

Social Computing Capstone

Day 17: Public Interest Tech

CSE 481p | Winter 2022

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Schedule for today's class

- Rest of the quarter schedule
- Discussion of reading and lecture on public interest tech (15 min)
- Course recap
- Group work time!

The rest of the quarter:

- Your final digital prototype + report is due on **Thursday**. If you need an extension, let us know.
- After lecture Thursday, you will have time in class to work on a poster for the showcase (will not be turned in). Please get your final poster design to Ruotong by **next Wed** so she can print it out.
- Next **Tuesday**, your video is due. This should be a polished iteration of your G5.
 - We'll break up into pairs, and groups will share their video and poster, and practice giving their pitches/demos to get feedback.
- **Next Thursday is our showcase!** This will be in the Allen School atrium from 10:00-11:00AM. It will be held jointly with the CSE 440 final showcase. (They will have a final awards ceremony but we will not).
 - Invite your friends!!
 - There will be poster easels, tables, chairs. Bring your laptop(s) to facilitate playing your video on loop and to have visitors play with your demos. Make sure they're charged (not sure of the charging situation in the atrium).
- Finally, you should spruce up your website as the final assignment. Add a logo or a banner! Add your pictures! Add your video! Add a link to your demo (if it's hosted somewhere)! Play around with CSS!
 - Some inspiration from other student projects: <https://courses.cs.washington.edu/courses/cse481v/21sp/teams/>

Public Interest Tech

Metaphors for our online social spaces?



- What's a good metaphor for our current spaces?
- What can new metaphors tell us about what we want from social media?

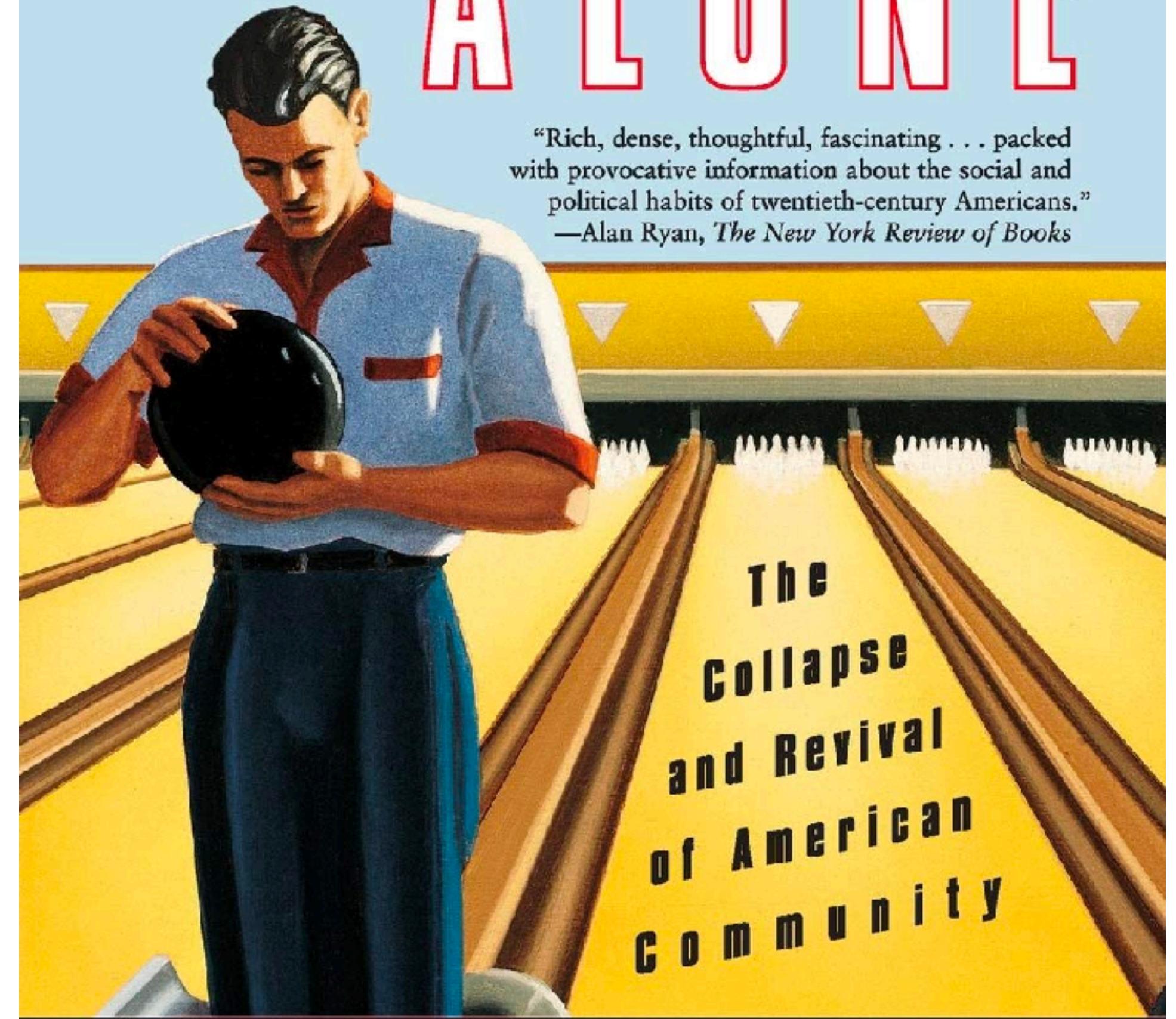
What is public interest tech?

- Simple: technology built to serve the public interest as opposed to private ones.
- What could this mean for social media?

THE NATIONAL BESTSELLER

BOWLING ALONE

"Rich, dense, thoughtful, fascinating . . . packed with provocative information about the social and political habits of twentieth-century Americans."
—Alan Ryan, *The New York Review of Books*



Robert D. Putnam

- Robert Putnam wrote this book to argue that **social capital** has been declining in the US since 1950.
- Social capital is the networks of relationships among people who live and work in a particular society, enabling that society to function effectively. Unlike traditional forms of capital, social capital is not depleted by use. In fact it is depleted by non-use!
- Putnam used **bowling** as an example to illustrate this; although the number of people who bowled had increased in the last 20 years, the number of people who **bowled in leagues** had decreased. If people bowled alone, they did not participate in the social interaction and civic discussions that might occur in a league environment.

From “bowling alone” to “bowling online”?

Online Communities Are Still Catching Up to My Mother's Garden Club

January 9th 2021

★ 1,703 reads



TERMINAL > NEW

TODAY ▾

16



@ntnsndr

Nathan Schneider

Nathan Schneider is an assistant professor of Media Studies at the University of Colorado Boulder.



Alongside whatever else mothers and sons talk about, I have begun receiving regular updates on the governance of my mother's neighborhood garden club. They make me jealous.



The club has survived from the heyday of suburban housewives—which my mother, as a retired government employee, never was. She is currently her club's president. She describes the debates, the subtexts, the meetings, and what they've achieved through it all. As she does, my mind drifts to my own recent encounters with governance: running a 500-person email discussion group, lurking among [open-source software communities](#), or reporting on contemporary social movements. No online group I've been part of can hold a candle to the simple and effective rule-set that has governed the garden club since the 1960s. Few online groups will last so long.



The club's bylaws occupy eight pages in an annually printed, 38-page handbook, which also has chapters on “hospitality” and “flower arranging.”

- Can we still strengthen civic bonds in the online social environment?
- What do we lose (if anything) with the replacement of offline involvement in groups with online ones on our existing social media platforms?

Reframing from:
customers,
contracts, and
market vendors

to
citizens,
constitutions, and
cities/countries



- What if social media spaces were publicly owned and communally managed/governed?
- What public institutions can we learn from? Governments, judicial systems, libraries, community centers, PBS or BBC, the public education system, the public parks system, museums, social work, etc.

How could this make us rethink content moderation?

Why are developers, project managers, and policy teams in Silicon Valley deciding content rules for millions/billions of people?

Who should get to decide how content moderation works in the first place? Who chooses what content is ok and not ok for millions of people?

What could make a content moderation process more *legitimate*?

Is there anything that feels illegitimate about the status quo?

Who should make the rules?

Probably not you.

Probably not any one person (like Mark Zuckerberg).

Probably not a small, homogenous team of techies in Silicon Valley.

Probably not just people who are in the U.S. or just people that speak English.

The government (which government)? Also problematic - in some countries, it's used to try to curtail speech. In places like the U.S. with free speech laws, platforms go beyond the First Amendment.

Answer 1: legal experts

The Facebook Oversight Board (“Supreme Court”)



Maina Kiai
Director, Human Rights Watch Global Alliances and Partnerships
Kenya
Background
Human rights



Nighat Dad
Founder, Digital Rights Foundation
Pakistan
Background
Digital rights
Online safety
Women's rights in South Asia
Gender and law



Endy Bayuni
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Journalism



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Principal, Lady Margaret Hall Oxford
United Kingdom
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Journalism



Evelyn Aswad
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United States of America
Background
International human rights law

<https://www.oversightboard.com/>

Oversight Board



Answer 2: experts independent from the platform

THE SANTA CLARA PRINCIPLES ON TRANSPARENCY & CONTENT MODERATION

1

NUMBERS

Companies should publish the number of posts removed and accounts permanently or temporarily suspended due to violations of their content guidelines.

2

NOTICE

Companies should provide notice to each user whose content is taken down or account is suspended about the reason for the removal or suspension.

3

APPEAL

Companies should provide a meaningful opportunity for timely appeal of any content removal or account suspension.

Third-party groups

Third-party fact-checking via Poynter's International Fact-Checking Network

Giving civil society (journalists, activists, and nonprofits) a seat at the table to help form policy

<https://www.santaclaraprinciples.org/>

Answer 3: the people?

CHI 2020 Paper

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Digital Juries: A Civics-Oriented Approach to Platform Governance

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ABSTRACT

As concerns have grown regarding harmful content spread on social media, platform mechanisms for content moderation have become increasingly significant. However, many existing platform governance structures lack formal processes for democratic participation by users of the platform. Drawing inspiration from constitutional jury trials in many legal systems, this paper proposes *digital juries* as a civics-oriented approach for adjudicating content moderation cases. Building on existing theoretical models of jury decision-making, we outline a 5-stage model characterizing the space of design considerations in a digital jury process. We implement two examples of jury designs involving blind-voting and deliberation. From users who participate in our jury implementations, we gather informed judgments of the *democratic legitimacy* of a jury process for content moderation. We find that digital juries are perceived as more procedurally just than existing common platform moderation practices, but also find disagreement over whether jury decisions should be enforced or used as recommendations.

Author Keywords

content moderation; platforms; social media; online speech; democracy; civics; juries; governance; institutional design

CCS Concepts

•Human-centered computing → Collaborative and social computing;

of local sociocultural norms and other context [42, 60]. Part of the challenge is that platforms are tasked with making difficult decisions about speech standards that profoundly affect public discourse [19]. Meanwhile, the processes that many large commercial platforms employ for content moderation—namely paying human content moderators [42, 78] and training often-times biased or brittle algorithms [5, 52] to spot violations—do not draw upon the perspective of users beyond superficial tasks such as flagging [25]. In their adopted role of the “new governors” of speech [59], social media platforms risk losing democratic legitimacy [87, 31].

A major corollary for how citizens can be democratically involved in governance decisions is the jury process in many legal systems, such as the American civil jury. In this paper, we consider how this process could translate online and propose *digital juries* as a civics-oriented approach for adjudicating online content moderation questions. Building on existing theoretical models of jury decision-making [49, 32], we present a 5-stage model outlining the space of considerations when designing a digital jury process: jury selection, onboarding, case trial, consensus formation, and outcome enforcement.

We then gather empirical evidence to explore whether digital juries are perceived as more democratically legitimate than the status quo of paid and automated moderation, as well as how aspects of jury design relate to perceptions of democratic legitimacy. We implement two prototype jury workflows that vary the consensus formation stage of our model, with one

<http://digitaljuries.com/>

What about democracy?

What if platforms had elections and local representatives?

Direct democracy?

“Jury duty” for content moderation?

How could this make us rethink social platform design?



What would it mean to design online social interactions to enable slower and smaller communication?

Instead of always emphasizing faster and more seamless at scale, what would it mean to slow things down, emphasizing quality over quantity of social interactions?

Designers are nowadays thinking about designing for **friction** and for **seamful** design

THE NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER

THINKING,

FAST AND SLOW



DANIEL

KAHNEMAN

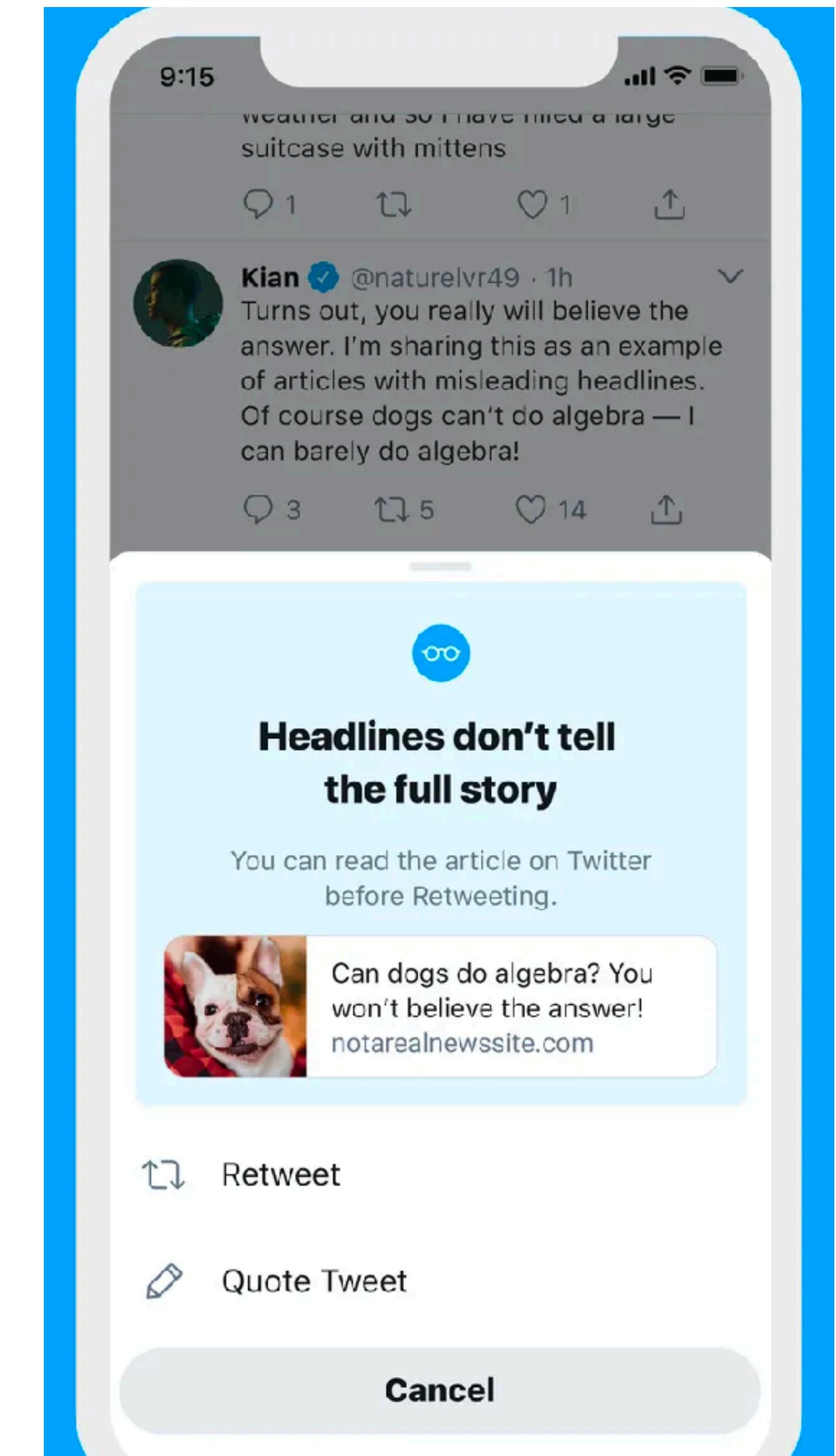
WINNER OF THE NOBEL PRIZE IN ECONOMICS

"[A] masterpiece . . . This is one of the greatest and most engaging collections of insights into the human mind I have read." —WILLIAM EASTERLY, *Financial Times*

"System 1" is fast, instinctive and emotional.

"System 2" is slower, more deliberative, and more logical.

What if we designed in more "speed bumps" to get people to slow down and reconsider what they're doing?



Course recap

- Thursday: the last lecture (!), given by Ruotong, on the design of AIs in social environments
- What I hope you will take away from the readings and discussions in this class:
 - That every social system is *designed*, either explicitly or by default.
 - That these designs can have substantial—but not complete—influence over the behaviors in a **sociotechnical** system.
 - That these designs embed *values*. They are political because they are producing a particular social order.
 - Building social systems is hard! There are important *ethical* considerations around consent. But there are ways you can quickly *prototype* new ideas without needing tons of tech.
 - That many problems we encounter in the online space are reflections of *social issues offline*, and if we're not careful, we can magnify them.
 - That the online social systems we see today still represent a small space of social possibilities. It's early days! For better or worse, we will see many, many more iterations of new social systems in our lifetime, that will each have huge ramifications on our society.

Group work time!