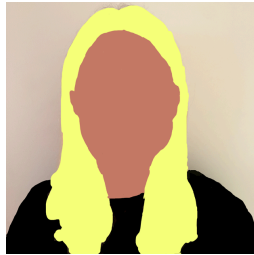
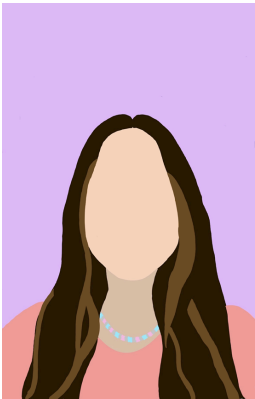
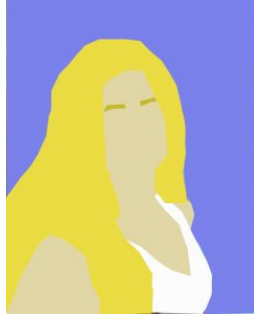
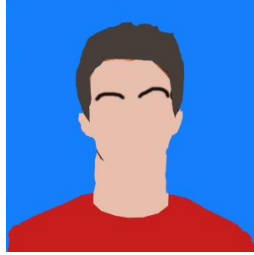


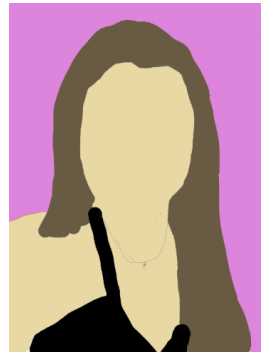
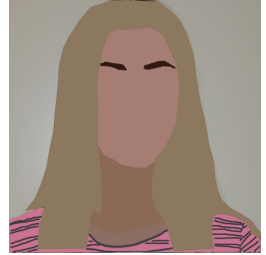
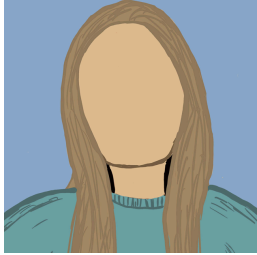


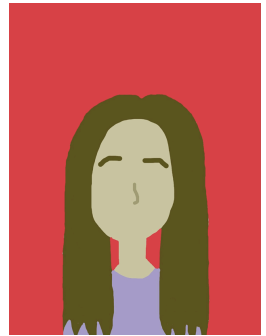
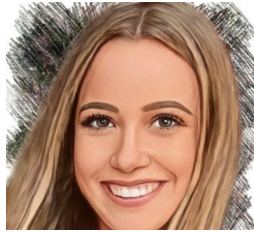
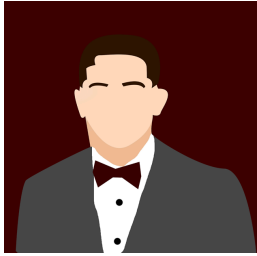


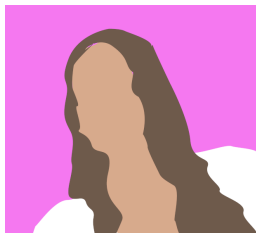
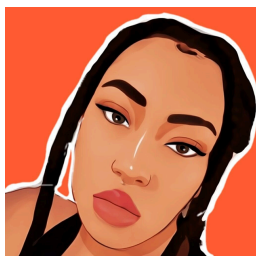
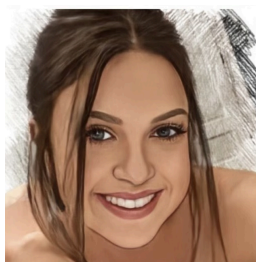


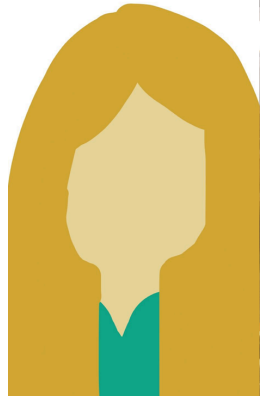
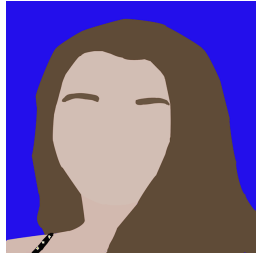
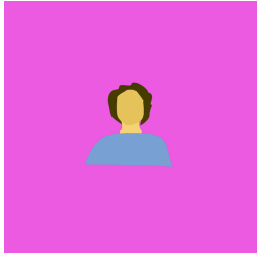


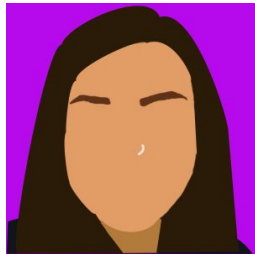
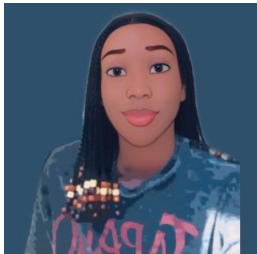
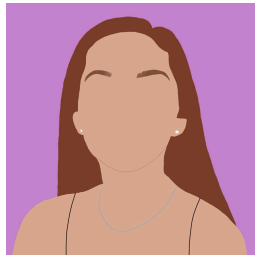














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<https://github.com/etocco-1>

Lizette Arias

Maria Garcia

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EDUARDO TOCCO

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s21\_042\_p1audio



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s21\_051\_p1audio



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s21\_059\_p1audio



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## Credits

## About the author



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<https://github.com/etocco-1>

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s21\_107\_p4video



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s21\_042\_p4video



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s21\_081\_p4video



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s21\_108\_p4video





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s21\_104\_p4video



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s1\_106\_p4video



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## About the author



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<https://github.com/etocco-1>

# Gallery of Memes

JACQUIE KURU AND EDUARDO TOCCO

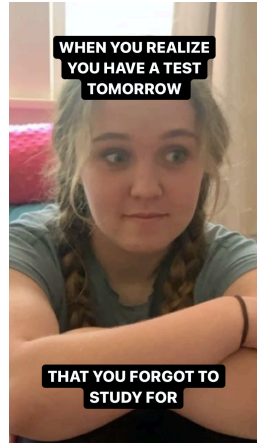
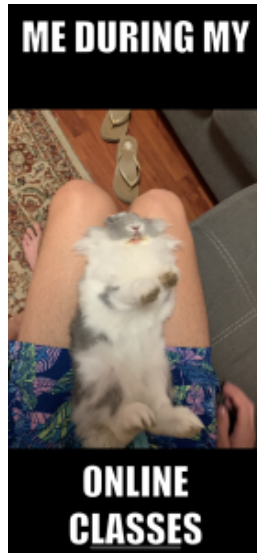
Many thanks to Jacquie Kuru for creating this meme assignment. Here is her fabulous instructional video:

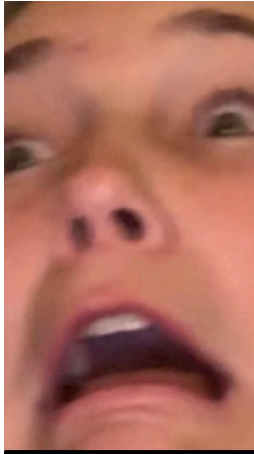


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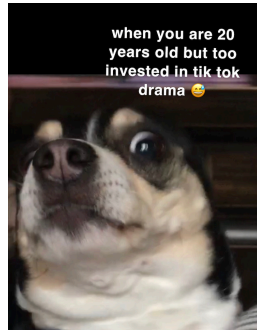
*view them online here:*

*<https://opentextbooks.library.arizona.edu/humanssocialmedia/?p=2295#oembed-1>*

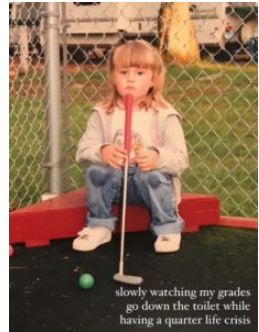




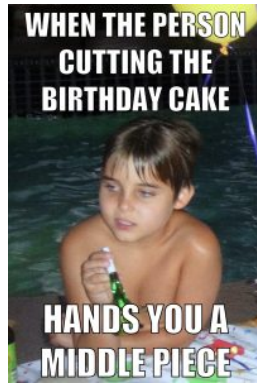
When an assignment is due at a different time than 11:59pm



when you are 20 years old but too invested in tik tok drama 😬

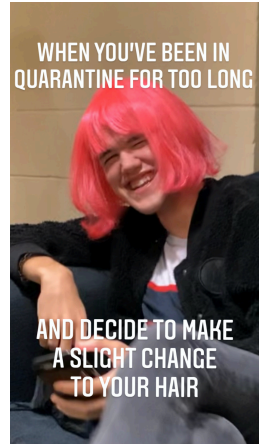


slowly watching my grades go down the toilet while having a quarter life crisis



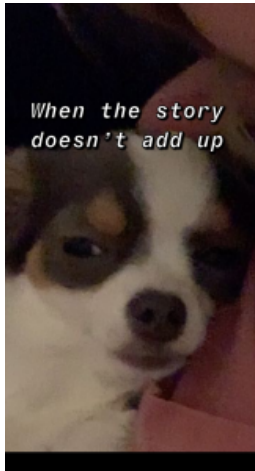
when you argue with people who don't  
want to get the COVID-19 vaccine







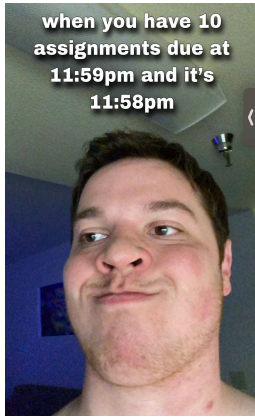




**5 minutes into the all nighter I said I'd pull to finish my assignment due tomorrow :**



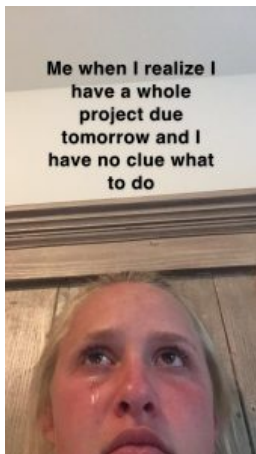
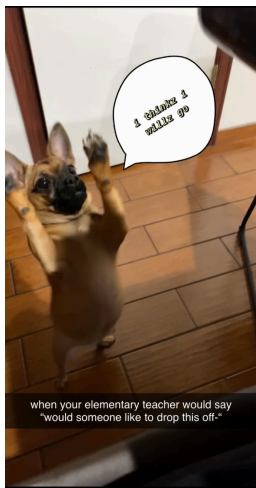


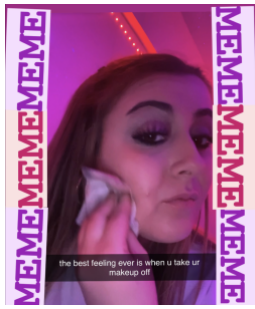


And it says last week











*Online school has  
me like:*

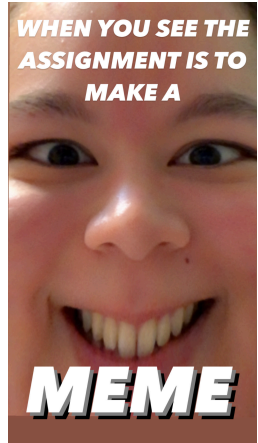


**WHEN IT'S TIME FOR  
A WALK**



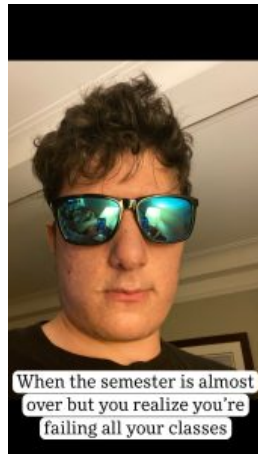
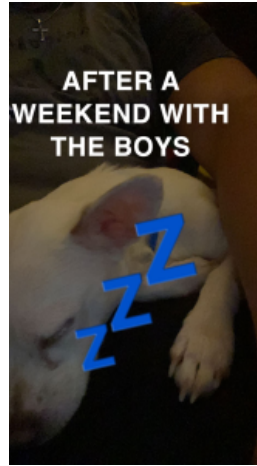
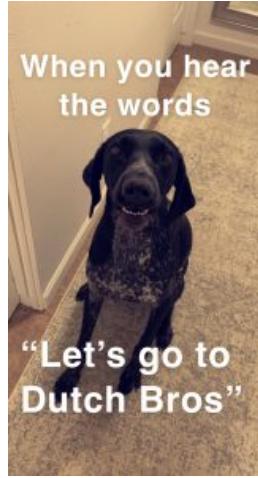
**BUT YOU RATHER  
SKATE**

**WHEN YOU SEE THE  
ASSIGNMENT IS TO  
MAKE A**



**MEME**





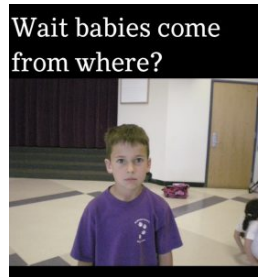
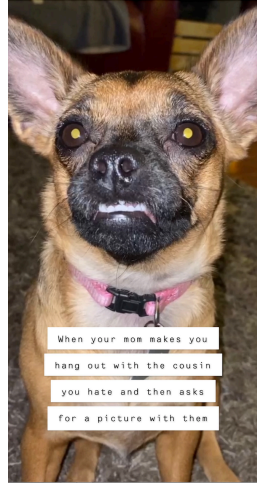
when he says his favorite holiday is easter



when you find out  
you have an  
assignment due right  
before your getting  
ready to go out.



**When someone comes over and  
starts coughing so you have to  
disinfect when they leave**



When it's your turn to  
do the dishes



Did you get the  
Barkizer...  
...or the  
Wooferna?



when you turn in  
your essay



at 11:58 pm



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<https://github.com/etocco-1>

# Gallery of episodes of the Social Media & Ourselves Podcast

DIANA DALY; JACQUIE KURU; AND GABE STULTZ

Social Media & Ourselves was project produced and created by Professor Diana Daly with students Jacquie Kuru and Gabe Stultz, and students studying new media in the iVoices Media Lab from 2020 through 2023. Episodes of this podcast are interspersed throughout this books based on content relevance. Below are all the episodes together.

## Strike first, squeaky voice!

*Release Date: July 1st 2022*

“I guess I always thought that if I strike first, you know, I’d win the fight more often.” For summer break, enjoy a few uninterrupted student stories about life online. Social Media & Ourselves Executive Producer: Diana Daly. Sponsored by the Center for University Education and Scholarship by the University of Arizona.

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## Spiritual Narcissism

*Release Date: June 1st 2022*

In this episode, Jacque explores how religious figures known for their hate and intolerance affect society through social media. Join her to see the impact one nationalist monk had on Myanmar, one preacher had on a past president's safety, and one minister who reminds us preaching just scripture isn't enough to spread true tolerance and love.

To learn more about the hateful preachers in this episode as well as many others, please visit [preachersofhate.com](http://preachersofhate.com)

To learn more about Reverend Doctor Jacqui Lewis and other good-natured figures like her, please visit [www.americanprogress.org/article/21-f...-watch-2021/](http://www.americanprogress.org/article/21-f...-watch-2021/)

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## Virtual Humans

*Release Date: May 1st 2022*

Meet Zero, one of the panelist at the OffBeat Media Group's presentation at SXSW 2022. In this episode, Jacquie explores the possible consequences and perceptions of virtual humans entering the entertainment space. Join her on her journey for answer as she interviews streamer, Outlaw Quadrant, and video editor, Hunter.

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## Virtuality 3.0: SXSW in Austin, TX

*Release Date: April 1st 2022*

The SMO podcast team was at SXSW 2022 with the University of Arizona Wonder House. In this episode, Diana sets out to disentangle the culture of the city of Austin and the hyperconnected projection that is SXSW. Are they in a codependent relationship? What has SXSW done to Austin's music scene? Why do even tech-savvy people prefer f2f to online? And what does all this mean for the next frontier of tech experiences, Virtuality 3.0? Interviews with Austin residents and visitors include Thor Harris of Swans, Luke Savisky of the 1990 film Slacker, and the crew of the food truck Cocina de Carnival aka Big Bertha.

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## Looking Back

*Release Date: March 1st 2022*

In this episode, Professor Diana Daly, Gabe Stultz, and Jacquie Kuru take a look back on the podcast, sharing their favorite episodes, moments, and challenges so far. Stay tuned for an additional episode this month – recorded at SXSW!

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## Metas And MasterChef

*Release Date: February 1st 2022*

In this episode, Gabe Stultz gives us an introduction to the world of Twitch. A site that dominates the live streaming world, the platform itself becomes subject to changing “metas,” or trends in popular programming dictated by popular creators. With boundaries being pushed to create the hottest new trend, we run into the latest meta: the “react” meta, in which

streamers are baiting DMCA strikes. Will they bring the wrath of copyright holders down upon all of Twitch, or is there no reason to panic? SMO theme composed by Gabe Stultz. Music in this episode by PRISM. Produced by Gabe Stultz with a deep thanks to Dr. Daly for this episode's interview.

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## Mary Louise and Sorority Surveillance

*Release Date: January 1st 2022*

“There’s a lot of pressure on sorority girls in particular to perform and to act like a typical sorority girl. But in reality, they’re just being surveyed and watched over at every second.” Gabe Stultz and Prof Daly guide us through stories illustrating the three levels of sorority behavior policing and how they play out on Instagram, Snapchat, and Greek Rank. Produced by Diana Daly and Gabe Stultz, with deep thanks to the students who shared their stories.

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## Girl Meets Chud

*Release date: December 1st 2021*

When Kiersten made a gamer friend during a Siege Grind, it seemed like a solution to lockdown loneliness. Then she got to know him better. Contains offensive language. Edited by Gabe Stultz. Produced by iVoices Student Media Lab, which is supported in part by the Center for University Education and Scholarship.

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## @Reality

*Release date: November 1st 2021*

The internet can seem like a faraway place. It can seem fictional and like it cannot affect you. But today we see relationships, politics, and cultural movements echoing attitudes that originate on the web. How can this be? In this episode, we listen to stories from people who thought they were impervious to the internet's influence. Instead, they found their realities perturbed by things they first saw on-screen. Produced and narrated by Gabe Stultz with support from Jacquie Kuru and Diana Daly of iVoices Media Lab at the University of Arizona. All music in this episode by Gabe Stultz.

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## Timelessness (2021 Rerelease)

*Release date: October 1st 2021*

Digital memory is perfect. Thanks to technology we remember so much more than we used to. And that's good...or is it? Featuring more stories by college students about the once-cool outfits, hairstyles, and moments that bring shame on social media later; then a story of surviving a mass shooting only to relive it in response to a photo on Facebook; and an interview with Diana's sister about Diana's MC Hammer pants and her hideous blazer that mysteriously disappeared in middle school.

(This is a rerelease of an episode produced in 2019.)

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## Parasocial and Parasitical

*Release date: September 1st, 2021*

An interview with Dr. Victor Braitberg about the machinations by social media platforms that help us form online relationships – and help them profit from it all. Is this good? Bad? Or The Truman Show? Produced by Jacquie Kuru and Gabe Stultz.

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## Hate and Power

*Release date: August 1st, 2021*

Our Media Lab student worker Jacquie Kuru explores her personal experience and understanding of Asian American hate through discussions with Professor Daly and fellow classmate Alicia Nguyen. Theme music by Gabe Stultz. Music backtracks and audio story by Jacquie Kuru. Produced by Jacquie Kuru, Diana Daly, and iVoices Media Lab.

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## The Intern Series Part 3: War Of The Worlds

*Release date: July 1st, 2021*

iVoices intern Randi Baltzer explores the differences in communication and connection between the tangible world

and the digital world through student stories and her own experiences. Theme music and music backtracks by Gabe Stultz. Produced by Diana Daly, Jacquie Kuru and iVoices Media Lab.

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## The Intern Series Part 2: Vulnerability

*Release date: June 1st, 2021*

Three stories of young people putting themselves out there on social media, leading to a range of situations from the uncomfortable to the sublime. Storytelling and collection by iVoices Intern Taylor Robeson. Music by Gabe Stultz. Produced by Diana Daly.

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## The Intern Series Part 1: Why the Hate?

*Release date: May 1st, 2021*

iVoices intern Kris Kelley explores her experience being cyberbullied after appearing in a Disney commercial, to understand why trolls spread hate online. Music by Jonatha Chance and Airtone. Theme music by Gabe Stultz. Produced by Diana Daly and iVoices Media Lab.

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## Episode 1: Interview with Stephen Rains

*Release date: March 31st, 2019*

Sometimes we panic about the growing use of social media. For this episode we talk to someone who believes social media can help people. Featuring stories by students witnessing fat-shaming, confessing to cyberbullying, finding support online when they least expect it, and so much more. Guest: Dr. Stephen Rains, author of *Coping with Illness Digitally*.

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U OF ARIZONA

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Dr. Diana Daly of the University of Arizona is the Director of iVoices, a media lab helping students produce media from their narratives on technologies. Prof Daly teaches about qualitative research, social media, and information quality at the University of Arizona.



Jacquie Kuru

Gabe Stultz



Thank you to the  
students who openly  
licensed the work  
included in our  
collections

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Fall 2020 ~ Spring 2021 ~ Fall 2021

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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

## **aggregated**

to digitally 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).

## **analog**

This term technically refers to reliance on processes that are continuous rather than enacted through specific



values (digits), but it can be informally used to mean nearly anything that is not digital.

### **antitrust law**

A form of regulation that challenges the power of companies when their behavior restricts the competitiveness of markets or harms consumers.

### **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

### **artificial intelligence**

The development of computing systems to perform intelligent tasks

### **authenticity**

A sense of "real"-ness that is associated with trust and closeness in online relationships

### **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

**bots**

Fake accounts run by automation.

**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 that in crowded spaces, you may politely acknowledge others, but you do not get into their business.

**collocation**

A collection of words that often occurs together

**communication rights**

An application of human rights to media and communication, seeking to ensure that individuals and communities around the world have access to the free expression and the tools they need to be heard.

**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**

When 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

### **digital (or virtual) ethnography**

A research method that involves the study of online communities, cultures, and behaviors through immersive and participatory observation. It adapts traditional ethnographic methods to the digital realm, aiming to understand how people interact, communicate, and form communities in online spaces.

### **digital colonialism**

The belief that Internet platforms are means of domination and oppression, particularly for people far from where the platform companies are headquartered.

### **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 vital part of mental health, this is a skill developed in childhood and adolescence by experiencing strong emotions and developing internal regulatory processes.

**epistemologies**

Ways of knowing, or how we know what we know

**equity**

the goal of support through first considering the different circumstances that may lead to varying support needs, and then adjusting support based on need

**ethics**

Considerations of how to minimize harm and do the right thing

**ethnicity**

Shared cultural expression or history, potentially including elements like religion or language

**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

**fan art or fan fiction**

Creative work made by a fan of a particular piece of media such as a TV series, video game, etc. featuring characters from said piece of media. These creative works are the backbones of online communities called fandoms.

**fandom**

The collective name for the fan community of a particular piece of media

**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**

danah boyd emphasizes these 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.)

### **identity**

An iteration of the self that links individuals with how they are perceived by others.

### **influencers**

Online celebrities and microcelebrities whose popularity is leveraged to sway the opinions, preferences, and purchasing decisions of their audience.

### **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**

Kimberle Crenshaw's theory that different identity categories and associated 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.

## **meme**

Something culturally significant - a concept or a form of media - that spreads from person to person, often being modified as it does so

## **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

### **natural language processing**

The science of how computers can understand what is asked of them through language

### **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, friends, 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, friends, customers, or all of these

### **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, "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

## **parasocial**

Uneven, or even completely one-sided, as in an interaction or relationship where one individual is more familiar with another, such as a celebrity or a fictional character.

## **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

## **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.

**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**

A phrase used by danah boyd to emphasize how in face-to-face communication, one can generally see who is paying attention and choose whether to speak to them, making communications private by default and public by design. Note this is flipped from how it is on social media. (It's Complicated, p. 61)

**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.)

**public media**

Media organizations that are funded by governments to pursue a social purpose, while retaining editorial independence from politicians.

**qualitative inquiry**

Using observations and conversations or interviews as human research instruments

**race**

The visible perception of whiteness, blackness, Latinidad, or other categorization related to people's characteristics such as skin color

**reflexivity**

Reflecting on one's own experiences and biases

**section 230**

Part of the 1996 Communications Decency Act in the United States, protecting online platforms from liability for the content that their users post.

**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

## **shipping**

The imagining or compelling by fandom audiences of a romantic relationship between two characters

## **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

**sociolinguistics**

The study of how human beings use language and to what purpose

**splinternet**

Coined by researcher Clyde Wayne Crews in 2001, the observation that the Internet is increasingly splintering into a set of distinct networks due to differing regulatory regimes.

**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 allows 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 great firewall**

China's combination of technology and policy that cuts the country off from platforms that are dominant elsewhere in the world, used as both a tool for enabling local entrepreneurship and political censorship.

## **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

## **tradeoff**

A situation where a problem requires finding a balance among competing ideals, and choosing to emphasize one value may cause harm to another.

## **utopia**

An idealized or perfect imaginary view of society

## **visibility labor**

The effort influencers invest in curating and maintaining their online presence to attract and retain followers

## **VTuber**

An individual who has adopted a virtual avatar to represent them online, usually as online entertainers on platforms such as YouTube

## **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,” according to the American Psychological Association (APA).

## **wellness**

“a dynamic state of physical, mental, and social well-being,” according to the American Psychological Association (APA).

## **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.

# Guidelines and Template for Contributing a Chapter to HRSM

Thank you for your interest in adding a chapter to Humans R Social Media. Please read the guide below, and if you are still interested in contributing a chapter, contact us through our online form.

## Information and steps needed to approve a new chapter

- Your name, affiliation, and position
- Date of request
- Proposed topic
- Where you think it should go in the book
- A sample of your work (Ideally a textbook chapter or popular press article)

## Style

HRSM was originally written for beginning college students in the United States. The style is closer to popular journalism than to most academic journals, and personal or first-person perspective is welcome but not required. Writers should avoid long paragraphs in favor of shorter ones, and include images

and/or multimedia elements to break up the text. Please peruse and consider the H5P elements available to you.

## License

Your work in HRSM should be openly licensed with the CC BY, CC SA, or other Creative Commons license. This includes media (images, audio, etc) that is uploaded to the book or media library. Media should be described with TASL included. Embedded media do not need to be openly licensed.

## Components to include

- The body of the chapter (preferably 2000 to 6000 words)
- Glossary terms (at least 1 per 1,000 words in the body) integrated and also included in a Core Concepts section
- A Core Questions section listing Glossary terms in alphabetical order

## Recommended and optional components

Additional components that can add significant accessibility and enjoyment for student readers include a guide to chapter contents, images, content created by students, and interactive media in H5P. These are all explained further in the template.

## Timeline

Once the agreement that you will add a chapter is completed,

you will be given editing access to an upcoming version of the book. We ask that you complete the chapter within three months.

## Template

Below is a template for contributing a chapter to this book. We suggest you read our An Invitation to Open Governance before beginning to contribute a chapter. Arranged contributors will be given edit access to a copy of this template.

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### Key points

- [Key point 2]
- [Key point 2]
- [Key point 3]

### In this chapter

1. Section 1: [Title]
2. [Optional:] Student Insights: [Title] [(author name, semester and year)]
3. Section 2: [Title]
4. Section 3: [Title]
5. Section 4: [Title]
6. [Optional – Embedded multimedia content]
7. Core Concepts
8. Core Questions

9. [Optional: Openly licensed external content, (Related Content)]

*[Tip: Using Heading 1 will make a anchored heading in the chapter. To generate the list of these, create your sections with titles in Heading 1, then save the chapter and view it in the Table of Contents, and copy the list that appears. Read more about the 2-level TOC in Pressbooks' guide on Appearance / Theme Options.]*

Writing

## Section 1: [Title]



Writing



[Optional:] Student Insights: [Title] [(author name, semester and year)]



**[Optional] Respond to this case study:** [A question or prompt to generate student writing and reflection on the chapter content.]

*[Tip: You can do this multiple times throughout the chapter and give the series your own name, or you can use “Respond to this case study.”]*

Writing

## Section 2: [Title]

Writing

## Section 3: [Title]

Writing

## Section 4: [Title]

[Writing]

*[Optional: Text box with an image and personal information about you, the chapter author]*

[If you like, write about yourself, in a bio or in an in-context piece in relation with the chapter.]

## [Optional – Embedded multimedia content]

[If you like, include multimedia content such as an embedded podcast episode.]

## Core Concepts

*[Add one glossary term for each 1,000 words written above]*

[define glossary terms and list in alphabetical order]

## Core Questions

[A.] Questions for qualitative thought:

1. [A question or prompt to generate student writing and reflection on the chapter content.]

[Optional: B. Review: Which is the best answer?]

[Create and insert quantitative question-based assessment.]

*[Tip: You can add H5P such as Multiple Choice questions.]*

[Optional: C. Game on!]

[Create or insert game-based assessment activities.]

*[Tip: You can add H5P such as Multiple Choice questions.]*

## Related Content

**[Optional: Openly licensed external content, title here]**

*[Tip: Find work licensed under Creative Commons in an openly licensed publication like The Conversation that included html code for reuse. Once you are creating your chapter, switch to text view in the Pressbooks editor, paste in the code, and Preview, then Create/Save.]*

*[Tip: Add metadata including author name (linked to your User profile) and licensing in the fields you see below when in Edit mode.]*

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# Conclusion

Why is it important to know ourselves in order to understand social media? This book is called *Humans R Social Media* because the development of social media culture, including norms and technological affordances, is wrapped up in you, us, and other humans. And we are also wrapped up in that culture; as we shape it, it shapes us.

We've tried to show how social media technologies and human culture partnership plays 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.

We hope this book has helped you to understand how important your role is as a human in a technological revolution.

And we hope that you will share what you've learned.