

Creativity in the Online Environment

Traditionally, communities are a group of people living together in one place, thereby creating a feeling of fellowship as a result of sharing common attitudes, interests, and goals. The group of people has to include multiple citizens interacting with a vast amount of individuals in the same place, such as a municipality, city, or state. Communities are also groups of people with common (and especially professional) interests within a larger society.

In our hypermedia landscape, communities belong no longer solely to the physical space, but to the new and digital environment. According to Lee Rainie and Barry Wellman, communities online are a new social operating system that gives rise to “networked individualism,” because, when you are in a community online, it is personal and individual and for multiple simultaneous users multitasking in the environment.¹ Online communities also allow both experts and information seekers to coexist and contribute equally.² This is not possible in most physical communities, and the web offers thousands, if not millions, of new places to participate.

“Every web page is a community,” says media theorist Clay Shirky in the book *Here Comes Everybody* (2008), “Each page collects the attention of people interested in its contents and those people might well be interested in conversing with one another.”³ Online databases, message boards, and social media sites provide digital interaction with one other, but it’s the content or material discussed through text, displayed through visuals, or heard through sound that captures the imagination of the you, the web user.

If you have created a presence on a social media platform, you have cultivated an online world where you have a group of individuals who are friends, followers, or fans. Your audience has turned into a community over time, where you gather with others in the digital space to share common interests such as discussing film, television, books, or other interests. How you interact within those communities can be your own unique experience. It is important to note that users of a social media community can define each platform as a different community. For example, in her book, *It’s Complicated: The social lives of networked teens* (2013), danah boyd discusses that teenagers have different communities for different platforms and audiences. While

explaining how a young woman uses Facebook with her actual name and Twitter with a nickname, boyd describes this act as “choosing to represent herself in different ways on different sites with the expectation of different audiences and different norms.”⁴ Online communities are places to locate a common audience and discuss your interests with others. The content being discussed, with interests shared with other users, may affect which platform you decide to join or start a community with others.

How do you find an online community to join? How do you find others who share a common interest with you? Whether on a laptop, smartphone, or tablet, you are always connected to a community and you are able to be a part of a group of creative individuals in your area of interest. You are part of a community no matter what, but it is up to you to decide which community to be a part of by selecting the platform and content of choice. In Shirky’s *Cognitive Surplus* (2010), he describes the connection to the web as a place that “allows you to find other people who like building model trains and doing macramé, designing paper airplanes or dressing up as anime characters.”⁵

If you are interested in being creative with a group of similar users, whether it may concern fictional characters or serious topics, you are looking for a community. And, like a community in physical space, your contribution and participation become consistent and attractive. Some may perceive your attachment to the community as an addiction, because you are always on Instagram or Facebook or Reddit, but it’s most likely just a desire to be part of your community. It is where the community is built, and where your social interactions take place day to day. Communities are both digital and in your physical environment.

Communities provide outlets for you to meet with other users who have similar opinions on particular cultural issues. If you want a platform to discuss topics and issues you truly care about, there are outlets for that, and you will participate and create content within the community once you acclimate to the platform. Online communities offer new ways for you to discuss issues that affect your daily life that you traditionally wouldn’t discuss with your physical community. A vast majority of digital media users use online communities for creative purposes, to discuss and share and create content such as memes, videos, and messages with others. Online platforms can also be used to start a community of change to influence opinions and for all users to have a voice, such as discussing political views on a blog or participating in a social activity such as the “ALS Ice Bucket Challenge.” With this activity, you have used the community to raise awareness on a particular topic that affects our culture. As media theorist Henry Jenkins describes, in the book *Convergence Culture* (2006):

New communities are defined through voluntary, temporary and tactical affiliations, reaffirmed through common intellectual

enterprises and emotional investments. Members may shift from one group to another as their interests and needs change, and they may belong to more than one community at the same time. These communities, however, are held together through the mutual production and reciprocal exchange of knowledge.⁶

Communities are built so that members can learn and exchange ideas with one another. Whether you are a part of a fan-fiction community or a community discussing political issues, you are exchanging experiences, ideas, and information with each other while learning things that will enhance your passion for the topic within the community or professional theme. By sharing your knowledge and information, you are participating in a community. Digital media communities can easily become larger, owing to their ability to have a farther societal reach. It is easier to gather a group of individuals to your community, owing to the connectivity of society as a group.

PARTICIPATION IN THE ONLINE ENVIRONMENT

In order to be a part of a community, you have to participate; in order to be a savvy user of digital media, you should understand your role as a creator to complete the interaction within the community. The ability to consider creativity in the online space will allow you to become a better citizen online and make your use of the web more valuable. The web is a boundless and limitless environment for creativity, and the only way you can use the web incorrectly is by not using it at all. There are millions of communities in which to get involved. To never participate in the online environment would keep you from advancing in society, learning new technologies, and seeking new ways to connect with others. The web is a vast landscape of small communities, inside larger communities, inside massive communities. If you participate passionately, you will be seen as a valuable community member.

In order to participate on your platform, you have to understand how it works and how to become involved with one another. In *Cognitive Surplus*, Clay Shirky explains, "a group has to do more than understand the things its members care about. Its members also have to understand each other in order to share or work well together."⁷ If you are to join Twitter, you have to realize it is different than other communities. Where a community on BuzzFeed may read articles about quirky topics to be read any time, Twitter's community is more immediate and short form. You can update Twitter in real time, whereas other communities post information to be read later.

In *It's Complicated: The social lives of networked teens*, danah boyd adds, "teens connect to people they know, observe how those people are using the site,

and then reinforce or challenge those norms through their own practices.⁸ Digital media users take a step back and understand their community. Once you have an understanding of how to be involved within the community and learn to communicate with other users, you can then participate on the platform in your own unique way. Take the time, once you locate a community, to understand its features, who the other users are, and whether the community creates content that would encourage you to participate.

Once you have understood how your community works, it is time to participate and create. What makes online communities grow and prosper is that anyone has the ability to publish content, because platforms and tools are easy for non-technical users. To participate in a community, it is both easy to join and easy to create content. You carry the tools with you at all times to capture moments that can be published to the web, instantly transforming yourself into a content creator. But what is important to note is that you are creating content with the sense that it's purposely created for the specific community. Communities vary, so the content you post differs from platform to platform. For instance, creating a photo album of family photos is for your Facebook audience of family and friends, whereas your short Vine video tribute to the *Hunger Games* shared on Twitter is for a completely different audience. Both communities describe your personality, but you have intent of creating different content for multiple communities.

Later in this chapter, we will discuss the four key forms of content: writing, pictures, video, and sound. Once you have found the community, platform, and audience, it is time to create your content using one or more of the forms. For example, BuzzFeed community pages incorporate all four forms of content into their stories. Shirky states that if:

people can share their work in an environment where they can also converse with one another, they will begin talking about things they have shared. The conversation that forms around shared photos, videos, weblog posts and the like is often about how to do it better next time—how to be a better photographer or better writer.⁹

When one participates in an online community and creates content, especially when posting on social media sites, the nature of those sites means instantaneous feedback from the audience. For instance, your WordPress blog post has a comments section for readers to respond; your Twitter feed allows for replies; and your Reddit post has a thread. Although the material may be negative at times, the feedback will mostly be valuable, allowing you to perfect and enhance your future content that will be added to the community. If you write fan fiction of your favorite television show, the feedback received from the audience will involve shared interests, providing ways for you to take your

story to another place or the next post. This feedback helps you enhance your content, motivates your participation in the community, and improves the material within the community as well.

The Rules of Participating in Various Communities

As you explore the many communities on the web, you'll find that each has its own method of participation and communication with other users. BuzzFeed community posts allow flexible methods of posting, but are restricted to only a few styles of posting; on Reddit, you can participate anonymously with text or images; on Tumblr, to communicate you need to reply or reblog. You may find a community of users who share similar interests, but the platform may not encourage your personal creativity. Sometimes, you should observe the community and how other users are participating before creating an account. You have to remember that, although you may have a creative idea, it might not fit into the format of the digital environment. The benefit is that you do not have to pay to play in the space, but you do not have much of a say over how the platform works or how your content is used. Make sure you read the terms of service before committing to full participation.

What cultivates participation is the fact that stories are created on multiple platforms simultaneously. The content you create to participate in your community may appear on several different digital media sites. This is what Henry Jenkins describes as transmedia storytelling and the convergence of media: "Transmedia stories unfold across multiple media platforms, with each medium making distinctive contributions to our understanding of the world."¹⁰ For example, the AMC television series *The Walking Dead* premieres new episodes weekly during its season run. Each week, fans of the show are able to interact with the show online with an application on their phone or tablet. The story continues on multiple platforms. Also, during the show's off-season, producers have created a web series on the AMC website for fans of the show to watch original content. Additionally, there are communities for *The Walking Dead* on Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, where fans can create their own content pertaining to the show. This is an example of convergence, which is where "multiple media systems coexist and where media content flows fluidly across them."¹¹ You have the ability to post your video on YouTube and tweet to your community of followers on Twitter. If the subject of your communities is the same, your two platforms have converged, which is why you publish the content on each. This also helps to build and grow your community. By creating this type of content, communities are very much intertwined with fandom, where users create content and want to participate with television, games, film, and anime, and other media where users have a passion for an

area of interest and wish to connect with others who share the same. Fan-fiction communities are just as important as non-fiction communities, and they can be outlets where users who are fans of a television series can be creative with digital media tools. Online communities provide you with ways to interact with others who share your interests, whom you may have had a hard time finding in physical space.

Keep in mind that users want to be noticed on communities, but at points want to remain private. Young adults have flocked to many different social media sites throughout the years. When those sites have become populated with their parents, young adults view it as being an invasion of their privacy when adults ask too many questions. Thus, users tend to move to a new social media platform as yet undiscovered by parents. As danah boyd points out, "teens aren't looking to hide, they just want privacy."¹² This theory can be applied to several developments in online communities. Although communities are meant to be found by all using digital devices and have users added to them regularly, if it's an invasion of your privacy, you want to move on to a community where you are not judged and can discuss, debate, participate, and create your topics of interests with your cultivated audience.

DIGITAL ENVIRONMENTS AND COMMUNITIES

In Dan Simmon's *Hyperion* (1990),¹³ a science fiction novel that takes place nearly a millennium into the future, there are references to the early information age of humanity, a time that spans the first 100 years of the Internet. If we are yet to be through that first century, it is hard to imagine the history of the vastly changing landscape. In order to be a savvy user of the web and become an empowered user, one must go beyond website literacy into participation in some of the most valuable experiences of the World Wide Web itself. As far as we can tell, the users themselves make up the early information age. Much like the people who, by sharing knowledge, made the Age of Enlightenment, those who create and share information make the information age. Each user is responsible for their part, and, in order to increase our awareness of each other, our issues, and our culture, we must participate in the online environment.

In this section, we hope to cover the basics of some of the most popular communities in the new and digital space. Although we cannot predict the future and what platforms may exist, the communities discussed will almost certainly be present for many more years in the future. There is a good chance you are already part of most of these communities, but, if you are not, we recommend you participate—the web benefits from your involvement.

SOCIAL MEDIA COMMUNITIES: THE BEGINNINGS OF FACEBOOK

When looking at the advancement of communities in the digital space, you need to look at the start of Facebook. When Mark Zuckerberg and his team launched Facebook (originally Facemash and thefacebook.com) in 2004, its purpose was providing a community-driven environment to bring Harvard University students together by giving them a platform to find out basic information about their classmates and view photographs of each other. Facebook offered students a way to find new friendships, build relationships, and discover people with similar interests among classmates at their school. Facebook was the start of the largest digital community that would occur online. Once Facebook was opened to the general public in 2006, the online community was open for all to join (at least if they were a minimum of 13 years old). Bonds were quickly formed with users with whom you already had prior connections, such as friends, family, and fellow classmates. Users were finding connections through Facebook's recommendations and friend algorithms, leading to the discovery that they might share common interests, such as movies, books, or politics, with other users. Facebook has always used the word "friend" to describe connected users, and the term "friending" appeared in our vernacular. Now, a friendship can be completely online, without a face-to-face meeting. Connections were built primarily through shared hobbies, pictures, and having conversations through Facebook posts, messages, and comments.

Facebook Friend Algorithms

One of the features of Facebook that has made it the most popular and most populous social networking site is its proprietary code and algorithms. Facebook's algorithms are like other algorithms: They do computations to solve problems. Facebook's code is much more advanced, however, and the data you provide solves the problem of having to seek out other users, products, and communities on your own. Facebook helps you connect. The more you use Facebook, the better and more refined the algorithm is at finding something specific for you. However, you should be aware that the data used in the algorithms is also sold to advertisers, to make the ads on the page more pertinent and specific to you. Additionally, Facebook is a publicly traded company, and the majority of its value comes from the data you create while participating on the platform.

Whereas traditional communities were built on social settings, Facebook did not anticipate how users of the social media site would build communities that focused on interests or connections and use the platform for personal reasons. In the 2011 CNBC documentary *The Facebook Obsession*, a young woman named Jennifer Kolb was featured because she was adopted as a child and was looking to find her birth mother using Facebook. When she typed her mother's name in the search box, no results were coming up. She came up with the idea to start a Facebook group titled, "Looking for My Biological Mother." One of the 1,500 users in the group happened to be a social worker whose hobby is to help children find their birth parents. Using online people searches, the social worker found Jennifer's match and even found her biological mother's Facebook profile. Jennifer was united with her biological mother and she used the online community on her Facebook group to help her with a personal goal.

Facebook Groups, Games, and Pages

Today, Facebook still provides plenty of ways to build a community. Facebook groups bring members together to discuss topics in animation, television, sports, and technology, or any specific interest. You can join groups with users who share the same interest in software such as Adobe Photoshop or Illustrator and use the group to ask questions and discuss new techniques and tools. There are location-based groups where you can connect with others who may live in the same town as you to discuss issues affecting the area as a way to build your local community and connect it to your digital community.

Facebook groups have been a resource for colleges and universities, as professors can connect with their students to discuss course issues and answer questions, and students can discuss the main topics in the class, without the faculty member friending the student. In addition to using Facebook groups, you can use Facebook's mobile games to start communities. Mobile games enable interactivity and entertainment with your friends who are also playing the game and lead you to engage in this form of social interaction with other users of the platform.

Pages are another great way to build communities on Facebook, because users can connect to a product or corporate brand and communicate their questions, comments, and passion directly to the brand by interacting and connecting with the same fans on the page. For instance, fans of Starbucks can like the page and connect with the brand more personally. If you have had a positive or poor experience with Starbucks, you can discuss it by commenting on their page and carrying on a conversation with fellow users. Brands have taken to Facebook to build community by asking their fans to post what's on their mind.¹⁴ This helps other users get a sense of the people

who share their similar interest. This builds brand trust and online community engagement through the page, as other members of the community may comment on the post.

Active Facebook Use

Facebook has over 1 billion users, and many people use it without reading the directions of the platform or considering the terms of service. Facebook is a publicly traded company growing in multiple tech industries that profits from selling user data to advertisers to make a better user experience. When using the platform actively, check the privacy settings on your images and your posts. If someone is a member of Facebook, they can see anything you post publicly. Facebook allows you to control what other members may see of the content you post, but you must manually control the visibility settings.

You can be a positive community member on Facebook and a user who is seen as a good influence by controlling your posts. Sometimes you want everyone to see a post, and you should post publicly, and sometimes you should change the custom settings so only your closest friends see what you are posting. Facebook uses sharing algorithms to post your content on your friends' feeds, so the more interaction your post has, the more the post shows up.

To post and be a leader, you should add photos to a status update, as people are more likely to interact with the content. If you post a link, Facebook will populate the post with the link's information, so you can delete the hyperlink before you post. You also have the ability to edit posts on Facebook, but remember that users can see the edits you made—sometimes it's better to delete the post and post again.

TWITTER

Twitter is a platform containing hundreds of communities where users tweet in short form, reply, or retweet, to engage the various users on the platform. Whether you are on your phone or on your desktop or on a Twitter app such as TweetDeck or Hootsuite, you invest in your community by reading the feed that is streamed in real time. When you read any type of Twitter user, either by following them or researching a hashtag, you gain a sense of a community by getting an insight into an individual's or group's thoughts, comments, and activities. What binds the community together is the communication of topics and issues to fellow and new followers.

To participate in the community of Twitter, you should have constant contact with other users in your interest area and post tweets on a consistent

basis to those users. In fact, to be a part of any social media platform, you should become literate in the platform in order to fully grasp its full use. It is important to understand how to connect with other users by using hashtags, retweets, and all forms of communication on Twitter. When you first join Twitter, you should research which communities you want to participate in and follow the people and brands who fit your interests. There are plenty of interest communities to follow relating to your favorite television shows, musicians, anime, books, and politics. At first, you may follow too many users, and you will soon learn to reorganize whom you like to see in your feed consistently.

Twitter and Corporate Engagement

Some communities you may join on Twitter may be based on a sponsored hashtag or promoted trending topic. Although these hashtags show a cohesive communicating environment, you should make sure that the brand sponsoring or promoting the tweet also fits in with your general interest. Companies looking to promote their brand sometimes try to form communities. For example, the hashtag #HelloFuture may be a common response to something cool and futuristic or technical, but it is used by BMW as a promotional tag. Participating in these promoted communities can be just as fun as in user-created communities; just be aware that your activity also helps the brand.

When you follow users, some may follow back, some may not; the way to increase followers is by consistently tweeting. You want your tweets to be read by as many followers as possible to build a community. To do so, you have to tweet, not only regularly, but also directly to the users. For instance, if you are a part of *The Walking Dead* community, you may tweet directly to a fan or a show character (using the @twitterhandle) to start a conversation others will find. Another way to build your community on Twitter is by retweeting content in your area of interest. This will help other users in your community who, when researching topics through the hashtags, come across your feed, thereby increasing the connectivity between the two. Speaking of hashtags, the Twitter trending topics play a part in building community. A trending topic means that something is popular or being discussed simultaneously by thousands of users at that moment in time, using the hashtag or keyword. If the Twitter user comes across your page, a connection can be made when the interaction begins, and a community member is located in the process.

As Dhiraj Murthy points out in his book, *Twitter: Digital media and society series* (2012), there are more than interest communities (television, film, and anime) for users to follow, such as disaster or health communities.¹⁵ If natural disasters occur, communities are developed through social media sites such

as Twitter for those affected to gather information, locate missing persons or materials, and figure out their next course of action. Twitter becomes a community when fellow users in the digital space help those who need to find information by seeking specific pages, profiles, and sites built for information about the particular event. These communities are built around those who share similar situations.

Twitter as a Creative Platform

When Twitter started in March of 2006, little did the creators realize that they would start a trend of short-form storytelling and creativity with those who wanted to participate in the platform and as a way to attract new users. This form of storytelling influenced many future applications such as Vine and Instagram, which will be discussed in further sections. Because they were only given 140 characters, users had a limit to the way that they could express themselves with their words and the text on the screen. Whereas Facebook provides users with an unlimited platform to write a post in as many words as they wanted, users are forced to be creative and to come up with new ways to communicate a sentence on Twitter. Each 140-character tweet could be its own chapter of your story, with your entire Twitter profile feed as the whole book for your visitors to read, sharing your life story.

There are many tools for users to be creative on Twitter. Although the community builds on your tweets and your interactions, it's the way that you write your tweets that will engage new followers and allow you to be interactive within the community you wish to be a part of, whether it's your own friends or fandom, such as a television community on Twitter. You should include a statement as well as a mix of links and pictures to connect to others. For instance, you have to use someone's handle when talking directly to a friend or to someone you wish to answer your tweet, beginning a back and forth discussion. Users who use hashtags to participate in a specific conversation on Twitter may also realize that the hashtag can be beneficial as a research tool.

HISTORY OF THE HASHTAG

Organizing content on the web was not beneficial to the average digital media user. Locating and organizing content was in the hands of those who created the social platforms on the web and supplied the content. Chris Messina, who was a consultant and regular user of Twitter, serendipitously created the now ubiquitous hashtag back in 2007. Liz Gannes researched the history in her article "The Short and Illustrious History of Twitter #hashtags" (2010) and found that Messina made the discovery when he inserted the pound symbol

Figure 2.1

Chris Messina posted the first ever tweet using the hashtag to propose Twitter groups. Chris's tweet stated, "How do you feel about using # (pound) for groups. As in #barcamp [msg]?"

Source: Photo by Kat Borlongan



after typing in a word or a phrase, and it automatically became a hyperlink that would take the connected word to the organized search results on Twitter. This allowed Messina to place all of his keywords into particular groups.¹⁶ The hashtag was born, and it became a way to place a label on a subject in categorizing content on Twitter. This form of tagging became a tool for users on Twitter to research an array of topics, from words to brands to news to events. It opened up a full database of information never before attainable by the regular user of social media or the Internet as a whole.

HOW IS THE HASHTAG USED?

Murthy explains, "Hashtags are an integral part of Twitter's ability to link the conversations of strangers together."¹⁷ The use of the hashtag brings users together who may not have conversed before, but are brought into the community together by discussing a topic being researched. For instance, if you are researching *#worldseries*, not only will it bring you information on players, teams, and games, but it will enable you to connect with others, opening up a possible new line of communication. Although you can see other users and their tweets on the subject, it is more of a flow of information coming through your feed. Many Twitter users have used the hashtag to be incorporated into trending topics for what is currently happening in pop culture or at that very moment. If you incorporate the hashtag, there is a better chance for your tweet to be read by other followers or potential new followers.

As the hashtag has evolved, it has become a necessary requirement for users to place the symbol on Twitter content, and it is also attached to videos, blogs, and other forms of multimedia in order to organize content on the web and

**Figure 2.2**

#Jan25 hashtag used in the Egyptian protests.

Source: Photo by Essam Sharaf, Creative Commons license

to help users looking to organize and collect data. The reach and importance of the hashtag have moved beyond Twitter, as other social media sites have used the utility, such as Instagram, Vine, YouTube, and Facebook, all incorporating it to allow their users to search their interests.

The hashtag has even been incorporated as an online community tool to organize information for the masses. In 2011, the Arab Spring used the hashtags #Jan25 and #PrayforEgypt to gain supporters looking to rebel against the Egyptian government, to raise awareness of the movement outside of Egypt, and so that online users could distribute content and find information.¹⁸ When Occupy Wall Street occurred in the fall of 2011, #occupy, #OWS, or #99percent were used to gather citizens to protest in New York about economic and income inequalities. Later, hashtags were used around the world, helping to spread the message, such as #OccupyLondon. Supporters of the Occupy movement used the hashtag to find those who wished to come out and protest with them, find donations to their cause, and spread their message globally. The hashtag became a constant news source for new daily information.

Hashtags generate new information in real time, and it becomes a task for the digital user to sift through all of the content and connect the information together. It can be quite the undertaking for a user to go through multiple social media sites to put together information on movements or actions to make a story. Look to the next presidential election. As each presidential candidate will use social media to display their goals, tasks, and outlines for the

country, it is up to the user to put the puzzle pieces together to understand the full circle of issues each candidate is bringing to the table. With Twitter and all social media sites using the hashtag, it has made digital research easier and placed the role of researcher on each digital user looking to be a part of the social good. Looking at the themes of the Occupy Wall Street movement, it may have started as an angry protest toward the US financial district, but it also showcased problems in American culture including student debt and, later, became a worldwide symbol of youth protest. Through the social conversation, the hashtag provided this movement, new awareness of these issues became national and world news and topics for discussion in all communities.

Hashtags and Society

Although the hashtag helped protestors gather together for the Occupy movements worldwide and attract attention to the protests during the Arab Spring, the public nature of the hashtag allowed those opposed to the movements also to see the information. Hashtags are essential pieces of new and digital media production and can be used in a variety of ways, from gathering people together, to analyzing an event, or even managing a brand. As a community member, you have the added fun of choosing to participate in the use of hashtags, knowing that you can be aiding powerful activist movements and showing support for causes you care about. Do your best to help the community, knowing that users of all types can see your tweet.

YOUTUBE

Whereas some online video distribution outlets rose, fell, merged, corporatized, and otherwise faded away, YouTube succeeded by being the most efficient method of sharing stories. Much of the content was created traditionally, with larger cameras and desktop editing software. With the advent of the iPhone in 2007, YouTube saw an influx of video, as users began to use their cellphones to record higher-quality video (480p, the equivalent of standard definition television) and upload them to the site. YouTube prevailed as the ultimate destination of videos, and thousands of users became vloggers on the site. YouTube was simultaneously the place to create and broadcast yourself to the world and the place to watch content. In late 2011, the iPhone upgraded once again to the iPhone 4s, offering a front-facing camera and a main camera that recorded 1080p, high definition, and video capture. Now, a professional video acquisition tool was available in anyone's pocket.

It's easy to see why YouTube became a community. With many social networks centered on text and pictures and with the vast amount of conversations centered on television, a distribution site where users can participate,

engage, and discuss videos is engaging to the online world. In [chapters 5](#) and [6](#), we will be discussing the effects of viral video and creating channels with web television through video-sharing sites such as YouTube.

THE COMMUNITY OF YOUTUBE

The powerful community built through the video-sharing site is now considered a competitive outlet to television channels. In Lev Grossman's *Time* article "The Beast with a Billion Eyes" (2010),¹⁹ he explained how YouTube has features that make it the go-to outlet for digital video media. First is the ease of uploading recorded video: The fact that everyone with a smartphone or tablet can record video instantly, thus capturing any moment that happens in their life. Video-acquisition technology is continually becoming cheaper to purchase and use. Second, when YouTube was created, it made a platform for users to watch any video, at any moment they wanted. YouTube is a distribution platform for all video content, whether produced by independent content creators or by professional businesses. If you want to watch the latest viral video, you go to YouTube. When you want to watch your favorite music videos, you go to YouTube. If you want to see the latest in sports bloopers, you go to YouTube. If you want to watch hours of cat videos, again: YouTube. At a moment's notice, you can use your phone, laptop, or tablet, whether it is to spend hours watching videos of your desire or to pull up a video to discuss with friends. Thus, when the platform was built, it turned into a community because, not only did users want to consume media, they were also participating and creating content.

"More video is uploaded to YouTube every month than has been broadcast by the three big TV networks in the past 60 years", Grossman notes.²⁰ Before YouTube, there was no place to go to view the vast amount of video uploaded every second, minute, hour, and day. Once created, it became a platform for millions of users to join, watch, and create, to post video to some form of platform, because we have a need to share our content for instant feedback, comments, and community building.

YouTube hopes to be a platform where those who visit will be inspired to create videos, learn from the videos and channels, and connect with those on the web. YouTube is a community because a user can find videos instructing how to put on a tie, change a tire, build a table, learn a basic foreign language, or solve a math equation. Users are willing to share videos to help others who come across them, provide knowledge, and inspire users to new skills. According to YouTube's community guidelines, the site is made for participation and for you to get the most out of its videos, to be creative, and to learn, and you must join in the variety of ways to interact with the users. Whether it is just by rating a video, leaving a comment, or building up to

creating your own videos, it's a simple way to connect with a video that affects you or has some form of meaning, so that it fulfills the desire to engage with the online world.

What is a community on YouTube? The main goal of being a part of the YouTube community is to participate with the content creator. If you visit their channel regularly and incorporate their videos into your daily life by viewing the videos at work, discussing the vlog with friends, and writing comments on the video on the channel while interacting with other fans, you are part of the community. You also should take the initiative to become a creator and producer of your own channel. The entire site is a platform, but content creators need a channel where they can post or collect their videos. Each channel is its own community, and within that community may be one particular subject or a channel devoted to multiple playlists of curated video content, such as if you are a film producer creating a channel for your short films, commercials, or interviews to show to your fans. The minute you sign on to YouTube, you are welcomed to its vast amount of possible communities. Through browsing channels or searching in categories that the site recommends, such as music, sports, gaming, education, news, and spotlight, it is easy for those who love to watch videos to find a community to be a part of on the social site. Once you find the community, you can subscribe to the channel as a way to easily click on your favorite channels to view the latest vlog or web series post. Your YouTube feed comes from the channels you subscribe to, and, if you post your videos or create compelling playlists, you can find yourself with more subscribers than some traditional television channels.

If you wish to cultivate a community on YouTube, it is good to have a few videos created before you design your channel. Whether it's vlogging, creating a web series, or posting funny videos of your friends doing stunts in the style of MTV's *Jackass*, you need content. Once several videos have been posted to your channel, subscribe to other channels that coincide with your content. This will bring other members of the YouTube community to your channel, who may then promote your channel by subscribing to it. Additionally, you can use the featured channels posted to your site and promote others in your community that post similar videos, in the same genre. Everything matters in getting others to join your community on YouTube. From the channel name, to the videos, to the description and comments from your audience, the channel creator has to look at each piece of the puzzle and turn to the analytics to understand its audience.

Google Purchased YouTube in 2007

When Google bought YouTube, it bought a community full of vloggers, web series creators, and users looking to post their most recent video captures. They bought a YouTube search engine of videos that look raw, real, and have

professional or amateur styles. It gave creators a quality outlet to post videos, because Google's technologies are limitless. Through the ability to create and edit videos, your latest vlog can look professional enough that it is of a standard that would appear on national television. Grossman describes how the average user spends 15 minutes a day on YouTube, whereas 3 hours is the average use for television.²¹ Although this may seem small, this is a huge number, as the community grows, and all forms of video content are added daily to the platform. More so than any other community, YouTube has had excessive amounts of copyright issues on the social site. YouTube has been proactive in this area by placing ads on videos or having the videos pulled down, among other forms of infringement action. But why would Google want to purchase YouTube? It could have easily invented a similar version, with its resources. Well, just as the search engine understands and takes notice of your search results, it is now able to understand which videos you desire to watch. Through analytics and bookmarking your Internet history, YouTube and Google understand which videos engage its everyday users. Just open up YouTube on your mobile device and you will quickly see, "What to watch", which is YouTube recommending videos to you from your latest searches. Google purchased the community of active users.

The site has successfully built a community for those who enjoy watching cat videos or such funny moments as "David After Dentist" (2009), where new and digital media users enjoy watching these videos just as much as they do watching the latest sitcom on television. Video is the same to the online community and, whether it is a web television series or a viral video, it's just content for users to enjoy as entertainment. Google and YouTube:

will notice if you watch the whole video or give it up in the middle, and which video you watch right after it, whether you post that video on your blog, and if you leave the site after you watch it or hang around for a while.²²

If you are a user on YouTube, it will feed to your interests and help you cultivate your community by featuring videos relating to your interests. It knows exactly what you want to view; therefore it will bring the videos to you, hoping that you will be engaged and will share the videos with others of your community to help with clicks toward raising the number of views of the video.

TUMBLR

Created in 2007 by a young developer named David Karp, Tumblr was bought by Yahoo! in 2013. This social media platform offers a sense of community similar to Facebook's and Twitter's and offers the additional ability to have

anonymity, together with motion graphics such as GIFs and videos. Tumblr is an interesting hybrid social network that is somewhere between Twitter and Instagram. It allows microblogging and picture posting, as well as video and audio embedding. Tumblr is often considered the most creative social network, with thousands of artists and photographers posting continually.

The Tumblr community is an extremely engaged group of users who feel they have the insider view of the web. Like Twitter, anyone can be on the platform and communicate with one another, and users have to create their feeds by following similar or interesting people. Also, like Twitter, you can use hashtags to organize your content into categories of information. Making your own Tumblog is easy: You just sign up and start posting. To make posts popular, you can add notes by liking the post or reblogging the post to your own feed and adding commentary.

The Tumblr community is very welcoming to a variety of fandoms and special interests ranging from photography, to books, to houses, to television shows such as *Sherlock*, *Dr Who*, and *Supernatural*. Users find each other through their interests and create tight communities of creative participants. Tumblr thrives on savvy user interaction and witty responses. The savvier and more knowledgeable of the web and culture you are, the more your posts can get reblogged or liked. Adding commentary is helpful as well, as you can contribute and enhance someone else's post. The low-risk, easy-to-approach use of Tumblr makes it welcoming to all users, including celebrities and authors such as John Green and Neil Gaiman. Additionally, memes can come from Tumblr owing to pranks and misunderstandings. There was once a post about a missing woman named Becky, and the user happened to post a picture of a young Taylor Swift. Someone replied, "I think that's Taylor Swift," and the original user reblogged and said, "No it's Becky." Several weeks later, Taylor Swift was seen in LA wearing a shirt that said, "No it's Becky," and the Tumblr community reblogged that image hundreds of thousands of times. We highly recommend participating in the Tumblr environment—you never know who you may also be participating with.

WORDPRESS

WordPress is the most advanced open-source blogging platform on the web. Digital media users flock to the site to create their own blog in hopes of having a voice, with their words and subject as their community. WordPress is a community platform, and, if you are to use WordPress.com, you will be using the content management system (CMS) as a contributor to the blogging environment. For many new and digital media users taking part in WordPress with the hopes of building a community around their written stories, you can use the WordPress open-source free version, which is WordPress.com.

This means the URL of your blog will have WordPress.com on the site (blog.wordpress.com). This does not require you to purchase a domain name or hosting, as WordPress will host it for free, with ads that show up on your page.

The WordPress CMS is utilized by many organizations and business websites that we visit daily, such as CNN, Reuters, GigaOm, and Mashable. Still, even with all of its HTML features, plug-ins, and tools, WordPress is still community driven by bloggers. To start your community on WordPress.com, create a blog with some pictures and text that fit within your chosen theme. We recommend that, when you create your blog, you chose a theme and be consistent. Find something you enjoy and write about it at length and consistently. If you like fashion, create a fashion blog. Like sports? Create a commentary blog that helps fellow fans see your point of view. The great part about each time you create a new post in WordPress is that you are able to put your blogs into categories, so that the reader of your blog can quickly come across or research the subject they are interested in. Although you are only using posts to create your blogs (rather than pages), the categories feature means that you are placing your blogs into topics. For example, if you are writing a blog about pumpkin picking, your categories will be Halloween or holiday, to help it appear in topic listings.

Your community grows because of how you take action to promote your blog via social media or using a nice theme for your blog. When readers and fellow bloggers visit your site, it is a two-way interaction within the community, because you are discussing topics, issues, and reactions to those commenting on your blog. Those comments that appear at the end of each blog will encourage regular conversation with your audience, thereby improving your blog and impacting you personally, encouraging growth and maturity, which are what communities should do. Whether your blogs are about your daily activities of being a college student, love of video games, or playing music, your built community helps drive a desire to continue writing, improving skills, but willing to share your stories with the world and connect with others.

USER-GENERATED COMMUNITIES: REDDIT

Reddit is a user-based forum website that curates content of events, images, and news currently affecting those in the world. Information and posts appear on the page when participants find a pertinent or interesting link they want to share with the rest of the community. Think of Reddit as a news site, with content updated so quickly that it has been referred to as “the front page of the Internet.” Reddit users submit links to Reddit in categories such as space, DIY, old-school cool, and Photoshop battles. The other Reddit users vote on

those links to move them upward or downward on the page. The community on Reddit is turning the links into a list of what all users on the Internet are currently reading, viewing, or watching at that very moment in time. As users read the links, the post goes lower down the page, which is where the site got its name.

Reddit doesn't edit the posted content or filter out information, and there is minimal moderation; therefore, what you see on the pages is important to the entire community. When new links are added, they either push toward the top if they are important and pertinent, or, if not, the links will be pushed quickly down the page. Any posted content has the opportunity to go viral, be it informational or entertainment. On any Reddit link, you will find the number of votes a link has received from the Reddit community.

Reddit has hundreds of different, very specific categories made by the community, called subreddits, where you can find links to politics, sports, history, and science, or even obscure and quirky categories such as fatbirds and Earthporn. Subreddit pages are made by the community and work exactly the same way as the main page of the website. There are subreddits specifically geared toward where you live or to things that have happened in the past that you still wish to discuss, and, if a topic does not exist, you are able to create a subreddit in the category you wish to post links for. The great feature of subreddits is that, not only can you see the number of users subscribed, but you can also see how many of those users are using the subreddit community at that moment, giving you an indication of whom you are interacting with.

Offering the possibility to join subreddits, Reddit becomes geared toward your interests, and they appear on your main page to encourage you to continue participating. As Reddit is forum-based, the comments appear as a thread, branching away from the main link. Users can reply to a single commenter or to the direct link. Because some subreddits are very specific discussion topics about politics or technology, Reddit provides a debate forum for users. When debating topics, authority users on Reddit write "I am a police officer" or "I am a science teacher" or "I am a runner," and users can ask those members any question they wish on that topic. This has lead to the very popular "Ask Me Anything" (AMA) discussions on Reddit, where you can ask an authority figure anything. People using the AMA feature range from Barack Obama²³ to Daniel Radcliffe²⁴ to Glitter manufacturers.²⁵

Like in the Tumblr community, Reddit users can remain anonymous, and whereas other communities such as Facebook and Google require the majority of users to use some form of their given name, it's refreshing to comment and post from a pseudonym. However, keep in mind that Reddit's anonymous environment is optional, as there are many occasions where celebrities, musicians, and authors use the site to open up a community to answer questions from fans. Although anonymous users could cause an issue on

Reddit owing to material some may deem not appropriate for the web, the site trusts the new and digital media users to push that material down the page, as the power is in their hands.

Reddit Activists

As discussed in the hashtag section, the communities built on Reddit have been used for activist movements. For instance, users have used the site to raise money for charities or to raise awareness on issues affecting the world, such as, when the Stop Online Piracy Act (SOPA) was being brought to the U.S. government, users on Reddit flocked to explain how this Act could harm the web. Reddit users encouraged a “blackout” protest on the site to show their anger against a poorly proposed law.²⁶ Another way that Reddit performs as an activist group is the subreddit Secret Santa at /r/secretsanta and Reddit Gifts. The Secret Santa subreddit was started in 2009, when Reddit users each got a Secret Santa and had to give another reddit user a gift. Inspired by JetBlue’s gift-giving challenge, Reddit users created a similar process of anonymous gift giving. The response was an instant hit, and a set of rules was created where, if you sign up, you will actually send a gift and you won’t be a jerk by promising something you can’t deliver, there is a spending cap of \$15 (including shipping), and you should try to be creative by doing something such as a handmade gift. In 2009, almost 5,000 users joined Reddit Gifts. In the reddit gift exchange site, those joining create a profile page with their likes, dislikes, and interests, where they can be matched with someone to give them a gift. Users then have 2 weeks to research a gift and go back to the site to let it know that they have purchased one, providing tracking information. Once the user receives the gift, he/she posts a picture of him/herself with the gift, as a thank-you note to the reddit user who provided the gift. Several extraordinary gifts were given, such as \$1,500 dollars a broke college student received from another Reddit user, and others sent gifts that matched users’ interests. After the first success, over 96 percent of the users who signed up actually sent gifts. The 2010 Secret Santa grew to over 17,000 participants; in 2011, it grew to over 38,000; and 2012 saw it grow to 60,000 participants. It has continually broken the Guinness Book of World Records with the number of exchanges.²⁷

With the success of Secret Santa and Reddit Gifts, the site began topic exchanges, such as a book exchange, board-game exchange, calendar exchange, or the Marvel superhero exchange. There are even programs for Reddit users to give and not receive anything in return, such as gifts for teachers providing school supplies for a class. It’s a true online community, because people are sending gifts to a complete stranger, but sharing the Reddit community in common.

How Do Communities Get Funded?

Venture capitalism is an investment system where investors and major corporations provide money to start-up companies, with the potential for it to grow into a long-term money-making investment. This is very common for technological endeavors by creators who are looking to start social media companies, mobile applications, websites, or devices. For small companies, agreeing to partner with investors is pivotal in helping the long-term growth of their business, assisting with paying for staff, materials, products, etc. An example of a venture capital firm is Sequoia Capital, which has worked with, and made millions of dollars from, technology companies such as Google, particularly when the company purchased YouTube.

Peter Thiel is an entrepreneur, co-founder of PayPal, and one of the first investors in Facebook and he started the Founder's Fund, among other investment projects. Thiel invested approximately \$500,000 in Facebook and, when he sold off most of his share, netted \$1 billion in profit. He is always on the lookout for creative ideas for innovating, not only in tech start-ups out of Silicon Valley, but also in areas that affect culture, society, and global issues. Thiel has run a program called 20 under 20, where that number of college students are asked to take a "break" or "stop" out of college to pursue their dream innovation, and Peter invests in their venture. Thiel has stated in previous interviews that he believes that college is too expensive, causing major debt, and takes away from the time period for young adults to innovate with their ideas. Past fellows have been chosen to innovate in areas such as information technology, robotics, education, business, energy, and space. Students chosen for the opportunity are able to create a new technology, leading into a future business or start-up, and, as for Peter Thiel, he finds the next new talent and venture to invest in and make a profit.

IMAGE FORUMS: 4CHAN

Chris Poole, who goes by the name of "moot," created 4chan in 2003. 4chan is a bulletin board and forum for digital media users to post comments and share photographs and images with the database. Discussion boards include topics on Japanese animation, comic books, television, and origami. This site and community are completely anonymous, with Internet users not having to even register. All they have to do is select their interest and they can participate in the site. Each category has a short code that it uses, such as /p/ for photography, /jp/ for otaku culture, or /vt/ for retro games. A word of warning: It is an adult-oriented board, and users will find material that is not safe for work (NSFW). As the bulletin board is anonymous, each picture posted, for example, is given an identification number. If users share identities, the post

will be moved off the site to a chat. The 4chan bulletin boards have started many popular web memes and happen to be the birthplace of lolcats and Rick Rolling.

With more than 20 million views per month, this site has built quite a large gathering of Internet users. One of the most visited and controversial discussion boards is /b/, which means random. The board has very few policy rules on posts (except for explicit illegal activity), and it is commonly linked with the trolls of the web, who have the freedom to post any sort of information online, but do so in destructive ways, posting anything that they want by doing pranks. 4chan is also the origin of the Anonymous "hacktivist" group that uses technology and connective networks to promote political issues, protests, and human rights. One example of hacktivist movements was a protest against the Church of Scientology called "Project Chanology" in 2008, where 4chan users protested and prank-called Scientologists—all organized on the boards. During these protests, the use of Guy Fawkes masks became associated with the group, as they were worn to the public protests. As the group was going to be protesting in public, members had to hide their faces, because the use of 4chan is anonymous.

Deep and Dark Communities

A word of warning: As responsible authors, we must warn that communities such as 4chan's /b/ board are not for the faint of heart. You cannot "unsee" things, and, unfortunately, users of the random board post images that are unfit for your consumption. Although many users of the rest of the 4chan boards are often well behaved, be careful of trolls and illicit behavior on these sites. Some of the darker communities lead to pirate sites, viruses, and dubious content.

GAMING COMMUNITIES

When traditional arcade and console games became connected on the web, users found that their previously limited approach to gaming expanded into a community. Traditional games may have had multiplayer features, but they were still limited to the characters and the storyline provided by the game developer. Online gaming allows for a massive multiplayer experience, and the user can role-play as a customizable character of a game. Games such as *World of Warcraft*, an RPG game that dates back to the mid 1990s, entered the online realm on its tenth anniversary in 2004. The game is open to any user with an Internet connection and the software provided.

The massively multiplayer online role-playing game (MMORPG) *World of Warcraft* encourages web users to join guilds and teams with other players in

order to win battles against other teams. As on social media, friendships form in the digital space, without the need for face-to-face meeting. The games require dedication and involvement to such an extent that some MMORPGs have created their own digital currency. It's actually possible to earn real money playing games if your team becomes good enough to win and collect enough digital commodities to sell to fellow users.

There are hundreds of MMORPGs for you to play,²⁸ and we recommend you locate a community of players with similar interests and time involvement. With a little bit of experimenting within the game, you can navigate a digital landscape that entertains, encourages community, and uses strategy.

USER CREATIVE EXPRESSION

There are thousands of places to express yourself on the web, and our recommendation is you pick what you like best. With the web changing so rapidly, it's up to you to find your place of comfort and creativity within a community that appreciates your work.

WRITING

If you really like something passionately, you should make that your muse and create as much as you can. There are fandoms on every platform, and you should participate in them, whether that means writing fan fiction about *Harry Potter*, *Supernatural*, or *The Walking Dead*. Whether you use Tumblr, Twitter, or a subreddit, there is a community where you can write. Writing also means being a really good reader, so follow your community's various posts and progress and play along with them. If you are a sports writer, make sure you write for the community, not the general, wide audience. Everyone can write about sports, but only you can write about it in your personal style, for your specific audience.

The web is a fairly new medium for writers, and bloggers, especially those who have been writing for over a decade, take a lot of pride in their online platform. The BradLand Manifesto (1999),²⁹ written near the turn of the century, explains why the web is a great platform on which to create, and we believe Brad Graham's thoughts are still just as important today. Graham wrote that he writes for his need to publish and see his words in print and his desire to control the information he knows well—to minimize "fram," in his words. Blogging gives an opportunity to learn and grow as a writer and web participant, and the web is there to explore. When you write online, you are given a ticket to explore the web and find information and points of view that increase your overall awareness. And think of it this way: Never before

in history has the opportunity to publish, join a community, and share your ideas been so available.

You are encouraged, not by the platform, but by those reading your material online who become fans and followers of your stories. In online writing communities, you have the choice to write fiction or non-fiction. It doesn't matter what you choose, as long as you are writing. You'll find that most social media offer ways of adding creative writing on their platform. Check out R.L. Stine's horror fiction on Twitter³⁰ and follow comedians as they test their material on Tumblr. Join fandoms and follow people who interest you and try to find new insight into pop-culture ideas.

The BuzzFeed platform allows users to create community posts where you have the same access to the tools the professionals use to create articles. The more platforms you learn to write on, the more likely you have mastered the style of writing on each platform. Remember that you should be creative and authentic when you write, because the web is a platform for people to enjoy each other's work. Look for communities that showcase your individuality and creativity on the web. Writing online should be looked at as an art form, whether it's writing on blogs, Twitter, or even a status update. The words you post online, whether fiction or non-fiction, provide the audience with a glimpse of your voice. Today, there are thousands of "bots" writing articles about any information available, and you have to separate yourself from the machines. After you write your material, be sure to share it on Reddit, post it on Facebook and Tumblr and Twitter, and be proud of your work. This is the best time in history to be a writer—you have the audience immediately available to help you out.

On Fandoms

A fandom is a group of online users who are fanatic to the point of creating a community that acts as a small kingdom of a shared common interest. The fandom usually creates related media and writing that is an extension of the media. Fandom isn't new to the web and has been around since fiction authors published and changed readers' lives. It's rumored that Johann von Goethe had a huge fandom surrounding his *Sorrows of Young Werther* (1774) and *Faust* (1808) books. If his fans had had access to the Internet, they probably would have created a fandom on Tumblr and written additional fan fiction.

Fan fictions are stories created by the community that follow the "canon" of material made by the original creator. Some of the biggest fandoms not only create fan fiction, but go a step farther, creating alternative expository sequences that border (if not cross into) erotica. Fan-fiction writers become so passionate about some of the characters that they may "ship" the characters, creating an "OTP" story that is completely fan made. To "ship" means to create a relationship between two existing characters who were not intentionally

paired in the original concept and make them a “One True Pairing,” or OTP. For example, the Sherlock fandom may create an OTP out of Sherlock and Watson and write shipping stories about that new subculture plotline. If the fandom collectively agrees the story is good enough and plausible in relation to the original plotline, it may get accepted as fandom canon.

If you like something, there is most likely a fandom already out there for you to join. You should write for it, because you only have something to gain in new friends and writing skills.

PHOTOS

The aim in creating and sharing photos in communities is for you to try, not to duplicate classical work, but to be an innovator. It is up to the user to incorporate their own style when taking photos and become an artist through using photos as creative expression. Taking photos has never been easier in today’s digital environment, owing to mobile technologies providing users with the ability to take photos instantaneously. Photography online is a work of art to be looked at, as well as a communication tool. Since the inclusion of hashtags on images, your photography communicates to various users in a way that printed photographs originally could not. You know the adage that a photo is worth a thousand words: Well, in the age of new and digital media, a thousand people may take the same photo.

Whether you post on Flickr, DeviantArt, Instagram, Imgur, or Twitter, you should promote your style. Join photography communities and be sure to hashtag your images on Twitter with #photog or #photo to have other photographers take a look at your work and start a discussion.³¹ Whatever photography platform you choose, pay close attention to the comments that people leave, because they will help you develop and appreciate your style. No one likes looking at the same photo over and over; people like to see new and interesting photography.

Our world is a beautiful place, and images of it you capture with your DSLR or your camera phone should be shared with the online audience. Follow Brandon Stanton’s “Humans of New York” to see a great example of photography and community engagement using Facebook as a photography platform.³² Brandon has photographed over 6,000 people and takes quotes from each subject and adds them as captions on the photos to inspire viewers, from New Yorkers to the rest of the world, with the experience of the New York lifestyle. Some professional photographers and photojournalists have taken to Instagram to show and share their work as well. NowThisNews occasionally features photojournalists’ work on their Instagram feed. Photojournalist Ashley Gilbertson captured images of returning troops struggling

with PTSD, and his work was featured on NowThisNews in order to show the horrors of war and display Gilbertson's work.³³

There are too many apps to name them all, and you should find the photography app that works best for you and your phone. It should allow cropping, color saturation changes, and the ability to post to social media from the app. You should be photographing and sharing as much as possible—not just to make your friends jealous of what you are doing and where you are going, but to help users experience parts of the world and points of view at their fingertips.

Photo Quality and Sharing

When deciding on a photo community to join, consider how well that community preserves your photos online. The web is not kind to photo quality, because it only works with certain file formats. Some sites, such as Flickr, allow you to upload full-resolution photos that can be downloaded in various sizes. This can be helpful if you are storing your portfolio online and you want your client to see the photos properly. You also want to look for an embedding feature, so that users can embed your photo on their site while keeping the important photography data of the original. Web-based photo communities such as Imgur allow embedding and sharing for the sake of driving users back to the community to continue the conversation.

VIDEO

Video communities are ones to be experimented with by all users. To participate with video is to both produce video content in a variety of creative ways and share it on video-based platforms, along with personal environments that can utilize media content. There are many ways to produce video content that will help you be creative and entice you to participate. The video content you produce can either be long form or short form, depending on the community you join. For example, a user can post a 10-minute vlog on YouTube or a 15-second clip on Instagram. Opportunities are available to produce video anywhere.

Chapters 5 and 6 will cover in depth the use of video on digital media through the use of viral videos and web television. Those chapters will discuss how you can use video to your advantage to market an idea, while generating revenue and building an online audience. Before you reach that point, understand that you are a producer and, when you create video, let the type of content you want to create influence you. This means experimenting with different genres, styles, and editing. YouTube allows you to create a vlog

with your mobile device or your web camera. With technology available and all platforms offering video tools, experiment creating a web series, a trailer, or fan fiction. Using a smartphone or tablet, you are able to capture those important moments each step of the way, such as vacations, graduations, birthdays, that you would want to remember for a lifetime and show to future generations. If you want to go more professional, you can use a GoPro camera or DSLR and you can experiment creating that short film you have always dreamed about.

Video communities, such as Vimeo, engage and inspire users to want to create web series or short films, particularly when indie filmmakers are using the site. By finding videos, you become part of a community to watch that video grow from a grassroots perspective.

As with writing, there is an audience for every type of video production. If you like playing video games, record yourself, make a "Let's Play" video, and post it on YouTube. Have an idea for an experimental film about dandelions blowing in the wind, record it, add music, and post it on Vimeo. If you want to dance in class to your friend playing "Chopsticks" on the piano, record a 6-second Vine. You can be a writer and share script ideas with your fans on Twitter or Tumblr. You can also be an editor: After filming your vlog, you can edit it through YouTube by adding filters, cuts, and effects. Digital media users have to experiment, and, if you create, you have the opportunity to build a gathering around your videos while finding a passion that you never knew existed before. There are now communities for you to create vlogs and talk to an audience, create your own web series, or share a moment with the world; those communities exist that thrive on viewing multimedia content.

SOUND

GarageBand and Audacity have allowed access to digital audio workstations, originally confined to audio facilities, on anyone's computer. Any creative individual with a nice microphone can create a mix album, a cinema score, or a podcast. If you are interested in what your friends are listening to, you can join Spotify and see their playlists. Besides being able to stream your favorite bands and artists, you are able to share what you are listening to at that very moment with your community on your social media platforms. You do not want to listen to your music alone, and digital music allows you to share your musical tastes with the world in order for others to discover these artists. Spotify also allows you to follow each other's music playlists, as well as to listen to the same music as each other. You are able to experience music more than ever before, even through video-sharing sites such as YouTube, as fans of artists have used the platform to post videos and tracks of their favorite

artists. Apple streams music, and YouTube even created a streaming music service so users can access music through portable devices on the go.³⁴

If you are a music creator, digital media give you a place to create and share your work globally on platforms such as SoundCloud, which is geared toward professional artists or anyone to create mixes for others to hear. There is now a community built around sound and audio in a way that makes it shareable, downloadable, and high quality. If you have ever wondered what a community thought of your sound, you are now able to post your track on SoundCloud and see what the community is saying about it through embedded messages on the SoundCloud player. Be more than a listener to music online: Be a creator.

THE CREATORS

The term user-generated content (UGC) has been around for many years, used to describe those who create a video, picture, or any form of media to post on the web. UGC can be anything that you make. It can be a meme, a GIF, or a podcast. Everything you create on social media, such as a tweet, an animation on Vine, or a picture on Instagram, is UGC. Although it was new to the generation of those who consumed media, we are now in one where we are constantly making our own content to supplement the consumption. Therefore, no longer are you just labeled as those who make UGC, but you are *creators*. You are creating material all over the web for distribution and personal use. Creating is commonplace and part of who you are as a person. After reading our book, we hope those who do not create take the next step and join those who create each day.

The Makers

The makers are people who are creators in the physical space, using new and digital media tools. As we move to a creators' world, the "Maker Movement" is occurring, where people are using computer programming to make open-source materials to help advance the way the web works and how we participate. Makers use digital media to print material on 3D printers, program little computers such as the Raspberry Pi, and program new virtual reality systems such as the Oculus Rift.

There is a gathering called the Maker Faire where makers and creators come from all over the world to celebrate new and digital media advancements and hands-on creativity. The slogan for the Maker Faire is "The greatest show and tell on Earth."³⁵ If there is one by you, try your best to attend!

GEEKS AND NERDS

This entire book would have been considered really geeky or nerdy years ago, and now the techniques learned on new and digital media are profitable and entertaining to a vast majority of people. The image of geeks and nerds is changing. When you look back at American culture, the classic use and image of the term nerd or geek is someone who wears high pants, glasses, and suspenders and has no sense of style. Think Steve Urkel in the 1990s television show *Family Matters* and every portrayal of the term in movies during that time period as well. Not only did nerds have a "style" they were labeled as having, even your personality could be associated with that term as well.

A nerd or geek was characterized as someone who played video games all day, read comic books, loved science, and was good with computers and technology. Today, those same traits are no longer looked down upon. The geeks and the nerds from yesterday are now the superstars of today. Learning code today is a superpower that anyone from Mark Zuckerberg to Chris Bosh appreciates.³⁶ Whereas, during the 1980s and 1990s, you might have been labeled a geek or a nerd for having a passion for any one of those hobbies, today, you are part of what is now trendy in American pop culture. As explained by the comic Chuck & Beans, nerds are academically inclined, whereas geeks are really passionate about their hobbies.³⁷

The top movies of today are all superhero films from classic comic books, graphic novels are being turned into television shows, and technology is at the forefront. Those who understand how to code, create a social network, or design an app are now seen as the ones in vogue with society and successful. The subjects that were designated as "uncool" are now popular. Look at the success of Comic Con, held in San Diego and New York each year. Thousands of fans travel around the world to attend this weeklong convention, just to get a glimpse of meeting comic book artists and see the latest trailer for the next superhero movie, or sneak a peak at the new season in television. We want you to be a passionate geek or nerd and, more importantly, we want you to participate in communities that help you create.

KHAN ACADEMY

Khan Academy is an example of the consumer becoming a "prosumer." This means that a user, creating short-form video content and posting it on the web, intends to interact with the audience and community, but in turn creates a successful venture and turns their product into profit. Clay Shirky calls these users "the people formally known as the audience."³⁸ What he means is the audience is now producing and has the ability, with short-form creativity,

to produce income as well. Salman Khan, who created Khan Academy in 2006, is one such example, as he provides educational resources to anyone on the web.

As the website boasts, it's free for anyone, providing lessons via video tutorials on math, science, history, computer science, and many other subjects. In 2006, Salman was using YouTube to post math tutorial videos for his cousin and other family members, to provide extra help for them learning the subject. He used YouTube as his teaching platform because Salman was working at a hedge fund in Boston, and his family members were in New Orleans. The videos became an instant hit with, not only his family, but also the community on YouTube wanting to learn the subject. Through engaging tutorial videos, Salman was able to provide what students would learn in the classroom to adults who desired to learn a subject or those who have never had the opportunity to learn.

Students can now use the video tutorials as a guide, playing, pausing, and stopping those videos at their own pace of learning. The videos were receiving millions of views and so many positive comments that the Khan Academy quickly became a community on YouTube for those thirsting to learn. The success of what turned out to be a social venture is that the content never gets old, as users flock to digital media for productivity, research, and the enhancing of skills, just as much as entertainment, and it shows how a community can come together to help one another online. In his TED Talk from 2011, Salman theorizes how he has "humanized the classroom," because teachers are interacting with the students.³⁹ Teachers are using his video in their lessons in flipped-classroom-style pedagogy, because his video acts as the lesson, while the teacher is going around the room to help all of the students and work on the problems with them.

After quitting his job, Salman turned the Khan Academy into a non-profit organization. It is funded on donations, but it receives backing from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and Google among many others, who continue to build its educational resources. The Khan Academy website includes, not only video tutorials, but also modules, assignments, and exercises for each subject area. The Khan Academy started as a community to change education and now it has proved successful, with self-paced learning and teachers using the program to see data on what videos their students are watching and what problems they are struggling with, among other analytics. With millions of subscribers and views and having changed the educational landscape, it comes back to community, as its short-form videos have captured millions around the world. Khan successfully created videos with ease, using technological tools that are available to anyone around the world, and he posted them to a platform where millions gather, not realizing that users are comfortable with the one-on-one interaction, not just with him, but also with the device they

are using. Khan has built a successful venture, with 10 million students a month visiting the website, which has 60 employees and interns, and it all started with videos being posted to the community on YouTube.

SHORT-FORM CREATIVITY

The majority of savvy web users are now accessing creative spaces using smaller machines such as phones and tablets, rather than desktop computers. The main way that people produce content on these small devices is through apps such as Vine, Instagram, and Snapchat. Users of the short-form apps follow specific users relevant to their creative interests. Why do users enjoy this form of content? Not only is this short-form creativity, it is also short-form storytelling. Each Instagram photo or video or 6-second Vine is telling your visual story on your specific profile page. These are "lightweight" apps that instantly take a picture from your phone and post it, and, before you know it, content is up on your profile page, where the audience can be brought into your life. Instead of long-form narratives, a simple picture tells a story of a day in your life. It is a footprint of your personality and a collection of your life story.

Your story is assembled in visuals rather than text, enabling the audience to see your creativity. It is a challenge to tell a story using a simple picture or 6-second Vine. More so than anything else, short-form storytelling encourages creativity, and that is what attracts an online audience and builds community on these platforms. Users of short-form media truly have to think about what to produce before they hit the button. When a picture or video is posted on Instagram, you have the opportunity to be creative in how you take a picture and whether you use a filter. Short-form storytelling has established itself as a new narrative style for digital media.

INSTAGRAM

Mobile video, or video captured by digital appliances such as the iPhone or Android smartphones, has flooded video-sharing sites such as YouTube. Everyone has equal opportunity to share and create stories, and, once the outlets were established, users occupied the outlets even before corporations saw their positive uses. Before Instagram and Vine, if a user captured a video on their smartphone and wanted the world to see the product, the audience had to go to the distribution outlet, whether that was YouTube, Facebook, or Vimeo. The creator was an operator of several applications, made distant by digital mode application, and they severed the creator from a seamless integration with sharing.

In 2010, Kevin Systrom and Mike Krieger created the mobile photography platform Instagram. The Instagram application platform uses the aesthetic constraint of square photo capture. The user and content creator can no longer choose the way the camera is held: The application forces the user to hold vertical positioning in order to capture an image that is formatted properly. Additionally, Instagram allows users to capture images and share them in the same application where the capture takes place and, therefore, it is a one-stop shop for all users. The application allows the user to capture a constrained square image, apply a digital filter effect to the image to "enhance" the visual, and share it immediately. The digital filter allows everyone to be a professional photographer. You have the power to apply a plethora of enhancements, enabling the user to play editor to their photo and apply an artistic look to what would be a "normal" image. It brings the traditional Polaroid or Kodak camera into a digital form. When photos from those cameras were printed, photographers had to go into a darkroom and apply filters and edits. Instagram brings those aesthetics to people who want to create. The image appears in the timeline almost immediately after it has been captured, without leaving the creative space.

The users of Instagram are able to research photos and users (hoping to add them to their community) through hashtags, a technology implemented in 2011. Users can be creative with the pictures they are taking and with the text accompanying each picture attached. Many users have come up with creative hashtags to place on photographs for users to search in order to come across their pictures, but this has also sparked trends on Instagram too. Instead of a generic text below a photo, the use of hashtags on Instagram is creative and inspires additional creativity,. One of the big Instagram hashtag trends is "Throwback Thursday", or #tbt, which is used each week for users to post a



Figure 2.3
#foodporn.

picture from their past, such as from when they were a child, on recent vacation, or a personal past event. Other trends include users taking pictures of their breakfast, lunch, or dinner at home or at a restaurant and calling it #foodporn; Man Crush Monday, or #mcm; and Women Crush Wednesday, or #wcw. The most popular trend, the selfie, or #selfie, is used when you flip your camera around and take a self-portrait of yourself. There is style and expression in the way you take a selfie, such as how you hold the camera to create the image you wish to have of yourself. It's expressive for the user, giving an entryway into their emotions, personality and how they are feeling at that moment. The selfie trend has transformed itself into an art form and has spread into pop culture. It has become a popular trend because users have the ability to control how they present themselves on screen to their audience. It has became a shareable trend that celebrities, looking to connect to their audience, regularly use for their visual stories.

Instagram's Upgrade

On April 12, 2012, Facebook acquired Instagram for \$1 billion in cash and stocks. There was immediate backlash from users concerned for their privacy when Facebook updated its terms of service after the acquisition. The new terms of service stated that it could sell your photos to third parties without telling you or compensating you for the photos used. Immediately, users were upset by this invasion of their privacy. Facebook had purchased an application that was used for creativity and art, and users were bothered and wanted their community to be left alone. After many users flocked to new photo-sharing applications that week, and negative feedback, Instagram had new terms of service created. Facebook is still generating income in the service, as sponsored posts were created in late 2013 as a way for advertisers to create specific photo and video posts in users' feeds.

VINE

The mobile aesthetic constraints were limited to photography until 2013, when Twitter announced the mobile video service Vine. Like Instagram, the videos had an aesthetic constraint of square capture, but, more importantly, Vine contained a temporal constraint that videos be 6 seconds or less. Twitter explained that the video was similar to tweets, and the brevity of the video would inspire creativity.⁴⁰ After the success of Vine, Instagram introduced short-form video capture, increasing the time to 15 seconds and adding filters to videos. The originality of Vine lay in the previously unconsidered concept of video capture: merging the micro blog and video. The message was to be short, and the shape was predecided.

Vine started quietly, used by a very small base of users who appreciated the speed with which video could be captured and shared. Like Instagram, the user can capture and share within the same environment. Originally, the user could not upload captured video material from their digital phone camera's library. The material had to be captured within the application itself. (Now the app allows for video to be uploaded from the camera's media library.)

Vine is a unique creation tool. In order to capture video, the user must hold their finger on the viewfinder, the screen of the phone. The electrical sensitivity of the smartphone user interaction is the standard operating procedure of the creation process. Once the finger is released from the screen, the recording stops. This means that Vine video can only be captured with phone in hand and operated with the application open. The application allows linear, in-camera editing, and the user can create 6-second linear narratives that allow for up to 100 edits (depending on how quickly the user can tap the screen). Vine has inadvertently reinvented a stop motion camera with a similar workflow to that of a Bolex film camera, where the user had to manually trigger the shot and was limited to the amount of "film" available in the camera—in this case, as much content as can fit into 6 seconds.

Before Vine, mobile video acquisition was a form without standards. The user's responsibility to capture utilizing a mobile device was completed when the user finished the entire video. The challenge for users on Vine is creating a 6-second storytelling with beginning, middle, and end, and thus using traditional film techniques on the platform will only engage the audience to your feed of Vines. With traditional techniques, after editing a wide shot of you opening the door, on action, the next shot would possibly be a close-up of a hand opening the door handle, and then back to a medium shot of you walking through. All edits were matched to actions. In Vine, temporal continuity still takes places, as time moves rather quickly in each video, so that the end of a story is quickly reached. You will see temporal continuity thoroughly achieved in stop motion videos, for example. In order for a three-act structure, with beginning, middle, and end, to happen on Vine, the point of the story has to be got across to the viewer immediately, with each section being its own specific camera angle or next point of the story.

Although Instagram Video has incorporated 15-second video, Vine tends to be the platform for artistic and creative stories. Instead of traditional videos, with someone holding up the camera and recording, you will find many forms of stories told with animation, Claymation, or Vine movies, owing to the stop motion effects built into the application making live editing interactive for all users. What Vine is doing for its users is teaching them how to edit video and tell a narrative story. It has allowed users to create stories in many short forms, and companies such as the Tribeca Film Festival have asked users to participate in its #6SEC FILMS competition, where users can enter to post Vines in

either the #Animation, #Drama, #Genre, or #Comedy categories. Many other companies and celebrities have since incorporated Vine into their marketing as a way to attract users' attention to short stories.

SNAPCHAT

Evan Spiegel, Bobby Murphy, and Reggie Brown created Snapchat in 2011 as a way to share photos and videos with a smaller online community. The difference is that the pictures or video you take within the application do not store any information on your phone or use up any memory according to amount of pictures or video you take daily. When a user takes a "snap," they take a photo or video in the Snapchat application, and then add filters and text captions or draw messages over the content. Each time you share a Snap with one of your contacts in the online community, the receiver only has up to 10 seconds to view it once it is opened. After the 10 seconds are over, the Snap is deleted.

Privacy and Snapchat

There have been some issues in the past with privacy and whether the photos are actually deleted. Many have questioned whether the photos are saved on Snapchat's servers. Also, many have taken screen shots on their phones when photos have come in. Although Snapchat will send users a notification, there have been ways around such alerts being sent. Snapchat made a deal with the Federal Trade Commission in 2014 because it was caught lying to its users. Although it bills itself as private, those who are not media literate or familiar with Internet technology might not realize that screen shots could be taken or that IP addresses were saved with the information. Also, Snapchat was collecting its users' information through its Find Friends feature, saving your personal and location information. The application is going to be monitored for the next 20 years.

Snapchat Creativity

You work with your phone's camera, and the screen becomes the viewfinder while your hand is on the record button. It is a constant interaction between the user and the screen. Within the application, you are able to focus just by tapping on the screen, which is acting as your lens and the f-stop of the camera. It offers creativity to online users, and fans of short-form storytelling navigate to this program because they see advantages in what they see as being private and helping tell stories that quickly fade away, without anyone else

ever looking. When you tap on the screen and select the pencil, your finger becomes the paintbrush, and your cellphone screen becomes the canvas where you create a caption. You can always erase or change your design with a fresh coat of paint or new canvas. Private messages, funny notes, and symbols all add creativity to the content. Because users have control of how long someone can view the snap, they are made sure to feel that they are in control of the content, not the application. If it's no longer on your profile, newsfeed, or explore icon, then it must have never existed, or only happened in that particular moment. The fascinating thing about Snapchat is that users are engaged for only a few seconds and, in that short moment, are entertained enough to continue to interact with the device. Even when looking at a picture, the user, seeing that countdown number on the bottom of the screen, is forced to not multitask with their media, which is what occurs in modern times: The user is forced to focus on the picture or video, as the pressure to be engaged is on the recipient, not wanting to miss the interaction with their community after the content has been viewed. When the content is deleted, there is a sense of closure for the user.

Whereas Vine and Instagram posts are always on your profile, Snapchat gives users a comfort level that no one will ever see it again if you do not want them to, and your creativity has no limits to what it can do, opening up all forms of storytelling. There is a close-knit community on Snapchat, because users are in control over who sees their content.

Snapchat encourages users to create photo or video stories giving an insight into their last 24 hours, as that is how long the story will stay on their feed for. After the 24 hours, it is deleted, and they can post a new story to their feed. This has given users the creativity to tell a story as a "day in the life of me" aspect of its community. You have one image or one video to share with your followers that will convey your personality, wit, and emotions in that time frame. This has offered users many innovative ideas for expressing themselves, as, normally, someone tells their story in a book, a paper, or conversation. To have one image tell your story, it has to be original, clever, and representative of how you want to be viewed by the online audience. By incorporating conversations and live video into Snapchat and even deleting conversations once they are completed, unless saved, Snapchat is hoping to offer instantaneous access and be intimate and exclusive to you and your online community.

NOTES

1 Pew Internet (2012). "Networked Individualism: What in the world is that?" Retrieved from <http://networked.pewinternet.org/2012/05/24/networked-individualism-what-in-the-world-is-that-2/> (accessed April 29, 2015).