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Curation: a theoretical treatment

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ABSTRACT

Curation is a key mechanism of sociality in a digital era. With an abundance of information, sifting, sorting, selecting, hiding, and standing out become laborious tasks. While researchers have diligently documented people's curatorial strategies, digital curation remains undertheorized in its own right. I therefore theorize digital curation by disentangling *productive curation* from *consumptive curation*, addressing how people curate content that they share, and that which they consume. I embed these agentic curatorial practices within structural bounds, both social and technological. In doing so, I offer a basic theoretical model that captures a dynamic relationship between individual curators, their social networks, and technological design.

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A defining characteristic of a networked society is the abundance, rather than scarcity, of information. The work of obtaining information therefore entails sorting through a sea of data to identify relevant materials. Relatedly, the work of self-presentation entails complex decisions about documentation, sharing, privacy, and publicity. From this information glut (Andrejevic, 2013), curation has emerged as a central component of digital media practice. A theory of digital curation is therefore a theory of attention within a saturated attention economy: how people allocate it and how they acquire and control it, for themselves.

Researchers have documented digital curation strategies among teenagers concerned with privacy and reputation management (Madden et al., 2013); news consumers (Brundidge, 2010); citizens living in urban conflict zones (Monroy-Hernández, boyd, Kiciman, De Choudhury, & Counts, 2013); and online daters searching for romantic connection (Heino, Ellison, & Gibbs, 2010). Indeed, curation is a 'trend that underlies long-term trajectories, persistent social practices, and discernible cultural patterns' of digitally mediated interaction (Hogan & Quan-Haase, 2010, p. 309). And yet, digital curation is undertheorized in its own right.

In this piece, I begin to theorize digital curation by analytically teasing out productive from consumptive curatorial practices. This distinction addresses how people curate performances of the self on the one hand, and how they curate content from their networks on the other. I further examine the affordances and dynamics that shape productive and

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consumptive curation. Together, production, consumption, and external factors form a basic model of curation in a networked era – an era characterized by vast and dynamic social connectivity, facilitated by widespread digital and electronic media (Castells, 2010; Rainie & Wellman, 2012). I focus in particular on curation as it plays out via social media platforms, the pinnacle form of network connectivity and one in which both people and content are abundant. In this instance, then, networks are made up of those who share direct and/or indirect connections through social media platforms (e.g., Friends, followers, and fans). The model of curation presented herein is significant in its demonstration of the multidirectional nature of curatorial practice, and an entwined relationship between individual curators, their networks, and platform design.

Curating social life

Broadly, curation refers to the discriminate selection of materials for display. The curator's art is to carve out that which is most provocative, beautiful, relevant, etc. So too, how we perform and what we consume through digital media are selections of the entirety (Hogan & Quan-Haase, 2010). They are selections of ourselves, selections of others, and selections of the social world. Users do not - and cannot - share everything, and of the universe of shared content, users come across a mere fraction (Bucher, 2012).

Far from a direct product of digital media, however, curation has always played an integral part in everyday life. What separates humans from other species is not our ability to create culture, but rather, our *need* for culture (Gehlen, 1940/1988). Culture is how humans compensate for weak instincts (Geertz, 1973). Humans accomplish culture through interpretive symbol systems that allow us to sort through the infinite corpus of sensory stimuli within which we constantly swim. We select out that which is relevant, ignore, or marginalize that which is less so, and make such decisions - though often subconsciously - based upon definitions of the situation, and definitions of the stimuli themselves (Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Blumer, 1969; Zarubavel, 1991). In short, humans are curatorial.

For instance, a reader of this piece, though focused upon the article, likely experiences a host of sensations such as paper (or plastic) upon fingers, an armrest pressing against the elbow, the tingle of a newly formed goosebump, the stream of light beaming through an open window, the clicking of shoes on a hard floor, etc. The reader selects out - or curates - which of these stimuli are relevant, and organizes them into categories of meaning.

Through curation, one turns a sensory flood into a guided stream. However, these curatorial processes typically occur below the surface. Readers are likely unaware that they background the buzzing light or shifting breeze in preference for the article in hand. Unless explicitly thinking sociologically, they do not continuously rehash the cultural reality in which all of these stimuli, their selection and meaning, make sense.

Similarly, people curate their identity performances, revealing and concealing parts of the self across myriad situations (Goffman, 1959; Leary, 1995). People enact different versions of the self across time, across networks, and amid new settings (Mead, 1934). Each situation calls forth particular identity meanings, and persons work to maintain these meaning through performance and interaction (Burke & Stets, 2009). For instance, one may emphasize beauty and sophistication when engaged in a romantic encounter, but power and competence when interviewing for a job. One may suppress or deemphasize intellect while playing with children, but suppress silliness while engaged with colleagues.

Digital social technologies take this human practice of curation and bring it to the fore, highlighting curation as a key mechanism of networked sociality. Users construct personal profiles, share creative projects, document events – both significant and mundane – and sift through news stories, videos, status updates, and image galleries. Through digital media, people curate both who they are and what they consume. In turn, they are subject to the curatorial efforts of others, as well as curatorial codes built into platforms through algorithms and design architectures. In what follows, I analytically disentangle productive from consumptive curation, and embed these within structural bounds.

Productive curation

Productive curation refers to what people document, make, share, and with whom. Even those with a strong digital media presence share a mere fraction of potentially sharable content, and what people do share is available to a limited (even if quite large) social network. Productive curation therefore resides at the intersection of self-presentation and privacy maintenance.

Self-presentation is a performance for both self and others. Social actors come to know the self by seeing what they do, and how others respond to them (Cooley, 1902; Mead, 1934). Thus, selves are performed and accomplished collaboratively and processually, forged through interaction. Digital social technologies provide platforms through which users engage in public and semi-public interaction. These platforms project identity meanings, and reflect these meaning back to the self (Gonzales & Hancock, 2011). As such, these platforms act as stages on which users perform and accomplish self and identity meanings (Hogan, 2010). The selves that users project, the manner in which they do so, and the ways in which they distribute self-relevant content across their networks, reflect curatorial decisions.

Performance and privacy are deeply intertwined. Privacy refers to the 'selective control of access to the self' (Altman, 1977, p. 67). That which persons keeps private – through whatever means – is that which they curate *out*, giving meaning to that which they curate *in*. Indeed, privacy and publicity are not zero-sum, but interact in a dialectic relationship (Jurgenson & Rey, 2013). Each revelation implies that which is concealed, while that which is concealed gives value to revelations. People therefore curate their performances across networks, maintaining privacy by granting discriminate access to the self.

Productive curation is shaped by the social affordances of digitally mediated platforms (Wellman et al., 2003). In particular, curators operate under the conditions of collapsing network walls and audiences who maintain a heavily participatory role (Davis, 2014; Davis & Jurgenson, 2014). These conditions can result in productive curation strategies that are complex and nuanced, or alternatively, blunt tactics that uniformly maintain a distance between users and their networks.

Digital social technologies broaden networks and connect network clusters that hitherto remained separate. This creates context collapse – the blurring and/or breakdown of previously segmented network boundaries (see Davis & Jurgenson, 2014 for a review). Performativity on social media therefore spans multiple audiences, and curators must decide not only *which content* to document and share, but equally, *with whom*. Moreover, users not only curate the content they produce directly, but become linked to content that those in their network generate. Tagged photographs, @connects, group check-ins and the like give audiences a prominent role in performances of self. The interactive nature of

social media makes managing audience contributions of keen importance, as other-generated-content plays heavily in users' public images (Walther, Van Der Heide, Kim, Westerman, & Tong 2008).

In an effort to manage these social affordances, some users employ broad tactics of privacy maintenance. For instance, some curate content with the most sensitive members of their networks in mind, limiting what they share across any and all platforms. These users may imagine how a parent, employer, or pastor would react to a piece of content and curate their performances accordingly. This is the 'lowest common denominator approach' (Hogan, 2010). Others who wish to engage more openly can carefully curate their networks in ways that allow them to relax their criteria for content sharing. By selectively accepting or rejecting Friend requests/requiring approval of followers, content curation requires less precision (Madden et al., 2013).

Recent data show that users' increased mastery of privacy settings facilitates a willingness to share more, and more personal, information amidst vast network connections (Madden et al., 2013). Those who do wish to share intimate content but remain concerned about reputation management employ a host of curatorial strategies. These strategies function to reveal different parts of the self to different audiences, taking a granular approach to performance and privacy maintenance. For example, some users create Fakebooks (multiple Facebook accounts), use aliases, and/or employ privacy settings to decide which members of their network can access specific pieces of content (Raynes-Goldie, 2010; Vitak, 2012). In this vein, users can curate content on a platform-specific basis. One may be precise in selecting content and adhere carefully to the lowest common denominator approach on open and archival platforms (e.g., Facebook) while sharing less discriminately through ephemeral media (e.g., Snapchat).

Through carefully constructed connection and privacy decisions, users not only curate self-generated content, but also shape audience participation. For instance, by restricting a politically contentious status update from appearing to outspoken family members, the user avoids an inflammatory response. Alternatively, publicly announcing a job promotion or posting pictures of a recent weight loss can elicit public displays of flattery. In turn, when audiences participate in unexpected and/or undesirable ways, users can retroactively curate by deleting connections or deleting content. For instance, over half of teens on social media have deleted others' comments and 45% report untagging themselves in others' photographs (Madden et al., 2013).

Productive curation facilitates identity performances that are simultaneously selective, widely spread, and potentially private, too. People decide with whom they connect, what to post, what to tag, and similarly, what to delete and exclude. In short, they use curatorial practices to produce content and manage identity. In the following section, I discuss consumptive curation, addressing curatorial practices by which users select from the clutter of produced materials.

Consumptive curation

Consumptive curation is an active practice of looking and engagement through which networked individuals navigate pools of data in discriminating ways. Consumptive curation is a practice of both necessity and motivation. The mass of information is too vast to survey entirely, leaving users to decide what kinds of content, and from whom, they wish to

highlight, ignore, engage, or remove (Boesel, 2012). Consumptive curation therefore refers to how persons allocate attention among information and social networks, creating particularistic windows on the world.

Although digital media researchers have paid relatively more attention to what I term productive rather than consumptive curation, the key notable exception is research on political content and news. This literature centers around debates between *selective exposure* and *weakened social boundaries* hypotheses. The selective exposure hypothesis predicts that people select out content with which they already agree, effectively avoiding new perspectives. In contrast, the weakened social boundaries hypothesis contends that people gain access to more perspectives via digital tools and collide with new perspectives and alternative opinions (see Brundidge, 2010 for review).

Research largely supports the selective exposure hypothesis. Adult and young adult internet users are deft in navigating information, finding the content they desire, and successfully avoiding content that they do not wish to encounter (Calavita, 2005; Pariser, 2011; Sunstein, 2001). For example, data from a Pew Internet and American Life study show that people tend to ignore politically charged content with which they disagree, and a sizable minority (18%) have blocked or unFriended someone based on political contentions (Rainie & Smith, 2012). In this vein, research finds that social network sites add little to democratic discourse, as politically interested users engage primarily with like-minded others and seek out confirmatory information, while those disinterested in politics navigate around political discourse altogether (Baumgartner & Morris, 2009). Sometimes, however, internet users do *inadvertently* experience diverse content, as they bump into unexpected information in their social media news feeds and search engine results (Brundidge, 2010).

The predominance of selective exposure speaks to consumptive curatorial efforts, and applies beyond political discourse. People do not just go online to learn, campaign, or protest, but largely, to socialize. Within the mass of available content, users sift through and determine what they find funny, offensive, boring, interesting, cliché, engaging, etc. Such decisions drive consumptive curation. People can consumptively curate both by manipulating the technology and selective practices of looking.

One means of consumptive curation is through manipulating the affordances of a platform, selectively allocating attention among vast networks. This can take various forms. For instance, one might use the 'hide' function on Facebook to remove a particular content creator from the news feed, or alternatively, subscribe to a thread or a user to increase its visibility. One might unFriend a network member, unfollow someone on Twitter or Instagram, or alternatively, make efforts to look at someone's profile, seek out their tweets, or search for their images. One could mute a hashtag, or follow a particular hashtag exclusively. Further, one chooses whom to Friend or follow in the first place, preemptively curating-in certain content while curating other content out (Madden et al., 2013; Sibona, 2014).

Of course, these technological manipulations require motivation, time, as well as a degree of skill and knowledge, not equally accessible to everyone (Hargittai & Litt, 2013). Such limitations do not, however, entirely preclude a person from consumptive curation. In addition to technological adjustments, users can manually allocate attention. People may skim through their news feeds, deciding when to pause, when to click, when to stop, and when to keep scrolling. For instance, a person might meticulously pore through a

Facebook album from a Friend's wedding; one might look at the album but only enlarge pictures that include the bride in her dress; or alternatively, one might ignore the album entirely. In this way, one may read all status updates from a famous comedian, while quickly scrolling past family members' political diatribes. A person could stop for pictures, but scroll past what look like advertisements. A person could click the links to all Fox News tweets, while ignoring those from other news networks.

In practice, people can and often do allocate attention through a combination of technological adjustment and manual practices of looking. For instance, people can follow a hashtag but only pay attention to the participants they know. Similarly, they can hide a contingent of Facebook Friends but still ignore most status updates from certain visible Friends, while reading all of the updates from other Friends. Indeed, consumptive curation is an integral part of the digital media experience, with practices encompassing both technological affordances and simple manipulations of the body.

Third-party curators

In the previous sections, I described the agentic practices by which people curate content as both performers and members of a participatory audience. Curatorial practices, however, operate within bounds. The boundaries of curatorial decisions are drawn by both human and machine. I refer to these as *third-party curators*.

The productive curatorial decisions of one's network, such as those delineated above, populate the pool of potential content from which a person can consume. Similarly, the content a person produces is only visible to those audiences who allow it to be so. Finally, the platforms through which content sharing takes place and the algorithms which distribute this content, shape productive, and consumptive content pools. In short, personal curatorial decisions of those in a person's network, coupled with built-in platform-specific affordances, parenthetically select out swaths of data from the whole. It is within these parenthetical bounds that people can express productive and consumptive curatorial agency. I break these curatorial boundaries into *network curation* and *curatorial code*. In the former, the curatorial actor is human; in the latter, the curatorial actor is machine. Though distinct, human and machine curators are not disconnected. Indeed, algorithms animate the politics of socially embedded designers, while both responding to and shaping user practices (Crawford, 2016; Gillespie, 2013).

Network curation and curatorial code

Network curation refers to the role of human actors in shaping the curatorial opportunities of those in their networks. This speaks to the socially interconnected nature of interaction and the collaborative nature of content production and consumption through digital social technologies. In particular, network curation captures the ways in which consumptive curatorial decisions delimit productive curatorial possibilities, and in turn, how productive curatorial decisions delimit opportunities for consumption.

Producing content is a necessary but not sufficient condition of its consumption. A key limitation to the visibility of produced content is others' consumptive curatorial decisions. For example, a person may be a prolific photographer, sharing numerous images per day on Instagram. However, if nobody follows that person or elects to look at that person's profile, that person is barred from participating in a productive way with the Instagram

community. Similarly, when those in a person's network gloss over that person's status updates, the updates cannot enter into the public discourse.

Consumptive curation, too, is limited by others' productive curatorial decisions. Actual content – or what producers share – is already only a piece of the infinite potentiality of shared content. Each action, interaction, and experience is subject to productive curatorial decisions. The producer decides what is and is not recordable and sharable. Only that which the producer documents and shares is available for consumption. The producer can then distribute each piece of shared content selectively, inviting specific audiences while excluding others. These productive curatorial decisions carve out particularistic content pools from which each consumer can select. For example, 'block lists' restrict others' content pools, precluding certain members of the audience from consuming the materials of those who blocked them. Similarly, by engaging in the lowest common denominator approach (Hogan, 2010) and omitting identity markers of sexual promiscuity, recreational alcohol consumption, or contentious political views, people exclude these narratives as consumable information. In this way, deleting a Friend's offensive comment on one's Facebook Wall renders it unavailable to the viewing audience.

In sum, consumptive curatorial decisions discriminate among the corpus of produced content, including, excluding, highlighting, and backgrounding certain bits of produced materials in ways producers cannot control. These personal consumptive decisions delimit producers' visibility. In turn, productive curatorial decisions provide a bounded corpus of content from which other users in the network can select, while increasing or decreasing the ease with which those materials can be accessed. Collectively, personal productive and consumptive decisions create boundaries for agentic curation among users' networks.

Along with user practices (i.e., network curation) platform architectures and algorithms curate material as well. I refer to this machine-based third-party curation as *curatorial code*. Architectures and algorithms make up a platform's technological affordances (Gibson, 1979; Norman, 1988), through which users are encouraged or alternatively prevented, from producing and consuming in particular ways. Architecturally, producers are guided in what and how they produce, preemptively shaping the field of available consumptive material. Algorithmically, each platform sorts the corpus of created content, distributing it among networks and publics, often in seemingly mysterious ways.

Platform architectures largely affect how users produce content. A dropdown gender menu, for example, affords predetermined choices of gender identification, when compared with the more open format of a 'write in' box. Similarly, character limits on Twitter prevent long narratives or full essays, while Tumblr encourages long-form communications. What a producer creates is therefore affected by the decisions of platform designers (Schraube, 2009). In turn, platform design guides users' attention by both shaping the pool of produced content, and also by granting content varying degrees of visibility.

The curatorial effects of platform architectures come into sharp relief through Bunz' (2013) oft-cited example of Facebook's 'Like' culture, as seen in a status update on an Auschwitz Memorial Facebook page. The Memorial page posted the following status update:

> On March 14 1943 a transport with approximately 2,000 Jews deported from the liquidated ghetto on Cracow arrived. After the selection 484 men and 24 women were registered in the

> camp. The remaining group, most probably 1,492 people, were killed in the gas chamber of crematorium II.

At the time of Bunz' writing, 77 people had clicked 'Like' on the post. As Bunz points out, the production of 'Likes' probably had little to do with anti-Semitism. 'Liking' in this case did not indicate appreciation of the atrocity, but instead, support for the organization's message, expressed using the (affectively imperfect) means available via the Facebook architecture. In short, because Facebook does offer a 'Like' button but does not offer a 'Dislike' button, content creators were limited in their productive capabilities. With these productive limitations, of course, came consumptive limitations. Consumers of the message could not consume a 'Dislike,' as the platform made this impossible[1]

Certainly, producers and consumers can navigate around architectural constraints. For example, they can add their own text to upsetting Facebook content, rather than clicking a prefabbed button. They can post images of themselves as genderqueer, even while selecting a binary gender category from a dropdown menu. They can leave templated categories blank, or fill them in ironically. The platform, however, sets the initial performative rules, and producers and consumers must engage these rules, even if in creative and unintended ways.

Once producers create content, in line with or against an existing platform's architecture, that content is then subject to algorithmic filtering. Site architectures code their default filters in ways that grant users varying degrees of explicit control. For instance, while Reddit, Imgur, and YikYak operate on an up-and-down vote system – with upvoted content granted greater visibility and down-voted content potentially removed – Facebook uses both aggregate data and personal user histories to cultivate a news feed aimed at keeping users optimally engaged. As Bucher explains, Facebook employs an EdgeRank system that filters information, such that any piece of content has varying probabilities of reaching each member of the producer's network. Assuming that consumers are willing to consume the content, each piece of produced content has anywhere between a 12% and 50% chance of appearing on the Facebook news feed (Bucher, 2012). Variations in visibility rest on three general factors: affinity, weight, and time decay. Concretely, a picture, posted an hour ago, by a producer with whom one interacts frequently, is granted greater visibility than a comment, written 2 days ago, by a producer with whom the consumer rarely engages. In 2016, both Instagram and Twitter moved from a simple chronological algorithm (most recent content displayed at the top of users' feeds) to algorithms that more closely resemble Facebook's. Certainly, user practices on Facebook, and now Instagram and Twitter, affect which pieces of content rise to the fore, but with a far murkier path to visibility than that facilitated by votes, or of course, by simple chronology. In addition to distributing individual user content, platforms often display trending topics, highlighting what is popular on the platform as a whole, and/or popular among a user's network or in the user's geographic region.

Outside of chronology and up/down votes, significant portions of algorithmic curation remain black-boxed (Latour, 1999), such that neither producer nor consumer can fully predict which pieces of content will stand out or alternatively, pass in quiet obscurity. Indeed, algorithms are always in motion, as they learn from dynamic user groups who post, purchase, delete, contribute, review, and ignore. Not only are algorithms proprietary and carefully guarded, but they are also responsive to network dynamics. The dynamism

of user groups, as they interact with active algorithms and with each other, are such that even those who engineer code for Facebook, Amazon, YouTube etc. are likely unable to predict patterns of content distribution (Crawford, 2016). Algorithmically guided curation – in all of its variants – affects both production and consumption.

Productively, algorithmic curation is a defining characteristic of digitally mediated identity performance (Hogan, 2010). In fact, Hogan defines curation as an exclusively algorithmic phenomenon, one that separates digitally mediated performances from other communicative forms (2010). He states:

> An exhibition site can now be defined as a site (typically online) where people submit reproducible artifacts (read: data). These artifacts are held in storehouses (databases). Curators (algorithms designed by site maintainers) selectively bring artifacts out of storage for particular audiences. (381).

In this vein, although producers make sometimes laborious decisions about what to share, when, and with whom, there is no guarantee that algorithms will sort their productive efforts in a way that makes the content readily consumable for desired audiences.

Similarly for consumers, algorithms affect which pieces of content take a central location and which remain buried or marginalized to the outskirts of the consumptive radar. For example, 'filter-bubbles' create boundaries that reinforce, rather than challenge, users' worldviews (Pariser, 2011). Filter bubbles refer to news feed and search engine results in which consumers' demographic data and previous consumptive decisions result in an influx of information that they find agreeable, to the exclusion of information with which they are not likely to agree. Certainly, filter bubbles play a role in the relative predominance of support for the *selective exposure hypothesis* cited above.

Like most structural conditions, curatorial code, as it manifests architecturally and algorithmically, is constraining but not immutable. Recognizing machine-induced constraints to both production and consumption can potentially alleviate them to a degree, as users manipulate platforms to their advantage. Productively, users can decide to post a picture along with a status update to increase its visibility, re-post an earlier announcement to account for time decay, or solicit up-votes on Reddit to ensure content remains on the site. Moreover, users can purchase greater visibility by 'promoting' their Facebook pages, tweets, and social media accounts, improving their position in the attention economy

Consumptively, some users are sensitive to the fact that their proverbial windows offer an architecturally and algorithmically filtered view, rather than the full picture. As such, they may be careful to avoid or rectify situations in which one producer – especially one whose content does not particularly elicit their interest – takes up too much space. Colloquially, this is referred to as 'clogging' or 'spamming' the news feed, and users may delete or hide offenders. They may also seek out particular users or pages to make a particular content set more prominent in their feed, effectively teaching the algorithm how they wish to consume.

In sum, agentic productive and consumptive practices are always also bound by third-party curators, both human and machine. First, each is constrained by network curation, or the curatorial decisions of network members. One can only consume that which others make available, and produced content is only visible to the extent that consumers have not filtered it out. Second, both production and consumption are subject to platform-specific architectures and algorithmic formulas, or curatorial code. Platform architectures shape

content production, thereby delimiting consumptive opportunities. Once produced, algorithms work such that consumers see only a portion of available content, and producers' content are displayed to only a fraction of their networks. Of note, recognizing these architectural and algorithmic calculations can mitigate some of their constraining power, but does not liberate users entirely. Both platform architectures and algorithmic formulas are malleable, often change, and in practice, are largely black-boxed, leaving much of the formula unknowable to both producers and consumers.

Conclusions

The purpose of this piece is to theorize curation as a process. Therefore, I delineated two dimensions of curation (productive and consumptive), and located these dimensions in relation to curatorial bounds. Digitally mediated curation is thus an interaction between user practices and architectural design. Figure 1 is a visual representation of the curatorial dimensions. Each quadrant contains an empirical example (see below).

The left side of the diagram represents agentic curatorial moves, while the right side represents curatorial constraints. The top row represents productive curation, and the bottom represents consumptive curation. Though separated for analytic clarity, the components of these quadrants overlap, and the borders between them are porous.

The upper left quadrant represents active productive curation. The example is a user posting a picture via Facebook status update. Here, the user produces content, selecting what to share and with whom. This quadrant intersects performativity and privacy. Through productive curation, users depict images of the self, selected from a corpus of possible materials. They curate these images for varied audiences, revealing and concealing their performances selectively. The first curatorial decision in constructing a status update is the decision to document. In this example, the user identified a particular event, and particular moment within that event, as worthy of pictorial capture.

Having curated this moment as documentation-worthy, the user then selected a particular image to share with the network, including information about location. This person

	Agency	**Curatorial Bounds**
Productive Curation	User Posts Status Update from Concert with a Picture and Geolocational Tag. Makes Update Visible to All Friends.	User's Picture Comment Appears in 12% of Friends' News Feeds (Curatorial Code) Friend Hides User's Posts (Network Curation)
Consumptive Curation	User Hides Friend's Posts	Filter Bubble (Curatorial Code) Friend Blocks User from Seeing Content (Network Curation)

Figure 1. Applying the curatorial model.

then made the content available to all Friends, but not to the general public. The included content, of course, implies a negative (Jurgenson & Rey, 2013). That is, it implies a host of material that the user curated *out*, along with an audience the user excluded. Other images from the same event, tags of network members in the picture, and images located in an internal folder (e.g., 'fun with friends') do not appear at all, or appear in a less prominent position of visibility. Similarly, the image is concealed from those not connected to the user through Facebook.

The lower left quadrant represents active consumptive curation. The example is a user hiding a Friend, removing that Friend's content from the consumptive pool. Users do not only seek out information, but also filter that which is available. One could similarly subscribe to a Friend's posts, create a list on Twitter, or pursue a profile on Instagram to increase the visibility of some content or class of content.

The upper right quadrant represents productive curation, constrained by a third party. The first example – representing curatorial code – is that of a picture comment visible to only 12% of the network. The second example – representing network curation – is a Friend hiding a network member, removing the person's content from the consumer's content pool. In both cases, the active performative decisions of the user are subject to external influences, both human and machine. Just as Facebook's EdgeRank system marginalizes text-based comments (Bucher, 2012), 'hiding' or otherwise limiting the visibility of a user's content limits the potential audience. By the same process, however, EdgeRank's privileging of images and a network member's active subscription to a user's content can increase the visibility of that content. Productive constraints are therefore not synonymous with limiting visibility, but rather, indicate an external shaping with regard to how a user's productive labor is distributed and consumed.

Finally, the lower right quadrant represents consumptive curation, constrained by a third party. The first example – representing curatorial code – is the 'filter bubble' discussed above, in which algorithms preemptively remove content that does not adhere to the consumer's worldview (Pariser, 2011). The second example – representing network curation – is a Friend blocking a user. The Friend's content is thereby removed from the consumer's consumptive pool. As with productive curatorial constraints, consumptive constraints externally shape users' agentic curatorial practices. That is, the performative and privacy decisions of network members create a pool of consumptive content, while architectural design and algorithmic patterns make that content more or less readily available. Again, actions by the network and patterns of design can both decrease *and* increase the size of the content pool along with the relative availability of particular pieces of content.

These examples are far from exhaustive. Typologizing the actual practices of, and motivations for, curation are beyond the scope of the present work. Future work, however, can use this curatorial model to map out how people navigate massive and complex oceans of digitally mediated content. More specifically, future work can explore each quadrant in greater detail, working to understand the conditions under which people are more and less restrictive with their curatorial productions, more and less discriminating with their curatorial consumption, and how they make sense of, are limited by, and work around, third-party bounds.

To this latter point, future work can look in depth at how power and resource distribution matter within the curatorial process. As mentioned previously, one way of

subverting the algorithmic system is by purchasing visibility. That is, those with the financial means may buy prime real estate within a competitive attention economy. Similarly, the ability to navigate the constraints of productive and consumptive curation relies largely on technological skill and savvy, which currently distributes unequally along lines of class, race, and gender. Having established the key place of curation and its structural configuration, researchers are now well primed to look at this configuration with a critical eye, and a focus on tangible systemic alterations.

Note

1. Since the time of Bunz' (2013) writing, Facebook has expanded its single-click options beyond 'Like.' These are called 'Reactions' and do include the negative emotions 'Sad' and 'Angry.' However, Bunz' general point remains illustrative to the argument at hand. Moreover, the additional Reaction buttons, though including negative emotions, maintain a general 'happiness paradigm' that discourages users from real expressions of dejection or rage (see Davis, 2016).

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Notes on contributor

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