

The Online Personal Brand

Through the first six chapters of this book, we have discussed ways to create online content with digital tools, and concepts of web literacy, examined visual storytelling with creative online content such as videos and memes, and explained how to post your new and digital material on the web. Today's savvy user creates a plethora of new content daily, with the intent to share on websites, social networking sites, blogs, and other online platforms. Sometimes, the content creator will share solely on the website they have designed (discussed in [Chapter 3](#)) or will share on the several social media sites where the savvy user participates. Occasionally, the content creator will take the "all-of-the-above" approach, posting on their website, Tumblr, community boards, comment sections, and countless other social media sites where the digital user-creator interacts with an audience. The options in the digital world are endless. Before we discuss how to create an online brand, the key term that has come up in discussion is the understanding of the word "share" for today's user.

In order to define sharing, emphasis must be placed on the standard definition, followed up by the meaning in a digital context. The word share is a verb meaning to have, to give, or to use something with others. There are two parts to this definition in the context of the digital realm. For example, a content creator may create a meme using the popular "Overly Attached Girlfriend" photograph, putting it through a meme generator, and adding text to create an image macro. As we previously learned, image macro memes require an audience, and digital creators want to distribute content to others for entertainment, interaction, and creative use. Once the intent to share the meme with an audience is established, the user understands the receivers are the online community he or she has cultivated, which includes friends, family, and Internet followers. By sharing, the creator-participant offers their content to be downloaded, viewed, and interpreted by their audience, who finds the meme by a variety of methods—whether by search engines or social media. Also, the user who comes across the digital content (in this case, a meme) is offered an opportunity to participate in remixing and reinterpretation after viewing the material and thus becomes a creator and distributor in digital culture.

A savvy user of digital media does not just consume media, but participates in all of the media tools offered. Media theorist Henry Jenkins considered the theory of participation when discussing traditional media interaction between television fans and their favorite sitcom, drama, or comedy. In a chapter in Burgess and Green's book *YouTube: Online video and participatory culture* (2009), Jenkins states "The emergence of participatory cultures of all kinds over the past several decades paved the way for the early embrace, quick adoption and diverse use of such platforms."¹ Since then, the ideology of sharing has increased, with the audience becoming more connected through social media, smartphones, and other advancements in technology. Therefore, the idea of sharing becomes a "two-way" interaction between the content provider—creating and posting to the web—and the user of digital media (becoming a participant with the idea of continuing to share the content with others.)

In 2012, Laina Morris and her "Overly Attached Girlfriend" meme went viral. As a participant in digital media, Laina created a video titled "Girlfriend" after Justin Bieber announced a contest asking fans to create their own version of his hit "Boyfriend" (2012). The photograph of Laina is a screen shot of the video that is infamously captioned and insinuates Laina as a stalker or jealous girlfriend. The meme has been shared by millions all over social media and was one of the top memes of 2012.

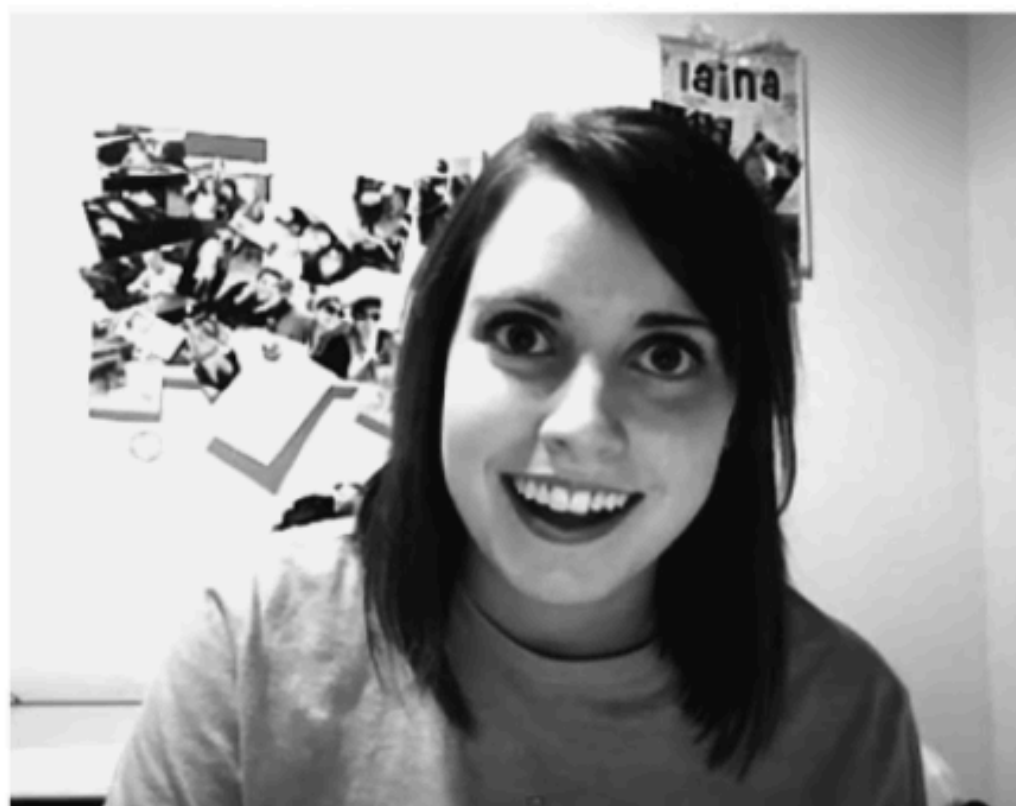


Figure 7. 1
Laina Morris: The
"Overly Attached
Girlfriend" meme.

Another aspect of sharing concerns how privacy settings are selected and updated throughout the user's social media experience. What do these technology companies do with my information that I post or have online? Do they sell the information I supply to them? What will these companies do with the information I provide to them? Learning about privacy settings is an integral area of becoming a savvy user of digital media and creating an online brand, which will be discussed in the following sections of this chapter.

While the web is still considered young and in its adolescent stages, the answers to these questions are being thoughtfully discussed, by both companies and the society of users, who are figuring out the long-term effects of such valuable information. Although it is important to ask those questions, there are actually different questions you need to ask when discussing privacy and the ideology of online branding. Several questions we now pose to digital media users include: Who is viewing the content I post and share online? Who is visiting my website and viewing my social media profile? If someone is looking at my public website, does this effect the content I post on the pages? Who is viewing the picture albums on my social networking sites, and why would someone be interested? Who is reading my commentary of opinions and my daily activities I tweet to my followers? When I post a photograph on Instagram, who is the person looking at that selfie or short video? In general, what type of content should I be posting online?

Always keep in mind the content you create daily and post on the web. What type of information is online for the world to see as it pertains to *you*? You'll have to go deeper than just thinking about the memes, videos, or pictures you post.

The Online Brand

Without speaking in the context of digital terms, the basic definition of a brand is the assigning of a name to a product. A personal online brand is a focused, structured, and thought-out "plan" for your digital presence that represents *who you are online*. The savvy Internet user has deliberately arranged all their information, content, and digital profiles, organized and connected together. This means that a user's personality, career, goals, and interests are clearly defined by a visit to their personal website and social media pages of Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram. The goal of the online brand is to connect each one of those traits, qualities, and, especially, individuality and authenticity. Although many Internet communities and message boards have anonymous users, an online brand clearly identifies the individual on the web. You are also being upfront and honest with your audience and the brand created. This, in essence, leads to an individual needing to first decide what they want their brand to be.

The Anonymous Online Brand

Differentiating itself from anonymous groups and hacktivist movements such as Anonymous, from 4chan, an anonymous online brand is someone in our society who does not want to share their actual birth name online, to the masses, whether on social media sites or in emails, and sometimes portrays a different identity to the audience of online participants. This person wishes to retain a sense of privacy or utilizes a variation of their birth name (Middle Name, Last Name Initial). Furthermore, there are times when users take a name or a role in the style of their favorite fandom—for example, joining a community message board discussing comic books and taking the name of their favorite Marvel superhero character. A digital user going on this route may not have a clear understanding of how the web works or preconceived notions of privacy issues. It is imperative that college students and people looking to become savvy in digital media understand the impact or effects of keeping an anonymous name will have on their future careers.

When cultivating, starting, or adjusting an online brand, it is vital to note that the product is *your* name. Your name is intertwined in the digital media landscape. Take a moment and think about each social media site where you participate. From Instagram to Pinterest to Facebook and Twitter, each site asks for a user name and profile picture to be associated with the profile, including the text, comments, and content, where the online audience would want to communicate. We will discuss this ideal as the chapter continues, but your given name is associated with all of the content you have created, posted, or shared. Let's review a few possible examples of name association online. Your name is associated with each photo album created on your Facebook profile page, the blog you wrote on the BuzzFeed community page about the top five controversial issues of the presidential debate, and the 6-second time-lapse video of a sunset posted on your Vine account. Your name is also associated with the comment posted to the *Wall Street Journal's* website on an article about healthcare, an animation video posted on Instagram, or a tweet giving your opinion on global warming.

Online Brand: Participate and create

Discovery Exercise

Look through all of the social media pages in which you currently participate. Locate and examine the URL of each of your profile pages. Your goal is to have all the profile pages have matching URL addresses. Once you have decided which name to use for your brand, go to the settings of each platform and change the address.

Tip

Remember, this URL will be across all sites. Also, we recommend your actual name. If your given name is already taken, select the closest variation. Here are several examples and how each connects to a digital media or social media site:

- Facebook.com/tkenny83
- Facebook.com/jamesncohen
- Twitter.com/tkenny83
- Twitter.com/jamesncohen
- Pinterest.com/tkenny83
- Pinterest.com/jamesncohen
- Instagram.com/tkenny83
- Instagram.com/jamesncohen
- YouTube.com/user/tkenny83
- YouTube.com/user/jamesncohen

In the section on “Online Identity,” we will discuss the importance of using your real name for today’s savvy digital media user. In this section, we will discuss some deeper implications of your brand in the digital space. If someone were to search your name on the web using an online search engine, what would come up in the search results that are associated with your name? What information is on the web with your first and last name? Lastly, what kind of content is connected to your name?

When you use your real name in various locations, you are acknowledging that your identity is creating a product out of the totality of your online presence. Your brand is the combined messages of all your participation. Once your name and identity are associated as a brand, as a savvy user of digital media, you will be able to figure out how to market yourself across the web, using all the new media tools offered to you and combining skills of design and storytelling on digital platforms. To explain how to make a brand out of the user, let’s look into two recognizable examples: Casey Neistat and Kingsley.

As we begin to discuss how to start the process of online branding, digital media management is a key ingredient of this. The first brand to manage is your own. This chapter will explore ways for someone to create their online brand. Through reading this chapter, users will understand how to utilize Google searches and their social media accounts to manage themselves.

BECOMING AWARE OF YOUR BRAND

Ask yourself and your friends how aware you are of what you are posting when using the web. Who is the audience intended for each post? Is it made