

# THE PERFECT MOMENT.

## DESIGNING SOCIAL MEDIA WITH KAIROS AND DIGITAL RHETORIC

PRECIOUS STOWERS

### INTRODUCTION

In the modern world, digital technology is at the forefront of many current and future innovations. From the comfortability of keeping ones' phone in their pocket to the societal acceptability of playing phone games while waiting in a grocery store line. The ability to reinvent the physical space by being immersed into the digital space has altered many societal, cultural and individual outlooks on the world people live in today (Fortunati, 2007). A dominant aspect of the digital space is social media. Social media encompasses a variety of online platforms where people, who are users, can share their own ideas, visuals, performances and interact with other users (Eyman, 2015). Interactivity can include the simplicity of viewing content or can include liking, commenting, sharing content from other users, or posting content online themselves (Miller, 1994). Social media is designed to give the user a continuously active space by rhetorically designing the timing of when the information for users will appear and when they can interact.

Particularly, timing the delivery and receiving of information can be described in terms of the Greek word Kairos. Kairos means an opportune moment, or sporadically having moments of an opportunity, or the "perfect moment" (Wikimedia Foundation, 2021). Social media platforms use the "perfect moment" to deliver continuous experiences for the user, which oftentimes becomes unnoticed by the user and normalized within society. Designing information to appear without the user noticing the timeliness of when it happens also creates opportunities for Kairotic events and spaces to take place. Therefore, social media is rhetorically designed to create consistent perfect moments for communication that impacts the physical space and change how people experience everyday living.

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### WHAT IS KAIROS?

As previously mentioned, the concept of Kairos is an important factor in designing social media platforms. The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines Kairos as “a time when conditions are right for the accomplishment of a crucial action: the opportune and decisive moment” (Merriam-Webster, n.d). Kairos was originated in Ancient Greece and was well known to be developed by the Sophists (Carter, 1988). The Sophists were rhetors and teachers who were paid to teach communication, argumentation, philosophy, and further implemented Kairos into their work (Carter, 1988). Another group of people who deeply valued Kairos was the Ancient Pythagoreans, who believed that Kairos was a fundamental law of the universe (Carter, 1988). Pythagoreans stated that the idea of time was developed in the Cosmos, which created an ethical dimension because people did not have direct control over timing (Carter, 1988). People could only take advantage of it when the perfect timing arose (Carter, 1988). Georgias is a well-known Sophist and a famous rhetor who implemented Kairos into his work. Gorgias was seen teaching the importance of Kairos to his students within argumentation and used Kairos stylistically when he would perform improve (Carter, 1988). A key aspect to Kairos which Gorgias discovered was that Kairos allowed an opportunity to permit two (or more) contrasting ideas to be seen together in one moment in time (Carter, 1988). It held space for two ideas to remain separated before someone and/or the audience chooses that the idea is right or wrong and/or before a decision is ultimately made. This imminent space can also be designed by the rhetor and is further explained later in this piece as it becomes a focal point to designing social media.

### WHAT IS DIGITAL RHETORIC?

Rhetoric itself can be defined as goal-oriented communication. Digital rhetoric can be defined as “the application of rhetorical theory (as analytic method or heuristic for production) to digital texts and performances” (Eyman, 2015). Almost all rhetorical techniques and stylistic choices applied in the physical space can also be applied to the digital space (Miller, 1994). Specifically, digital rhetoric within social media is primarily found as content and is created by the users. Digital rhetoric is a leading reason behind the power of social media because digital rhetoric itself gives power to the user by stylistically emphasizing their communication using techniques that can only be seen, and/or amplified in the digital space (Miller, 1994). Social media is then able to encompass all of the user's rhetoric and choose which ones they want to show, style how it is presented and when they want it to be presented (Tierney, n.d). All of these decisions can alter the original rhetoric intended from the user. Additional stylistic techniques to support digital rhetoric are interactivity, reach, anonymity and speed (Miller, 1994). All of these techniques can be transformed and designed based on the goals of the social media company.

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## DESIGNING SOCIAL MEDIA AND KAIROS

As previously mentioned, Kairos is defined as the “perfect moment” or a moment for an opportunity to take place. Kairos is a key concept when rhetors choose to communicate online because it shows that social media as a platform and the rhetor simultaneously were ready to communicate at a point in time. This in itself can be presented as a “perfect moment” because there was an “opportunity”. Social media is then rhetorically designed to use Kairos and/or time to drive mass amounts of digital rhetoric to reach their mass amount of users. Social media platforms using time as a design method then become a powerful tool because time ultimately impacts direct and indirect users of the platform based on the commonality that everyone “has time”.

For example, if a user decides to post a political opinion online, the social media platform allows the opportunity for other users to comment underneath the post. As more users decide to interact with the post by either liking or commenting, the post then reappears on more user's feed pages because of the large amount of interactivity. This overall creates more opportunities for rhetoric to take place, because of the continuous opportunity to interact with the content and other users. The initial view of this content can also be seen from Gorgias's perspective, where the user who has never seen the content is now meeting this new content at one point in time. Viral videos can also be connected with this example as it takes on a similar pattern of timeliness and interactivity. Likewise, as more people watch a video, the more people would be able to interact with the content, furthering the video to reach more people based on the growing popularity measured through the number of interactions. Both of these examples further intertwine with the idea of Kairos because it creates a continuous stream of perfect moments that offer a space for an opportunity if the user decides that it is the right opportunity for them.

Perfect moments can also intertwine through both physical and digital spaces, as many moments can be seen starting from the physical space and traversing through the digital space. For example, the perfect moment can be when a new company posts on social media for their avid user to view the news article at 2 pm. From another perspective, another perfect moment can be when the audience has just enough time in their day to post a comment under that company's latest new article. These moments can be as “spacious” as taking a few days to ponder about a topic before commenting, or can be as quick as liking the post. In contrast, many of these decisions are becoming faster due to new design systems and the faster pace of digital space. The timing of physical and digital spaces though may not align, however a perfect moment that connects these two spaces may exist. This concept and its potential for using timing as a dark pattern will be further explored in the next section.

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## POTENTIAL DARK PATTERNS AND KAIROS

When further defining the aspects of a “perfect moment”, stating something is “perfect” should have a neutral emotional connotation, in which the user might have a positive or a negative experience with these perfect moments. For example, there are many “dark patterns” within designing social media to keep a user engaged with the platform (University et al., 2018). Dark Patterns can be defined as “...a user interface that has been carefully crafted to trick users into doing things...they are not mistakes, they are carefully crafted with a solid understanding of human psychology, and they do not have the user’s interests in mind” (University et al., 2018). In a broader sense, these dark patterns can also become more malicious over time depending on the design itself and its context (University et al., 2018).

For example, many social media platforms offer notifications services to alert the user when someone and/or the platform themselves are trying to reach the user (University et al., 2018). The social media notification might not offer the chance to fully dismiss notifications altogether on the initial alert, causing more interactions from the user than necessary (University et al., 2018). These social media alerts also may have a nagging behavior if the notifications are alerting the user frequently (University et al., 2018). This would be considered a dark pattern because it redirects the user from their initial action and it persists over time, causing the user to spend more than the desired amount of time focused on their application (University et al., 2018).

Overall, this shows that social media platforms may be using timing to create perfect moments for platform communication rather than perfect moments for user communication (University et al., 2018).

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## CONCLUSION

Kairos and the concept of using time as a rhetorical tool can help rhetoric reach more people faster than ever due to the design of the digital space. As Kairos was originally seen as an important tool from the beginning in ancient Greece, it has now been normalized due to the adoption of social media within society. The design of social media can ultimately affect how people may communicate in the physical space, as sound notifications, physical movements and objects themselves continue to connect the two spaces together.

As innovations move forward, time in itself will remain the same, however the concept of how people and technology view time may alter. As social media platforms continue to adjust to create the perfect moments for their users, these perfect moments may not be perfect at all.

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