Social Media

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SOCIAL MEDIA

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1. Introduction: Social Media Studies

In the early 21st century, Facebook, Twitter and YouTube are everywhere, and their user base grows each year. In 2012, Facebook had over one billion monthly active users, and by 2018, it had 2.25 billion (Statista, 2018a). In 2012, Twitter had just over 150 million "monthly active users"—the number of unique visitors to a site for a 30-day period—yet by 2018, it had ballooned to 326 million (Statista, 2018b). In 2012, YouTube had 800 million monthly active users; by 2018, it had 1.8 billion (Gilbert, 2018).

As social media corporations expand, so too does the number of academics who theorize, research and write about them. Previously a niche topic in Internet and computer-mediated communication (CMC) studies, social media is now a burgeoning area of inquiry across disciplines. Illustrative of social media studies' growing academic prominence was the 2015 launch of a journal called *Social Media + Society* mandated to advance "the understanding of social media and its impact on societies past, present and future." Over the past decade, social media has captivated researchers in communications studies, cultural studies and political science, and instigated a diversity of theoretical and methodological approaches. Researchers have examined social media in a wide range of contexts and as related to human psychology and interpersonal behavior, cultural identities and communities, capitalism and inequality, privacy, transparency, surveillance, democracy, government law and policy, propaganda and public diplomacy, protest, revolution, warfare, and entertainment and celebrity (Bankler, Faris, and Roberts, 2018; Baym, 2015; Brooking and Singer, 2018; Burgess, Marwick, and Poell, 2018; Carr, 2011; Craig and Cunningham, 2019; Duffy, 2017; Elmer, Langlois, and Redden, 2015; Fuchs, 2017; Gillespie, 2018; Lanier, 2018; Marwick, 2013;

Mason, 2012; Mayer-Schönberger, 2011; Trottier and Fuchs, 2015; Turkle, 2017; Vaidhyanathan, 2018; van Dijck, 2013; van Dijck, Poell, and de Waal, 2018).

While much research has been undertaken on the intricacies of social media in an array of specific contexts, this chapter presents a broad and holistic overview of some key issues in the study of social media in society. It begins by reviewing and assessing some prominent ways of conceptualizing "social media" (with regard to the digital age and Web 2.0's technological uses and affordances) and then moves on to probing conceptualizations of social media as a system, a tool and an agent. To emphasize the interdependent relations between social media and society, the final section highlights how social media is shaped by and is shaping capitalism (the economic sphere), the state (the political sphere) and the entirety of how people live their lives (the cultural sphere).

2. Social Media in the "Digital Age": Web 2.0's Uses and Affordances

Social media can be defined broadly as "those digital platforms, services and apps built around the convergence of content sharing, public communication and interpersonal connection" (Burgess, Marwick, and Poell, 2018, p. 1). Some of the world's most prominent social media platforms, services and apps encompass social media and networking services (Facebook), social and microblogging services (Twitter), video sharing services (YouTube), cross-platform messaging and voiced over internet protocol (VoIP) services (WhatsApp), photo-sharing services (Instagram), and content aggregation, rating and discussion services (Reddit). In addition to representing this convergence, social media is associated with the "digital age." But what does this connote? Some common dictionary definitions of the "digital age" advance a noun for a present in which more digital technologies are being used by more people than ever before. For example, the Cambridge Dictionary (2018) defines the "digital age" as "the present time, when most information is in a digital form, especially when compared to the time when computers were not used." Likewise, IGI Global (2018) describes the "digital age" as the "time frame in history that the use of digital technology became prevalent and of common use throughout the world."

While most would agree that the digital age is a relatively recent period in human history, defining when it began is far more questionable. Some might argue that it began in: the 1940s, when the MIT graduate and Bell Labs engineer Claude Shannon conceptualized digitization in "A Mathematical Theory of Communication"; the 1950s and 1960s, following the invention of the transistor and the military-corporate development of the Internet's backbone; the 1970s and 1980s, with the rise of information and communication technologies (ICT) corporations that produced and sold digital technologies

such as personal computers and network services to individual buyers in the civilian market; the 1990s, with the launch of the World Wide Web, the privatization of public Internet infrastructure, and the browser battles between Netscape and Internet Explorer; or, perhaps in the first decade of the 21st century, when Facebook, Friendster, MySpace, Foursquare, Tumblr and Twitter launched their social media platforms. The line dividing the end of the pre-digital age from the beginning of the digital age may be fuzzy, but the idea that we are now living in a new "digital age" crystalized by the more recent development and diffusion of social media platforms is pervasive. "Social media" and "digital age" are frequently paired, as indicated by news story captions such as "How Social Media helps Digital Age" (Raut, 2018) and journal article titles like "Leading in the Digital Age: A Study of How Social Media Are Transforming the Work of Communication Professionals" (Jiang, Luo, and Kulemeka, 2016).

In the early 1970s, the Internet, the laptop computer, the smartphone and social media platforms did not exist, and the digital technologies that millions of people now use and rely upon for work, leisure and politics was unimaginable. The US Department of Defense was still developing ARPANET, the earliest packet switching network and prototype for the modern Internet. Tim Berners-Lee, the British computer scientist who invented the World Wide Web in 1989, was still an undergraduate student at the University of Oxford. The IBM Personal Computer was about ten years away from being "consumer friendly." Martin Cooper, head of Motorola, had just used the first handheld mobile phone to call Bell Labs, a rival firm. Chad Hurley, Steve Chen and Jawed Karim, the founders of YouTube, had not yet been conceived, or born. Facebook (launched in 2004) and Twitter (launched in 2006) were not technically possible or feasible business ventures. Jump ahead four decades: the Internet, the laptop computer, the smartphone and social networking services are part and product of society, and researchers describe the rise of a "digital society" (Athique, 2013; Lindgren, 2017) or a "platform society" (van Dijck, Poell, and de Waal, 2018).

In addition to being periodized as part and product of a new "digital age," social media sites are sometimes conceptualized with regard to what tasks they enable people to perform with these technologies. Relatedly, the affordances of social media have been attributed to a paradigm shift away from older "mass" or transmissive communication systems (e.g. radio and TV broadcasting) and earlier Internet and computer-mediated communication models (e.g., Web 1.0), to "Web 2.0" (O'Reilly, 2005). At the 2004 O'Reilly Media Web 2.0 Conference for Internet entrepreneurs and Web enthusiasts, Tim O'Reilly and Dale Dougherty popularized the idea that Web 2.0 equaled the advent of a new Web amenable to user-generated content, interaction, participation and interoperability. Since then, it has become commonplace to interpret social media sites as "Web 2.0" writ large. As the story goes, unlike the passive

consumer experience of broadcasting and Web 1.0, people are now interactive producers and consumers of media content, or "prosumers" (Toffler, 1984), all because of Web 2.0. Social media sites do enable a merger of consumer and producer, as demonstrated by the glut of digital media content produced by the same people that consume it. Social media sites support personalized people-to-people and many-to-many communication, and these platforms afford many interactive uses including: socializing (e.g., chatting with a friend who lives many miles away on WhatsApp); lurking (e.g., watching or monitoring what a Reddit user is writing and posting, but without them ever knowing); taking action in relation to existing content (e.g., tweeting, retweeting or commenting on a TV news story on Twitter); creating and circulating original content (e.g., sharing "what's on your mind" with the world, via Facebook); remixing old content (e.g., making a music video "mash up" of one's favorite 80s songs on YouTube); and getting entrepreneurial (e.g., the YouTuber PewDiePie became a multi-millionaire by monetizing his *Let's Play* video game commentary videos).

Much fanfare surrounds the idea that billions of social media users, not just a handful of big media conglomerates, are creating and sharing their own content with audiences, small and large. Yet, the idea that Web 2.0 and social media represent a break with traditional media monopolies of the past overlooks significant continuities. In fact, the World Wide Web's inventor, Tim Berners-Lee, frames the very concept of "Web 2.0" as a "piece of jargon" because "Web 1.0 was all about connecting people" and was designed as "an interactive space" to enable "people to people" collaboration (cited in Laningham, 2006). If we go further back in time to the 1980s, Stewart Brand and Larry Brilliant's Whole Earth 'Lectronic Link (WELL) afforded users a wide range of computer-mediated communication practices, personalized user-to-user connections and interaction in virtual communities (Rheingold, 1994). In this regard, the purportedly novel "ideas, values, media forms and technologies" associated "with Web 2.0 and social media had already been developed for Web 1.0 in the 1990s or with earlier formers of networked computing such as Bulletin Board Systems" (Stevenson, 2018, p. 69). "When we focus only on 'what's going on now' with social media at the expense of attention to 'what came before', we fail to understand social media's history, and this erasure of the past is typical of 'present-minded' capitalist societies" (Jameson, 1990).

The anti-historicist idea that social media heralds a revolutionary break from the Internet and World Wide Web's past is sometimes coupled with the flawed notion that social media sites are made for "users." Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg recently declared that he "built Facebook to help people stay connected and bring us closer together with the people that matter to us" and said that "Facebook has always been about personal connections" (cited in Mosseri, 2018). Facebook may certainly help some distant friends and family members

stay connected and feel virtually close, but Zuckerberg's contention that his social media platform exists solely for the benefit of the individuals who use it—and user-centric conceptualizations of social media platforms, services and apps more generally—overlooks how rather than simply a neutral tool through which users exercise free will, Facebook and other online applications are carefully designed to enable and constrain user conduct as appropriate to their corporate owners' objectives. To really understand what is "social" about social media, we need to broaden narrow discussions of social media affordances and users with a more holistic look at the social shaping of social media. What, then, is society, and how does it shape social media?

3. Social Media and Society: System, Tool, Agent

In a 1987 interview with the magazine *Women's Own*, the first female Prime Minister of the UK, Margaret Thatcher, declared "there's no such thing as society. There are individual men and women and there are families" (cited in Moore, 2010). Of course, as the poet John Donne reminds us, no "man (or person) is ever an island" because people are social beings who thrive in groups in communities, within larger countries—and, as our society todays shows, on Facebook. For Marx (1845), the "first premise of all human history" is "the existence of living human individuals" that are always "dependent" upon and "belong[ing] to a larger [social] whole" and all societies entail "the co-operation of several individuals, no matter under what conditions, in what manner and to what end" and are constituted by "productive forces and forms of intercourse at any given time." Williams (1976) conceptualizes society as the total social world in which we exist, or, "the body of institutions and relationships within which a relatively large group of people live" (p. 291). To make the point more simply, society cannot be reduced to a simple collection of individuals pursuing their self-interests, as it is something much bigger than any one individual and encompasses "structured relations and institutions among a large community of people" (Giddens and Sutton, 2017, p. 1).

In a society of millions of customized Twitter handles and personalized Facebook profiles, it is difficult to identify the "social" in social media. Frequently, social media is used for individualistic and self-directed ends. Nevertheless, even the most self-promoting handles and attention-seeking profiles belong to and depend upon a much larger infrastructure and community for their existence. It would therefore be erroneous to conceptualize social media as auto-referential silos and stand-alone assemblages of hardware, software and users. To capture how the use of one technology depends upon many relationships with and connections to many technologies, historians use the phrase "technological system" (Hughes, 1983). Social media sites are no exception and are indeed "technological systems." The functionality of social media platforms, services and application assumes the existence of and relies upon other

technologies and people. Social media is not yours or mine, nor is it about any one individual, but rather it is part and product of a system.

Take the ostensibly simple act of picking up a smartphone, logging into Facebook and posting what's on your mind for the world to read. This quotidian practice relies upon pre-existing social conditions of possibility. For example, child workers toil in the cobalt mines of the Democratic Republic of Congo to extract the metal parts of the lithium-ion batteries that power our smartphones (Siddharth, 2018). Engineers develop and maintain the cellular network that lets us use smartphones to communicate with distant friends and loved ones through the messaging services of social media sites. Technicians maintain the electricity grid that we rely upon to charge up our smartphone batteries each day, and energy powers the sprawling social media data centers whose carbon dioxide emissions have a significant ecological impact despite Silicon Valley's "green and clean" image (Climate Home News, 2017; Maxwell and Miller, 2012). Electricians wire homes, apartments and buildings with the sockets we plug our smartphone chargers into when our batteries die. Inside each social media corporation is a division of labor comprised of computer engineers, app developers and content moderators. Even though unwaged "digital labour" has been a key point of focus in critical studies of social media's exploitative business model (Fuchs, 2017), and Facebook, Twitter and YouTube's combined workforce totals no more than 40,000 people, waged workers are integral to these companies' mode of producing the "service" we use each day.

While social media services and our uses of them are part of a large system constituted by many pre-existing technologies, and by many people that extend across many institutions and organizations in society, the system of social media is sometimes obscured by stories that center on social media uses and impacts, positive and negative. For example, news headlines such as "Using Social Media to Strengthen Your Marriage" (Focus on the Family, 2012) and "4 Ways You Can Protect Your Marriage from Social Media" (First Things First, 2014) represent opposing perspectives on the power relationship between users and social media. In the former headline, social media is a tool that couples use to strengthen marriage; in the latter, it is an agent that threatens to ruin marriage. But which view is correct? Do we have power over social media or does it have power over us (and the quality of our marriages)? Is social media just a tool that helps us achieve our goals, or, does it do things to us (such as strengthen or threaten our relationships)? Do we use social media to change society, or, does it have power to act upon and change society, for better or worse? What is the most powerful agent of social change? Humans or social media? These types of questions express a fault line between two salient philosophical perspectives on social media in society: technological instrumentalism and technological determinism.

Technological instrumentalism is basically the idea that humans are rational agents that have power over technology. From this perspective, any social media platform is just a useful tool that humans rationally design, use and put to ends they decide, for good or bad. From this premise, instrumentalism maintains that social media sites are not essentially "good" or "bad": they are value-neutral. The Facebook platform does not care about good or evil or right or wrong. For a technological instrumentalist, humans are moral and technology is not, so any social media platform's morality resides in its human use, in the specific ends to which people put it. In itself, Twitter lacks a moral compass, but the human uses of Twitter can be judged according to moral criteria, because Twitter exists in a society where laws, ethical frameworks and notions of morality exist. For example, during the 2016 US election campaign, white supremacists (mislabeled by some as the "alt-right") rallied around Trump, hoping that if elected he would use his power to "make America great again" by turning it into a "white only" country. In the years following Trump's win, many alt-right propagandists used Twitter to spread hate speech and attack Trump's opponents. Twitter did not tweet hate: white supremacist users did. As such, the technological instrumentalist invites us to pass judgement not on Twitter, but on the use of Twitter by hate mongers. We might appeal to Twitter's hate speech policies or the golden rule to determine that the user's tweet was morally repugnant. But Twitter should not be judged as inherently good or bad because some bigoted user used it to tweet hate. The racist user, however, can and should be judged for using Twitter in this way. After all, Twitter did not form its own racist ideas and tweet them around.

Diametrically opposed to technological instrumentalism is technological determinism, and this is the idea that humans are relatively powerless against technology, and that any technological artifact is an agent that acts upon humans and fundamentally changes them and society. From the perspective of technological determinism, social media, not people or the social power relations between them, is the primary "cause" or "agent" driving major changes across all of society's institutions and organizations. The World Economic Forum's Global Agenda Council, for example, describes social media as transforming all existing institutions, from the news media to banks to public healthcare to government (Guzman and Farida, 2016). Apropos determinism, social media does not simply add something to society, but changes society. After Facebook launched on February 4, 2004, one did not live in the same old society plus Facebook; one was living in a different type of society. Yet, a major problem with technological determinism is that it treats technology as if it is human, with a heart and mind of its own, and a will to act upon society. It puts social media and algorithms, not people and the social relations between them, in the driver's seat of change. Yet, your Facebook page does not in itself conspire to help or harm society. Your Twitter feed does not plot to make the world a better or worse place than it was before. Or does it?

Socially Structuring Social Media: The Economics, Politics and Cultures of Social Media

Social media is part of a techno-social system, can be used as a tool and may effect social changes, but what social structures and organizational and institutional actors possess the greatest power to design and engineer this system, instrumentalize social media and bring about the changes to society they intend? Society's need for social media was never pre-given or universally apparent, but something that was shaped by the large-scale organizations and institutions within society that conceptualized, financed, researched, developed, produced, distributed, administered and promoted it in society. Unfortunately, the organizational and institutional reality of social media is sometimes overlooked by those who praise it for increasing "our ability to share, to co-operate with one another, and to take collective action, all outside the framework of traditional institutions and organizations" (Shirky, 2008, p. 20). There is no question that social media enables individuals to partake in these practices, but what's untenable is the notion that these practices happen outside of or apart from traditional institutions and organizations. In light of this anti-social conceptualization of social media, society's prevailing social relations, institutions and organizations shape, interact with and even use social media sites to do what they do. As we will see, social media is interwoven with the *economic* structure of capitalism and corporations, the *political* structure of the state and a variety of governmental organizations, and the cultural structure of whole ways of life. These structured relations—economic, political and cultural—shape and are shaped by social media, dialectically and dynamically.

First, social media platforms are shaped by the economic structure of capitalism, a mode of production in which goods and services are produced for sale (with the intention of making a profit) by private corporations using technology and human labour. In the early 21st century, social media companies are paradigmatic of emerging business models connoted by appellations such as "informational capitalism" (Fuchs, 2017), "communicative capitalism" (Dean, 2005) and "platform capitalism" (Srniceck, 2017). Srniceck (2017) documents how 21st-century capitalism is "centered upon extracting and using a particular kind of raw material: data" (p. 38). "Platform capitalism" refers to capitalism's "turn to data as one way to maintain economic growth and vitality in the face of a sluggish production sector" and the "platform has emerged as a new business model, capable of extracting and controlling immense amounts of data" (p. 6) that user activity produces. In platform capitalism, platform corporations provide the "infrastructure to intermediate between different groups" (Srniceck, 2017, p. 48) and collect, analyze, process, commoditize and sell people's private data, often to advertisers or other entities (Andrejevic, 2007). Whereas early 20th-century industrial capitalism was propelled by companies that extracted, refined and sold crude oil—apropos the metaphor that

"data is the new oil"—the Silicon Valley giants of the 21st century produce, refine, use and sell people's data commodities (Fuchs, 2017).

Behind and beneath user-friendly interfaces, personalized profile pages and prosumer content are platform capitalists that operate "sites and services that host, organize, and circulate users' shared content or social exchanges for them" but "without having produced or commissioned [the bulk of] that content"; and these corporations run "an infrastructure for processing that data (content, traces, patterns of social relations) for customer service and for profit" (Gillespie, 2018, p. 254). While the owners of social media corporations sometimes represent their social media platforms as intermediaries that bring together users, customers, advertisers and service providers (Srniceck, 2017), platforms are better conceptualized as mediators, not passive intermediaries, because they shape what uses are made of them, and what is done to and with users (Jin, 2013, 2015; van Dijck, 2013). A few people, not all of us, make and are responsible for platform design choices. For example, CEOs, board members and shareholders are the ones who make the big decisions that shape how social media sites are developed to turn a profit. The engineers and programmers employed by social media firms make choices about the operations of the sites we "log in" to each day. They create and update the algorithms that make topics trend on Facebook, feed Twitter news feeds and recommend YouTube videos to us. They build interfaces in anticipation of uses by certain users. They monitor what users are up to and sometimes redesign sites in response. As such, users can't always do whatever they like with social media. In fact, social media sites are made to proscribe and constrain our uses of them. The "Terms of Service" define many of these in the fine print. On Twitter we can express ourselves—but within a 280-character limit. To use Facebook, we must consent to have our information collected, used and shared by it. And in response to social pressures, social media firms have launched policies and content moderation protocols (e.g., "Facebook Community Standards," "The Twitter Rules," "Instagram Community Guidelines") that constrain uses and expressions.

Apropos the logics of platform capitalism, social media owners and their workers develop social media sites to aggregate user data. These platforms are produced to enable their owners to sell services to users and sell the data that users generate as commodities to other firms (Fuchs, 2017; Jin, 2013, 2015). Social media users leave long data trails behind their day-to-day digital interactions with smartphones, search engines, apps and social media sites, and platform capitalists efficiently aggregate and sort data about these users (e.g., the sites they visit, the products they buy, the places they go, the posts they create, the searches they conduct, the stories they like, click and share) and then assemble this information into an approximation of a person, a data self. They then put a price tag on these data selves (and often large sets of data selves). In 2017, Facebook's average user was worth about $20.21 (Glum,

2018). Having produced and put a price tag on a user's data profile, social media firms then sell access to user profiles, (and attention) to advertising firms, and match their users with digital ads for products the ad firms want them to buy. As Cohen (2012) explains, "as we spend time on online, we generate information that is instantly collected, analyzed, sold, and then presented back to us in the form of targeted advertisements that reflect our online behavior and consumption patterns" (p. 179). The online advertising market is nearly monopolized by Google (which towers over 80 percent of the total online search market and generated $95.38 billion in advertising revenue in 2017) and Facebook (which dominates social networking and accumulated $39.94 billion in ad revenue in 2017). These Big Two data aggregation firms take in more than half of the world's total online advertising revenue.

Second, in addition to being shaped by capitalist economics, social media corporations are shaped by the structure of the modern state. In the early 21st century, states still define the "national interest" inside and outside of their respective territories and pursue it, using instruments of coercion and persuasion, and sometimes they do so with help from private social media platforms. Because states are "in the midst of a historic (and frequently wrenching) transformation" from analog to digital systems (Eggers and Bellman, 2015), social media companies were for a time able to evade the communication law, policy and regulatory frameworks that states applied to older media firms. But over the past few years, states—particularly across the European Union—have tried to territorialize and exert some governmental powers over social media firms on behalf of public values and interests (van Dijck, Poell, and de Waal, 2018). At the same time, states are rapidly integrating social media into their governmental operations. After all, in the United States, the White House, the US Congress, the Department of Homeland Security and the Department of Defense run their own Facebook pages; American President Donald Trump uses Twitter to speak directly to his fans and followers; the Republican and Democratic political parties communicate with their constituents through social media sites; citizens spread political information and disinformation on Facebook; and YouTube influencers for the Right (e.g., the white supremacist Richard Spencer) and for the Left (e.g., the democratic socialist Natalie Wynn, or, ContraPoints) try to shape what and how the subscribers to their channels think and act.

In addition to being objects of state governance, as well as integral to their bureaucratic, administrative and political practices, social media platforms have become significant to the geopolitics of states. For example, the US national security state conducts surveillance of populations in almost every country on the planet through the Internet with help from the social media corporations that monitor, collect, process, commoditize and sell people's private data and content. Since 2007, the US National Security Agency (NSA) has used its PRISM surveillance program to collect messages, videos, posts and photos of

non-US Facebook and YouTube users (Savage, Wyatt and Baker, 2013). The US Central Intelligence Agency's (CIA) Open Source Center also monitors social media sites to gauge global public opinion about America so as to help public diplomacy and propaganda officials to manage it. "From Arabic to Mandarin Chinese, from an angry tweet to a thoughtful blog, the [CIA] analysts gather the information" and "they build a picture sought by the highest levels at the White House, giving a real-time peek, for example, at the mood of a region" (Keller, 2011). In conjunction with serving as a privatized conduit for global state surveillance, social media sites are also being enlisted into state-run transnational persuasion campaigns. During Barack Obama's first term as US president, the US State Department's Office of Public Diplomacy started mobilizing social media platforms to spread positive images and messages about America, counter anti-Americanism and engage citizen-users all over the world (Comor and Bean, 2012). State military forces have also embedded themselves in social media platforms, and they are waging "information warfare" through them (Brooking and Singer, 2018). As Rand Waltzman (2015), the former program manager for a $50 million Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency (DARPA) study of "Social Media in Strategic Communication," points out, "the use of social media and the Internet is rapidly becoming a powerful weapon for information warfare and changing the nature of conflict worldwide."

Further to being shaped by society's dominant economic and political structures, organizations and institutions, social media is part of culture, or, the customs and norms, practices and discourses which constitute whole ways of life for a large number of people in society. Social media sites (and the devices people rely upon to access them) are increasingly customary, and they represent a norm that guides the day-to-day conduct of individual subjects. While social media had zero value to people who came of age in a previous generation, in the digital age it now appears to be a necessity, as it is interwoven with how millions of people communicate, socialize, work, play, consume and vote. For some, the absence of social media seems unthinkable, even frightening. Read the polls: 73 percent of Americans cannot imagine life without the Internet (McCarthy, 2017) and teenagers are framed as unable to "imagine a world without social media" (Devon, 2015). As the imperative to use social media grows ever more widespread and intense, mass use of social media seems less like a free choice and more of a prerequisite or compulsion for living in the modern world. Unfortunately, failure to heed social media's customary and normative prescriptions can result in stigmatization (being disapproved of or condemned by the group) and exclusion (being kept out or marginalized from group activities). Unsurprisingly, a majority of Americans now use Facebook and YouTube (Smith and Anderson, 2018).

While all individuals are social beings that interact with and live amongst larger groupings of other individuals, in the digital age individuals are

interacting more and more via social media. But to participate in mediatized rituals of social interaction, one must follow a procedural script. Too often, we focus on what people are communicating about through social media as opposed to probing what people are actually doing with it and, by extension, telling people what to do. All technologies—including social media—"express larger sequences of actions and ideas," and the meaning of each and every tool "is inseparable from the stories that surround it" (Nye, 2007, p. 2). Social media proscribes specific practices, and it tells us a story about what to do with our time, our bodies and our minds. Twitter and Facebook, for example, convey a procedural story about how to use them and what's to be done with them; this story may get people to perceive the world and act in it using social media in ways it prescribes. Twitter: log in using fingers to touch a virtual keyboard on a smartphone screen; flick the graphical interface of the screen up and down, scanning tweets with eyes; "like" tweet by touching a heart symbol, "comment" on tweet by touching text box symbol, "retweet" by tapping the retweet symbol; if inclined, tweet your mind using no more than 280 characters. Facebook also immerses users in a procedural script: log on; check notifications; accept or reject friend requests; do the "happy birthday" ritual; go to homepage; scroll down and review recent posts; like a few posts; lurk around friend homepages and see what they are posting; comment on or like a few of these; check notifications again; sign out; log in again; repeat. These procedural scripts are performed by billions.

Further to being part of the social structure—customary, normative and encoded with procedural scripts that demand certain practices—social media is something that large numbers of people hold ideas and beliefs about, and increasingly people are communicating these through social media platforms. On Facebook, users can search for and read posts that convey diametrically opposed views about social media such as "7 ways Facebook is bad for your mental health" and "How you can use social media to improve your mental health," as well as participate in debates about whether or not they should stay on or quit Facebook because of how it is affecting their mental health. Basically, the billions of people currently using social media will often hold a variety of sometimes clashing ideas and beliefs about social media's impacts upon them, and upon broader society. When making and sharing rhetorical claims about social media's uses and effects, social media users construct meaning about social media and add to a societal discourse about it.

Conclusion

This chapter has presented a holistic overview of the social shaping of social media. Social media are sometimes framed as discontinuous with the past and heralding a "new" digital age for users, "new" Web 2.0 affordances, but the system, set of tools, agencies and effects of "social media" arose within older

social structures that continue to exert influence upon their present and future. The economics of capitalism and the politics of territorial nation-states interact to shape the development, diffusion, uses and impacts of social media, and the broader cultures or whole ways of life of billions of people. By undertaking research that sheds light on how particular economic (corporate) and political (state) organizations try to shape social media and their users for ends they decide, and identifying instances when the users of social media try to reshape these structures in pursuit of different ends, we render social media intelligible in human rather than in anti-human terms, and remind ourselves that social relations between people still catalyze social change.

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