

memes, are made for sharing. Each is a presentation of self, a statement of identity. Privacy isn't the right word with which to approach images taken for deliberate public display, because it invokes a crude binary of private/not private. The motivations of users in sharing images and the potential consequences for those being shared are more complex than that. So this chapter also looks at the darker aspects of online visibility, from the brutal outing of involuntary porn to the systematic, pervasive and indiscriminate government surveillance of internet users revealed by Edward Snowden.

Chapter 6 argues for the need to rethink our relationships with social media firms and other users in terms of *citizenship*. It discusses a range of movements and political alternatives, from Occupy Wall Street to the Bitcoin crypto-currency, and argues that these show the contours of an emerging form of *distributed* citizenship. This term describes the development of creative political relations with other people within networks. It describes a kind of citizenship that isn't restricted to a particular geographical space but is instead defined by shared meanings, by collaborative creativity and by creative political action within and through networked digital media.

The concluding chapter draws the book's various threads together in an argument about the importance of bringing social media into debates about media literacy, and media literacy into debates about social media (the concluding sections of earlier chapters are kept quite brief, the better to bring them together in this final chapter). Taken as a whole, the book addresses the major social media platforms and their specific affordances and uses. It examines social media as industries and as central sites for understanding the cultural politics of everyday life. It engages with questions of technologies and texts, of audiences and users, and of how networked digital media are adopted and adapted in an environment built around the convergence of personal and public communication.

What Are Social Media?

For a time, I thought Facebook was trolling me. It began to recommend to me lots of *people you may know* who were dead philosophers or media theorists – Michel Foucault, Walter Benjamin, Neil Postman, Jacques Lacan, Pierre Bourdieu, Marshall McLuhan and others. I asked my Facebook friends, many of whom are in the same line of work, whether they were seeing them too. But no, was the consensus. Just me. So I turned it into a small game. Each time another dead thinker appeared as a recommended Facebook friend, I would take a screenshot of this and share it on my Timeline with a caption referencing their work and making a joke about how it might connect to Facebook. So Walter Benjamin – the work of friendship in the age of mechanical reproduction. Marshall McLuhan – the Zuckerberg Galaxy. And so on.

The first to appear was Jean-Jacques Rousseau, so I shared a screenshot of this +1 *Add Friend* image with a caption modifying Rousseau's famous line from *The Social Contract* of 1762 ('Man is born free, and everywhere he is in chains', Rousseau 1987: 141) to read instead 'Man is born free, and everywhere he is on Facebook'. The response, like the joke itself, was unremarkable. About fifteen of my friends clicked the *like* button, mostly other academics, mixed in with a couple of former students, while two other people also shared it with their own networks. One of my friends, a professor from Canada with whom I've interacted very often on Facebook for more than six years but have never met, added a comment and we began a conversation, on-screen below the Rousseau image:

ANDREW: Graham, did you coin the phrase, 'Man is born free, and everywhere he is on Facebook'?

ME: I did, Andrew, although Rousseau had done most of the work on it before I got there.

ANDREW: heheh. Is it OK if I use/cite this wonderful rhetorical coinage in a piece I am writing?

ME: Absolutely :-)

ANDREW: Great. I am going to take a screen shot of it, so your name will appear. Is that OK?

[continues ...]

This exchange went on for a dozen more lines, some of which drew other responses and *likes* from other people, before, as happens, we all suddenly got bored at the same time and moved on to something else.

What was this? What was going on in this small, brief (and, to be clear, utterly unimportant) moment on Facebook? In this chapter, I'll argue that it offers an example that helps us to define what social media actually are, and how they are different from other kinds of media. In this example – just one of billions of interactions that take place through that network every day – we can see the main elements that define social media and how they can be understood. So let's take that tiny flake of online interaction, entirely familiar and unremarkable in its contours to anyone who uses something like Facebook, and following John Fiske's (1990) advice about communication, let's take it to pieces instead of taking it for granted.

First, it was a moment of networked communication that began with a media image. Facebook is, after all, a media company. But it was an image created by me, the user, not by the media company. Facebook, like other social media firms, is a media company that does not itself actually create any media. This is something that sets those companies apart from media firms that developed in the twentieth century in order to make and distribute images and stories and ideas – the BBC, say, or Disney – all of the things that we now describe with the unlovely word *content*. Instead, Facebook provides a *platform* for its users to do this themselves.

Second, it was a moment of communication prompted by Facebook's *database*, by every previous interaction and connection I had made on its network, and by its algorithms suggesting that I might have some connection with the late Jean-Jacques Rousseau. This database is the engine of Facebook. It's the engine of that company's daily operations and expansion, determining how it shows certain material and certain interactions to certain users, based on what it takes to be their desires, and recording how those users respond, in the attempt to get them to use Facebook more. And this database is also the engine of its business model. The business of social media is in selling information derived from its database to advertisers and marketers (Elmer 2002). The business models of social media platforms are built around a particular conception of the database, in a way that was identified as characteristic

of Web 2.0 early in the twenty-first century (O'Reilly 2005, 2006, Hinton & Hjorth 2013). That business model is to sell uses of their database of users' personal information to other businesses, and to have the users build that database by using the service. Every time a user posts a video, likes a photo, searches for a product or sends a message to a friend, this interaction becomes a new part of the database and adds to its value for the company.

Third, it was a moment of communication that drew together a number of members of my personal *network* on Facebook. Like every other Facebook user's personal network, mine is not a homogenous group, and most of them would not have a clue who most of the others are (and nor would they be likely to think about it). In fact, of course, they're not a group at all, and it would be really surprising if they imagined they were. Instead, each is an individual at the centre of their own unique Facebook network, and each also becomes implicated in lots of different networks, some centred around different individuals, each time they interact on Facebook. Each is part of multiple networks, coming together in different configurations for different interactions on Facebook – and everywhere else in their lives as well (Rainie & Wellman 2012). Social media tools allow users to participate in communication networks and to establish their own networks of relationships, connections, friends or colleagues with whom they can interact through these services. Such communication can flow in multiple directions between multiple combinations of people, although it may be misleading to use the phrase *many-to-many* communication, as the numbers involved in a given communicative event may be quite small.

And fourth, it was a moment of communication that brought together aspects of the *public* and the *personal*. When I took my screenshot and posted it on my Timeline, I wasn't trying to communicate with anyone in particular – just with *any* of my Facebook network who might be interested or amused. Of course, like everyone else, there are some people with whom I enjoy interacting on Facebook more than others, and I'm sometimes disappointed if those favourite people don't respond to particular things I post. But for the most part, I share things without a specific person in mind, and I note this here because I think it is characteristic of social media. In the case of my Rousseau screenshot, I was only sharing it with a few hundred people, but I wasn't sharing it with any one of them especially. This has certain things in common with the broadcast model of communication, through which messages are sent with the implied address of 'To whom it may concern' (Peters 1999: 206). Now, a few hundred people on Facebook is certainly a long way from the audience for, say, *Game of Thrones*. But it shares with that

show a certain mode of address: a certain *this is for you, if you want it* quality (Thompson 1995, Scannell 2000). In this sense, it is *public* communication.

But it's also *personal* communication, because the interaction included not just the sharing of the image with whoever might want it, but also the one-to-one conversation that took place beneath that image. Before social media, Andrew and I would have had our exchange of messages through some one-to-one medium – email or text messaging or on the phone – and this would have been quite separate from the media image that prompted the exchange. But with social media, the *public* message and the *personal* communication take place in the same space. More than this, they are both visible to others within that networked moment.

Social media are those that allow people: to say or make things; to share those things with others; and to have that saying, making or sharing made visible to still others. Tagging, friending, liking and the personal curation of media material into playlists or channels, or into media streams like Facebook's news feed, are all common activities whose significance is not only that users can and do share them, but that these actions are made visible to others. Any of my other Facebook friends could have seen that exchange; indeed, Facebook may have sent a notification to some of them to alert them that it existed. It's most likely, of course, that pretty much no one paid any real attention to that particular conversation; but in principle, the personal interaction between Andrew and me was visible to others, some of them unimagined. And this too is characteristic of social media communication.

Defining Social Media

To understand social media we first need to consider how they can be defined. And like any important term in the field of media, culture or communication, the meaning of *social media* is contested. Christian Fuchs collates a useful collection of contending definitions from the academic literature which emphasize certain recurring concepts including sharing, collaboration, and opportunities for users to both create their own media material and to publish it in networked spaces (Fuchs 2014b: 35–7). But these definitions overlap, compete and at times contradict each other. One reason for this is that the term emerged first as a marketing slogan, rather than as a concept. This sets a challenge for researchers to retrospectively repurpose a slogan as an analytical concept that can explain emerging and fast-moving communicative practices and expectations in the media environment. The earliest use of the term recorded by the *Oxford English Dictionary* dates from June 2004, when it was used

to brand a business and technology conference in California called 'The Business of Social Media'. The conference announcement, archived at the Internet Archive's 'Wayback Machine' (<http://archive.org>), opens by using the phrase *social media* to connect a list of then-novel internet developments to the promise of commercial opportunities:

Blogs ... social networks ... RSS readers ... syndication ... the tools of social media are creating powerful new business opportunities, but to take advantage, technologists, professionals and investors need to understand this new, fast-emerging technology and the unique language it uses.

So like the contemporaneous term *Web 2.0*, with which it has considerable overlap, the term *social media* was coined as a marketing tool. This in itself tells us something about how we should respond to the more excitable claims about its potential to empower users. We could probably pursue examples of usage of the two words *social* and *media* together going back into the 1990s, but these would describe different kinds of phenomena to those we use the term for today. The web address socialmedia.com was registered in 1999 (Bercovici 2010), although the archived copies of that site maintained by the Wayback Machine suggest that it was nothing more than a holding-spot for years. In the same way that *Web 2.0* was an obvious term because the 2.0 label was well established in the computing sector and offered a clear pitch to investors that there were new kinds of web firm starting up in the wake of the dot.com bust, so *social media* was an obvious coinage to describe the various emerging internet phenomena of the day, including blogs, RSS feeds, aggregators, emerging platforms for user-generated content and profile-based networking services like LinkedIn and Friendster. Again like *Web 2.0*, the term *social media* began as an attempt to describe certain common features of emerging web-based media and technology platforms and their business models. Some of the practices which the term was devised to describe no longer attract the attention that they once did (RSS readers, for example), and while *social media* is now generally taken to refer to profile-based platforms such as Facebook, LinkedIn and Instagram, the term draws attention to broader shifts in everyday communicative practices and expectations in the media environment.

The label *social media* is so powerful and so ubiquitous that it's worth underlining here that not all contemporary internet phenomena are social media. Otherwise we would not need the term at all, and could just say *internet* instead. So Wikipedia, for example, is not social media. Wikipedia is obviously a user-generated content project, and in

some senses may be the most important of those (as in, for example, its rejection of advertising, which makes it one of the most powerful examples of the possibilities of a non-commercial, public service internet). But Wikipedia lacks the dimension of personal communication that is so central to social media. A user can create an account to gain editing privileges on Wikipedia, but there is no provision to connect these accounts into networks of friends or contacts, or for other dimensions of networking beyond discussions of editing details with other editors. A Wikipedia account should not be confused with a profile, in the senses that that term is understood by users of Facebook or Twitter. And the convergence of public media with *personal* communication is actively dissuaded on Wikipedia, which demands instead that its contributors adhere to a 'Neutral Point of View' in everything they contribute – no opinions, no assertions, no original research, no judgmental language, no personal perspectives.

Not all smartphone apps are social media either, however important manipulating digital sweets in *Candy Crush* may be to contemporary online life. And nor is a service like Uber social media. At the time of writing, Uber, which allows people looking for taxis to connect with non-professional drivers nearby, is often touted as something of a flagship for the *sharing economy* (see Benkler 2012). But while *sharing* is a pivotal word for social media, as we'll discuss in more detail in Chapter 2, not everything that is tagged with this buzzword is about social media. Uber relies on a database and it's certainly networked, and it's at its most useful as a phone app, but it lacks any dimension of either personal or public communication.

So, let's pull all of this together into a definition – one that tries to acknowledge the whole complex of technological, economic, industrial, social and cultural developments that are caught up in the term 'social media'. So social media are *networked database platforms that combine public with personal communication*. Each of the key words in this definition points to a different aspect of these complex phenomena, and each highlights broader shifts in everyday communicative practices and expectations in the media environment.

To focus on the word *networked* is to focus on the technological systems, and on the ideas about social organization that they embody and express. Technologies do not determine how we organize ourselves and each other – rather, they embody ideas about how we should do this. The ideas come first. But the ways in which those technologies are then both adopted and adapted once in use can open up new possibilities. 'The street finds its own uses for things', as William Gibson put it (Gibson 1986: 215), but so too do governments and corporations.

To focus on the words *database* and *platform* is to focus on the business models, and on the ways in which firms try to exploit the possibilities of networked digital media. The foundational development here is the convergence of content, computing and communications – a selfie, for instance, which is an image (content) that's created with and viewed upon computerized devices, and distributed through telecommunications systems. As all forms of media are now digital, these can be experienced on any kind of computer-enabled device. The expansion of networked communications makes it possible for users to not only *experience* digital media, but also to create and circulate media for themselves. In doing this, they also create and circulate information *about* themselves, and databases of such information then become valuable commercial resources. Social media offer us platforms for communication, but we should always be conscious that they make commercial use of not just that information that we choose to communicate, but also of that which we communicate without realizing.

And to focus on the words *public and personal communication* is to focus on the cultural aspects of social media. Social media are a formation made possible by the convergence of what people do together on social network sites, with how we use user-generated content platforms of the kind described by the label Web 2.0, and with the uses we find for mobile devices such as smartphones, tablets and laptops that enable ubiquitous connection at all times. The media environment of the twentieth century was one built around large numbers of people listening to stories told by smaller numbers of people. This environment still persists, of course – the public communication systems of TV or cinema are not going to disappear completely, and nor are important textual systems such as the news. But these are all changing as new uses are found for such systems in a networked digital environment. One central use is that networked individuals can now make and circulate their own meanings. The public space of the media industries and the personal space of the individual response can now occupy the same space – social media. The following sections explore how these key words – *networked*, *database*, *platform*, *public* and *personal communication* – can be brought together to help us understand social media.

Networked

In 1968, networked computing was still experimental. It would not be until the following year that the first connections would be made on what would become the ARPANET, the precursor network of all those that are brought together today as the internet (Leiner *et al.* 2000). Two

leading figures from the agency behind that network – the Pentagon's Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency, or DARPA – were J.C.R. Licklider and Bob Taylor. In 1968, Licklider and Taylor wrote a paper that foresaw that the computer would not just be used for processing information but for communicating with other people. This is such a taken-for-granted feature of everyday life in the twenty-first century that it's easy to miss how very visionary it was in the days before the development of the personal computer. Licklider and Taylor predicted that online communication would lead to the development of new kinds of community: 'communities not of common location, but of *common interest*' (Licklider & Taylor 1999: 108, original emphasis). And they predicted the emergence of a cluster of software programs that would be within the network, not on an individual machine (an anticipation of the cloud), and that would operate as a kind of intelligent agent for its user. Here are some of the things that they predicted this system would do for its users:

take notes (or refrain from taking notes) on what you do, what you read, what you buy and where you buy it. It will know who your friends are, your mere acquaintances. It will know your value structure, who is prestigious in your eyes, for whom you will do what with what priority, and who can have access to which of your personal files. (p. 109)

Almost 50 years later, this sounds rather like a description of Facebook's algorithms, although Facebook *never* refrains from taking notes about what its users do: it even saves the abandoned drafts of messages and comments that its users start to write but decide not to post, and records how long they spend looking at material that they decide not to comment on or *like*.

The development of the internet from the ARPANET towards what we now call social media, is in part a story of *connections* – it's a story of new ways of connecting ideas and information, and a story of new ways of connecting computers into networks. It's also in part a story of *communication*, and a story of the ways that people communicate through networked digital media to form *communities* of many different kinds. And it's also in part a story of *commerce*, in which the pre-web internet, whose developers and users were largely one and the same, gives way to a commercial media space in which developers transform their users into their product.

Licklider and Taylor's vision of communication was different from many of the other most important concepts that were to shape the

internet. Vannevar Bush's *memex*, Ted Nelson's *hypertext* and Tim Berners-Lee's *World Wide Web* were all pivotal moments in theorizing how *information* and *ideas* could be connected in new ways. But Licklider and Taylor saw how *people* could be connected in new ways.

life will be happier for the on-line individual because the people with whom one interacts most strongly will be selected more by commonality of interests and goals than by accidents of proximity ... communication will be more effective and productive, and therefore more enjoyable. (Licklider & Taylor 1999: 110)

'All watched over by machines of loving grace', as Richard Brautigan had put it in a poem of 1967 (Brautigan 1967) – indeed, the counter-culture of which Brautigan was such a distinctive voice would go on to find important expression and legacies in the development of the internet (Castells 2001). So ideas of personal communication and the formation of online community were present in internet cultures from the very beginning. *Community* would go on to become one of the central tropes through which the early internet was to be understood (Rheingold 1993). But communities of common interest are only one aspect of how people use social media. These are better understood not as communities but as networks.

A central analysis of the concept of the *network* is that of Manuel Castells, in his *Information Age* trilogy of the late 1990s. Castells describes a world in which the rapid and pervasive development of information technology, the shifting alignments of both capitalist and statist systems, and the rise of new social movements interact in a society for which *network* is the key term. Networks, he argues, of 'production, power, and experience' (Castells 1998: 350). Castells's emphasis on network as both metaphor and concrete description is shared in different ways by figures such as Latour (2005) who argues for an understanding of social life characterized by shifting patterns of networked association. Lee Rainie and Barry Wellman describe networks of connected individuals, each of whom is at the centre of a constellation of their own networks as well as being a part of those of many other people:

People are becoming more aware that each individual is at the center of his or her own *personal network*: a solar system of one to two thousand and more people orbiting around us. Each person has become a communication and information switchboard connecting persons, networks, and institutions. At the same time, each person has become a portal to the rest of the world, providing bridges for

their friends to other social circles. With the size and complexity of these networks, each networked individual has to balance out collective and interpersonal commitments in unique ways. Facebook is a good example: It consists of millions of interlinked personal networks, each 'home page' connecting to 'friends' and interests. (Rainie & Wellman 2012: 55)

This kind of 'networked individualism' is a characteristic of social network sites. In their 2008 discussion of these, boyd and Ellison point to the importance of the pioneering social network site SixDegrees, which launched in 1997. Snapshots of the platform are preserved at the Wayback Machine. In one of these, its self-description from April 1999 still sounds very contemporary in its use of the words *communicate*, *share* and *connected*, and in its juxtaposition of *personal* with *millions of other members*:

Inspired by the theory of six degrees of separation, sixdegrees is your personal on-line community where you have the ability to interact, communicate and share information and experiences with millions of other members from around the world, all of whom are connected to you.

But the web environment of the late 1990s was not yet one in which such a network could cross the kinds of demographic boundaries that Facebook has done to reach its current position where one in every five people on earth use it regularly, and SixDegrees closed within a few years. Not everyone in the late 1990s yet had enough friends who were also online to enable network effects to kick in. And the practices of making, sharing and commenting on content – especially online video – weren't yet developed enough for any but the most hardcore. And as Kirkpatrick (2010: 69) points out, even uploading profile photos was not yet practical for many users as there just weren't that many digital cameras yet in use, which made it harder for people to connect with those they knew (which Jane Doe was the one you went to school with?). The lack of photos also made the entire network less attractive than one built around people's faces. But SixDegrees mattered because it brought together existing elements of online culture into something that was a recognisable precursor of contemporary social media, including personal profiles and buddy lists from chat and messaging services. It was an early example of how online media could be used not just to create community, but to develop networks for the collaborative performance and presentation of identity.

Marshall (2014) offers a useful distinction between what he calls representational and presentational media. By *representational* media, he describes the established media industries of the mass production of popular culture (cinema, broadcasting, recorded music, newspapers and magazines, games): 'It is representational in the sense that, through its stories, narratives, and images, these media forms attempt to embody a populace. The stories, in all their manifestations, represent a culture' (Marshall 2014: 160). By *presentational* media, he describes the ways in which media are now 'performed, produced and exhibited by the individual'. By creating, linking to or commenting upon some item of media, the user is also establishing a performance of self – a presentation that foregrounds the *individual* in contemporary communication rather than the *audience*. The individual is both presenting and performing versions of themselves, but is also doing so within networks.

On some platforms, this is explicit. LinkedIn, for example, on which one crafts one's CV for public display, and develops a network of professional connections with whom one might share endorsements for particular work skills or even write a public reference. LinkedIn has been open since 2003, and became a publicly traded company in 2012. As of July 2015, it claimed more than 360 million members in more than 200 countries and territories (<https://press.linkedin.com/about-linkedin>), making it a major presence in the social media environment. Employers and recruiters use LinkedIn to search for possible candidates, while users try to present themselves in their most marketable light. LinkedIn does not see the kinds of over-sharing common to other platforms, through which users face the problems of negotiating collapsed contexts that separate their different offline and online networks (Meyrowitz 1985, Wesch 2009, Marwick & boyd 2010). LinkedIn uses what has been described as a 'gated-access' approach to establishing connections with other users (Papacharissi 2009), in that users are discouraged from adding people to whom they cannot demonstrate an existing connection of some kind (colleague, classmate and so on), and there is also a function to request introductions to users who are not part of one's network if there is a mutual connection. The presentation of self on LinkedIn is strictly business.

Dating sites and apps, in contrast, demand a quite different kind of self-presentation, in which the user simultaneously tries to present themselves in the way they think will be most attractive, while trying at the same time to invoke a very specific imagined and desired audience (Smail 2004, Arvidsson 2006). Matchmaking and hook-up apps like Tinder or Grindr combine this with geolocation and chat functions to narrow the search to a particular environment. Facebook in fact resembled a dating website in some respects for some years, and in creating a

profile users are still asked to indicate whether they are 'interested in' men, women or both. Options that have been removed over the years include the ability to search for new people in specific locations by gender and relationship status (which include, among others, 'single', 'married' and 'it's complicated'), as well the option to indicate what one is 'looking for' – these used to include 'random play' and 'whatever I can get'. When adding a new friend, Facebook used to ask how you knew each other, and provided a standard fill-in-the-blank option to select 'We hooked up and it was _____'. The unlovely option to *poke* someone remains a part of Facebook today.

Profiles have antecedents in dating websites, personal homepages (Papacharissi 2002, Cheung 2007) and online communities of interest that form around particular topics (Rheingold 1993). But a user's social media profile is not always a self-representation, but instead one that others collaborate on developing through using the service (Ellison & boyd 2013). A user's presence on a platform like Facebook is one in which that user's friends collaborate in developing the presentation of self that is the profile – every comment, every 'like', every post on another user's Timeline, is a contribution to how that other user is represented to others on Facebook.

The popularization of the mobile internet that was driven by smart-phones makes the internet less about connecting computers and more about connecting individuals. Personal communication is not necessarily just one-to-one, and can be scaled up within networks, so that it takes on a public quality. And on social media, each individual is at the centre of their own mobile network of networks – the people with whom one interacts on Facebook may be different from those one prefers to follow on Twitter, and each of those may be quite different from the professional constituency to whom one pitches one's work identity on LinkedIn, or the kind of person one hopes to find when swiping on Tinder. None of these people is an audience or a group, but rather in each case each connection is a part of just one of an individual's own network of networks.

Platform + Database

YouTube was created in 2005. Ten years later, it's hard to remember the web without it. Was there ever a web without Keyboard Cat? Were fails epic back then? YouTube very quickly became a central hub of popular culture, with prominent moments from 'Leave Britney alone' to 'It gets better' becoming catchphrases on a scale that could previously only be managed by the very biggest broadcast TV shows. Now it is

unremarkable for leading politicians to launch election campaigns on YouTube, or for the service to compete with broadcasters for the rights to stage campaign debates. News stories are frequently broken, sustained or suddenly upturned by video evidence uploaded to YouTube by bystanders with smartphones (Allan 2013, Thorsen & Allan 2014). It has made possible new approaches to advertising (*I'm on a horse*), and to activism and advocacy (*Kony 2012*). It has spawned entire new genres (unboxing and haul videos) and enabled entirely new audiences for genres that had previously been limited to particular kinds of specialist community (supercuts, videogame speedrunning). And of course, YouTube has made possible a whole new kind of self-branding entrepreneur (Marwick 2013a), from PewDiePie, who earns a reported US\$4.7 million annually from YouTube ads alone (Kang 2015), to Zoella; the more than 8 million subscribers to Zoella's main channel, on which she offers hair and beauty tips and shows off what she's bought at the shops, helped her ghost-written debut novel become the UK's fastest-selling book of 2014.

But, for context, think back to just another ten years before the site launched, and the improbability of YouTube is striking. Picture yourself in 1995, trying to pitch the concept for YouTube to a broadcast-model media mogul like Rupert Murdoch. Murdoch was then – and still is – head of one of the most powerful, influential and genuinely global media corporations in the world. He had built an empire, first from newspapers, then from television, then film and book publishing (Shawcross 1992, Wolff 2010). His corporation ran household-name brands such as *The Simpsons*, *The Sun*, Twentieth Century Fox and Sky. There was almost nobody on earth more successful at making money from public communication. So you'd take him your idea for YouTube.

We're going to build this really huge website, you'd tell him, and it's going to offer free access to every music video ever made. And not just that. It will also have every movie trailer ever made, every big news story, every TV and cinema commercial from the last forty years, the best bits of every football match, the standout scenes from every film and every episode of every TV show, and all available film of cats. We think we can make global superstars out of Korean rappers doing novelty horsey dance moves – something like that could get watched more than 2 billion times. And – get this! – it will also have videos of everybody's birthday parties!

Murdoch would likely have called for security to have you escorted from the building. But then again, not many people really got the web in 1995 – even Bill Gates took a while to see its potential. And *hype* was

the native language of the web from the start, as some of the sharper commentators at the time pointed out (Barbrook & Cameron 1995, Dery 1996, Wark 1997). So a figure like Murdoch, who had built his empire through business models of both mass distribution and enforced scarcity, would have had lots of quite natural objections. *Who owns all those rights?*, he might have asked. *Who wants to see videos of everybody's birthday parties?* *How much is the electricity bill going to be?* *And what's with all the cats?* Those would all have been legitimate questions – some of them still are. And another basic objection to this fantasy sales pitch of 1995 would very likely have been about the enormous human resources and working hours required to source, compile, convert, upload, organize, title, tag, subtitle and caption those many hundreds of millions of hours of videos. *Who's going to do all that work and how much would we have to pay them?* The answer, which nobody really saw coming in the 1990s, was that we would do all that ourselves for free. And more than that, we would *make* videos ourselves and upload those to YouTube too.

YouTube remains the best example of what came quickly to be called *Web 2.0*. *Web 2.0* was both marketing hype and business model (Lovink 2011, Marwick 2013a), but it also captures a particular moment in the first decade of the twenty-first century, in which a new wave of popular websites came to rapid prominence and shifted the narrative of what the web was about. YouTube, along with Blogger, Flickr and others, was a site for what began to be called user-generated content (UGC). This is a label that is sometimes used in ambiguous ways, but was usefully defined by the OECD (2007: 18) as media material that: first, is published in some way (so making a video and then just keeping it under your bed doesn't count); second, involves a certain amount of creative work or contribution (so just clicking *like* on that John Oliver clip doesn't count); and third, is made outside of its creator's professional work practice or routine (so your Harry Potter fan fiction might count, but J.K. Rowling's would not). The rapid success of YouTube led to its purchase by Google in November 2006 for US\$1.65 billion, an event and a sum of money that no doubt had something to do with *Time* magazine's selection the following month of *you* as its Person of the Year:

for seizing the reins of the global media, for founding and framing the new digital democracy, for working for nothing and beating the pros at their own game, *TIME*'s Person of the Year for 2006 is you. (Grossman 2006)

But this rapid mainstreaming and commercialization of YouTube contributed to the site changing in ways that weren't always in tune with the

elements that had contributed to its initial appeal. The ever-rising scale of YouTube's reach, and the speed with which established commercial media recognized and moved in on its potential, meant that, as van Dijck (2013: 117) put it, 'ordinary users never really rivaled mainstream pros'. The 'most viewed' videos of all time are no longer home-made novelties but are now expensive music clips by the likes of Katy Perry and Rihanna. True, this picture is complicated by YouTube's 'Partner Program' which shares advertising revenues with pro-am YouTubers whose channels attract significant numbers of subscribers (Burgess 2013). But at the same time, we should also be careful to recognize that YouTube is not broadcasting, and the value its users derive from it should not be reduced to a twentieth-century fixation on Top Ten lists. This is a common error in discussions of networked digital media – to assume that something only matters if it can draw a large audience (as in Hindman's 2009 book on blogs, for example, or Castells's unpleasant term 'electronic autism', Castells 2009: 66). But your video that only gets six views is still worth posting on YouTube, if those are the six people you wanted to see it, or if those six people can take something from it.

David Gauntlett argues that *Web 2.0* was best characterized by the ways in which its best known sites enable previously disparate individuals to 'come together to work collaboratively in a shared space' (Gauntlett 2011a: 5). He offers the analogy of the early web with its personal homepages as lots of separate gardens, tended by individuals, whereas *Web 2.0* was more like a community allotment. The more people join in and take part, the better the space gets, the more variety and depth it has, the more range and utility it can offer. So, seen from this perspective, *Web 2.0* was about enabling online collaboration on an enormous scale, and offering a platform for anyone who wants to contribute their resources to a project that will be more than the sum of its parts. For many commentators (such as Delwiche & Henderson 2013), *Web 2.0* was about what Henry Jenkins (2008, 2009) labelled *participatory culture*. It's important to note that Jenkins does not suggest that *Web 2.0* sites like YouTube created participatory culture. Rather, he argues that: 'the emergence of participatory cultures of all kinds over the past several decades paved the way for the early embrace, quick adoption, and diverse use of such platforms' (Jenkins 2009: 109). He's absolutely correct in pointing out that people had been finding ways to create, communicate and circulate their own media long before YouTube (Duncombe 1997, McKay 1998, Downing 2001, Atton 2002, Meikle 2002).

But we should be clear that the term was originally coined to label an emerging business model, not a culture. 'We should judge *Web 2.0* for what it is', cautions Geert Lovink (2011: 4), 'a renaissance in Silicon

Valley'. The label *Web 2.0* is generally credited to Tim O'Reilly, who applied it to those internet projects that were having some degree of success in the wake of the dot.com collapse of 2000. O'Reilly's original discussion of Web 2.0 (O'Reilly 2005) brought together a range of tools and services that perhaps had as many points of difference as they had things in common (including Google, BitTorrent, Wikipedia and Flickr, for instance). But the common points included providing a software service rather than selling a software product. They included an 'architecture of participation', which makes the service better the more it is actually used (search results, for instance, which become more precise the more data the search engine has – including previous searches). They included developing services that could be used across multiple devices, something that was to become crucial with the rise of the smartphone. And they included the importance of the database as the engine of the successful Web 2.0 business model: YouTube is not just a database of videos, but also of its users' viewing histories and preferences, their search records and their interactions with others on the site. All of these become fuel for YouTube's advertising business (an approach that we will discuss in more detail in Chapter 2).

Before the coining of the term *Web 2.0*, there was no concept of a precursor *Web 1.0*. Nobody spoke of Web 1.0 – there was just the web. But after the concept of Web 2.0, it became necessary to construct a retrospective model of what Web 1.0 had been: a reductive characterization which involved eliding all kinds of inconvenient messy complexities. And after Web 2.0, it also became inevitable that people would start to talk about, look for or devise contending versions of Web 3.0 and beyond (a quick search on Google for *Web 4.0*, whatever the hell it may be, brings back 143,000 results; more, no doubt, by the time you read this). Tim O'Reilly and John Battelle topped even this with their move to *Web Squared* (O'Reilly & Battelle 2009).

Matthew Allen (2013) argues that we should see Web 2.0 as 'rhetorical technology, through which the computing industry attempted to change the way we think of the internet' (Allen 2013: 264). It was to think of the web as a platform, and the discourse of 2.0 meant bringing together transformation (*it's an upgrade*) with continuity (*it's still the web, just different*). And so other contending interpretations of Web 2.0 now take place within this 'discourse of versions', in what Allen describes as 'a fight to define the future, though control over the meaning of the past and the referential present' (Allen 2013: 270). To tell the history of the web as a teleological narrative of Web 1.0, 2.0, 3.0 and so on and on is to try to influence that very narrative, through directing its development along lines that suit one's own ideals or business plans. The term *social*

media does similar work, and brings together transformation and continuity in a similar way, with its *media* positioning itself within the familiar, while its *social* modifies this in a claim to change.

Nancy Baym (2011), similarly, has pointed out that not only was UGC central to the web from the beginning, but that internet communications before the advent of the web – such as Usenet – offered *only* user-generated content. There was no professional commercial content with which to contrast the idea of UGC (see also Lobato *et al.* 2013). Some of the most important projects of the 'Web 1.0' era were built around UGC, from GeoCities to Indymedia. Web 2.0 exemplar Blogger launched in 1999, before the dot.com collapse, while Amazon had been soliciting its users to contribute book and product reviews for years before these were retconned as UGC.

But YouTube and the Web 2.0 moment did two things. First, it made this kind of collaborative, de-professionalized, everyday creativity, posting and sharing into something that was both mainstream and pervasive. GeoCities and Indymedia were pretty niche, but YouTube is ubiquitous. And second, YouTube and the other successful Web 2.0 operations demonstrated a business model that would go on to underpin social media. As in my earlier observation about Facebook, YouTube found a way to make money by becoming a media company that does not itself produce any media. Rather, it provides a platform for others to do so. And in so doing, its users build the database of content and personal information from which the company makes its money.

In some cases, providing such a platform is the basic affordance offered by the service, in the way that a photo-based social media tool allows its users to upload photos. In other cases, such as that of Facebook, it is a much larger and more complex set of affordances, built around the provision of an Application Programming Interface (API) which allows third-party software developers to produce add-on services, such as games, to run on the platform provided by the social media firm. Facebook also, of course, offers tools for its users to upload or provide links to media material of various kinds, as well as to express themselves through writing or images. This dimension of social media is about publishing – the platform provides a means for the user to republish found material with or without additional comments, or to distribute user-generated content.

Tarleton Gillespie has teased out the multiple meanings of *platform* in this kind of Web 2.0 discourse, and the ways in which it sometimes suggests a technical system (as in the iPhone or Android platforms for developers) sometimes suggests a system of opportunity (a platform for advertisers), and sometimes suggests a system of empowerment for its users, who can

use it to find and express their voice (a speaking platform). Gillespie argues that the uses and ambiguities of *platform* offer YouTube (and its parent Google) the means to not only present but also to disguise its operations.

This discursive positioning depends on terms and ideas that are specific enough to mean something, and vague enough to work across multiple venues for multiple audiences. To call one's online service a platform is not a meaningless claim, nor is it a simple one. Like other structural metaphors (think 'network', 'broadcast' or 'channel') the term depends on a semantic richness that, though it may go unnoticed by the casual listener or even the speaker, gives the term discursive resonance. (Gillespie 2010: 349)

In this analysis, the connotations of platform – *a raised stand for speaking, a political party's manifesto, a computer operating system* – overstate the ways in which YouTube is different from older media operations and understate the ways in which it is similar to them. These similarities would include its reliance on advertising, and its resulting susceptibility to commercial and regulatory pressure. Gillespie's argument is that the uses of *platform* by social media firms obscure such pressures rather than illuminating them. A similar argument can be made about the uses of the word *share* by social media firms, and will be explored in Chapter 2.

Public Media + Personal Communication

Let's return to that small example from the start of this chapter, where Facebook had suggested someone using the name of the eighteenth-century thinker Jean-Jacques Rousseau as a possible new friend, and the beginning of the exchange beneath that image between me and my Facebook friend Andrew. To recap:

ANDREW: Graham, did you coin the phrase, 'Man is born free, and everywhere he is on Facebook'?

ME: I did, Andrew, although Rousseau had done most of the work on it before I got there.

ANDREW: heheh. Is it OK if I use/cite this wonderful rhetorical coinage in a piece I am writing?

ME: Absolutely :-)

ANDREW: Great. I am going to take a screen shot of it, so your name will appear. Is that OK?

[continues ...]

The very banality and unexceptional nature of this exchange in this context tells us a lot about how people communicate on social media, and about what makes such media distinctive. The exchange brings together an element of public communication with an element of the personal in an environment of uncertain visibility.

The initial post is, on a *very* small scale, an example of the broadcast model of communication – what Thompson (1995) calls 'mediated quasi-interaction'. It's addressed to no one in particular. There is no specific imagined audience, beyond the set of everyone who can see my posts on Facebook. It's not aimed at anyone specific, in the way that a phone call or a text would be. At the same time, it does recognize those people who can see my posts on Facebook as likely to get the reference and get the joke (although it would also be possible to get one or the other but not both). And in this, as Scannell (2000) has argued, it addresses the general *anyone* of its intended audience as *someone*, without knowing quite who that someone is. The public and the personal converge.

The follow-up conversation below the image is an example of what Thompson calls 'mediated interaction'. It uses a technical medium of some kind, in this case Facebook on our respective devices, mediated by wireless networks or broadband cables. It's also two-way communication, or indeed more than two-way, with possibilities for a great many people, in principle, to join in. Facebook's interface is structured to prompt such interaction, with every post we view coming with clickable options to *like* or *reply*, and with our profile pictures already lined up next to a text box reading 'Write a comment' on each post that we view.

An important aspect of such communication is that it involves people who are not together in the same space at the same time, and this connects with a certain absence of cues as to how each comment is to be read. So unlike face-to-face communication, we have no access to tone of voice or facial expression or body language, and so we have only the text to go on. There is a certain tension in all online posts, as was observed back in the days of Usenet and listserv cultures (Connery 1997). On the one hand, posts are written texts, and as readers, we tend to expect that means they're finished thoughts; on the other hand, a comment on a social media thread may be a throwaway remark, of the kind that we might revise as soon as it left our mouths in conversation. In conversation, it's fine to say *wait, that's not what I meant*. In writing, that's harder (although Facebook now allows users to edit both posts and comments). The cues that we associate with both writing and speech are absent in a social media environment. This is why misunderstandings online are so very common, and why both Andrew and I make small gestures in our exchange to signal our attitude to each other, Andrew with his *heheh*

and me with my :-). Because we're not present in the same space, words like *here* and *there*, or *this* and *that*, can't be used with quite the same precision, as we can't both see what the other is pointing to when they say *this*. So note Andrew's retyping of the full caption of my image at the start of the exchange, rather than writing *this*.

And a further central element to social media communication is that both the public and the personal aspects are visible to others who are not otherwise a part of the interaction. At times they may announce their presence by clicking *like* on one line of an exchange or even by sharing it. This in-principle visibility is a fundamental part of what makes social media a distinct experience from other forms of communication. It brings with it new kinds of demands for new kinds of ethics in everyday life, as we negotiate each other's communications and each other's public identities in making use of these in our own social media presentations of ourselves. Andrew's asking for permission to reproduce the image and to identify me by name is one recognition of those daily ethics of visibility. We'll return to this question of a social media ethics of visibility in more detail in Chapters 4 and 5.

This convergence of the public and the personal in a context of unpredictable visibility has brought with it new dilemmas, possibilities and risks for relationships. Daniel Miller's anthropological study *Tales from Facebook* offers fascinating narratives of people watching their own relationships unravel as a result of their own behaviour on Facebook. Again and again the convergence of public and personal is the problem – not least in being able to tell which is public and which is personal. 'You can't say that the photos on someone else's Facebook site were posted specifically for you to see, but neither can you say they weren't. Once there, they are part of your social life' (Miller 2011: 171).

The rise of social network sites, and the Web 2.0 business model and the cultural practices that it made possible, are two of the three pillars on which social media have developed. The third is the rise of the smartphone, which brings public and personal together in new alignments. Smartphones exemplify the convergence of communications, computing and content. And they bring mobile devices firmly onto the agenda of communication research and scholarship (Goggin 2012, Goggin & Hjorth 2014). Communications regulator Ofcom reported in August 2015 that 66% of UK adults owned a smartphone, which represents very rapid adoption of a kind of device only available for less than a decade (Ofcom 2015a: 3). There are long prehistories of mobile telephony, but recognisable mobile phones were first introduced commercially in the 1970s and 80s (Goggin 2006, Green & Haddon 2009, Ling & Donner 2009). While it too had its

antecedents (Goggin 2011), it was the launch of the first Apple iPhone in January 2007 that inaugurated the smartphone era:

The iPhone represents a distinctive moment, both in the very short history of mobile media and in the much longer history of cultural technologies. Like the Walkman three decades earlier, it marks a historical conjuncture in which notions about identity, individualism, lifestyle, and sociality – and their relationship to technology and media practice – require rearticulation. (Hjorth *et al.* 2012a: 1)

Apple's introduction of the App Store the following year made possible new approaches to designing, selling and using software, and made every iPhone infinitely customizable. Each mass-produced phone is also a one-off personalized extension of one's daily life. But, as several commentators have pointed out, an iPhone is also a tightly controlled system, which the user is unable to personalize by hacking or changing the code in the way they could with any other computing device; you can install any software you want, so long as it has passed through the gatekeeping systems of the App Store (Zittrain 2008, Goggin 2011, Hjorth 2012). For many, probably most, users, messing around with their phone's software is not something they would want to do anyway. They want something that works. Ben Goldsmith (2014) points out the paradox that this closed and tightly controlled operating system has nonetheless become the platform on which developers have built more than a million different apps. But the closed black-box operating system is nonetheless an example of how the contemporary networked digital media environment manifests tensions between closed proprietary systems and open source ones (including the category of open proprietary systems such as Android).

Smartphones are central to the convergence of public media with personal communication. As Vincent and Fortunati point out, every phone becomes a repository and a vehicle for its user's emotions and relationships. 'Held near to or on the human body', they observe, '[the phone] plays a vital role in the emotional identity of the user, as well as assisting in the emotional management of the ups and downs of everyday life' (Vincent and Fortunati 2014: 317). A phone also, of course, offers multiple portals through which that user can connect with others, including the unknowable audiences of social media platforms. A photo taken with one's phone can be shared with personal contacts through the built-in address book and its integration with SMS and MMS and email, or it can be shared straight to the limited personal network of one's friends or followers on whichever social media tools one has chosen to install, or

published to any or all users of Tumblr, Instagram, Pinterest, Flickr, Facebook, Twitter or many more. Personal moments, however trivial, can be shared with specific or imagined audiences, as in the internet meme that reappears whenever a major platform goes offline for any time at all, in which an anguished hipster clutches their phone and says *Instagram is down – just describe your lunch to me*. The emergent genre of the selfie – a form that captures social media perfectly, and which we will discuss further in Chapter 5 – can be used to share not just the personal but also the intimate. The phone can be used to personalize one's experience of public space, by playing music through headphones to provide a customized soundtrack; and it can also be used to draw in sounds and images from that public space for later personal use, by for example using Shazam to pursue an interesting song heard in a café (Crawford 2012). *Listening*, as Crawford argues, is a useful frame in which to consider social media habits, as we drop in and out of Twitter or Facebook to catch what people are saying, or tune in and out as our attention shifts.

But smartphones are intimate in other ways as well. The apps we install on our phones collect ever more information about our personal communication and behaviour. For instance, installing Facebook's app on your phone means giving it permission to do a lot of things, including read and modify your contacts, add and edit events in your calendar, read your texts, take pictures and video, record your physical locations and your network connections, read your phone call log and call your contacts directly, and prevent your phone from going to sleep. Many other apps are just as intrusive (see the analysis by Share Lab 2015 for more). Apple's Siri agent will rummage through your email to try to identify the number of any unknown caller. Spotify records not just your location, but how fast you're moving to your next one, and whether you're walking or running to get there.

Smartphones expand the range of ways in which people can experience being present in the same space at the same time (Hjorth *et al.* 2012b) and can complicate our understandings of what it means to be present with someone (yet swiping on Tinder) or absent (yet chatting on WhatsApp). Licoppe (2004) describes the phenomenon of 'connected presence', through which we maintain relationships by the continuous exchange of communication, rather than waiting until we're present in the same space at the same time to catch up. Those moments of physical co-presence and those moments of absent mediated interaction become threaded together in a coherent relationship, managed and maintained through mobile media. I attended a wedding in 2014 in which the adult daughter of the bride watched the ceremony from the other side of the planet through FaceTime and appeared in some of the formal wedding

pictures, as the bride held up the phone for the photographer with her daughter's face filling its screen, while the daughter commented aloud on who she could see in the crowd.

Conclusion

The social media convergence of public media and personal communication was not invented by Facebook. Facebook was not the first to use the database business model or to offer a platform for users. And it was certainly not the first network. But Facebook has so far been the firm that has best been able to capitalize on the affordances of social media. It has exploited the database and platform elements of the Web 2.0 business model by continuing to draw in new markets: it has been very strategic in this from the beginning, when its phased addition of new universities to its closed network gave it a sense of exclusivity and created demand. And it has its sights set on developing internet infrastructure in parts of the world that have not yet been able to gain reliable access, with a view to making the firm synonymous with the net. It has continued to expand the range of media types that users can post to the site (photos, videos, gifs) in order to undermine rivals that specialize in one type – Flickr's claim to be the world's largest photo-sharing site was killed years ago by Facebook, and photos were not even Facebook's core proposition. Facebook has been relentless in adding new affordances for its users to commit more of their lives to its servers. Its ascent coincided with the arrival of the smartphone and tablet, and with greater availability of both wireless and broadband networks. Its timing, its simple fill-in-the-blanks interface, and its provision of a free service all helped Facebook to see off earlier leading platforms, some of whose names now echo from the past like half-remembered bands – Friendster, Bebo, Friends Reunited and MySpace among them. So having defined social media, the next chapter turns to focus on Facebook as the leading example of the sharing industry.

Social Media

Communication, Sharing and Visibility

Graham Meikle

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