1. **The evolution from websites to digital platforms was not inevitable: nominate what you believe are the 2 or 3 key developments in the rise of global-scale platforms.**

The rise of digital platforms came about because of the World-Wide Web (W3), disruptive innovation, and people wanting to make their lives simpler. Although the internet existed well before the W3, the W3 combined everything users wanted and made it easier for users to access information. The W3 made hypertext and text retrieval a global system, which allowed users to access data from anywhere and not restricted to local servers like the WAIS model. Essentially, the W3 indexes from the previously existing information systems, which, unlike those systems, could only search within themselves. For example, you couldn’t follow links with WAIS, and Gopher only allowed you to search for things in a hierarchical menu (Berners-Lee et al., p. 56). Additionally, the W3 introduced hypertext, URL addresses, and the HTML language. This invention allowed websites like Google, Facebook, and YouTube to be made and into what we know today. Without URLs, HTML, and HTTP, these platforms likely wouldn’t exist.

The rise of the dot-com bubble in 2001 meant many people were creating websites and trying to be relevant on the web. With website growths on the rise, the W3 kept expanding its database and transitioned from “Web 1.0” to “Web 2.0”, the internet we know today. Tim O’Reilly, author of “What is Web 2.0…” describes Web 2.0 as a full realization of the true potential of the web platform. O’Reilly gave examples of terms related to both Web 1.0 and 2.0. Examples include the transition from Britannica Online to Wikipedia, page views to cost per click, Netscape to Google, and content management systems to wikis. Websites were no longer static pages without interactive buttons, and websites were also built on the web rather than on a desktop or a local server. Many websites survived the dot-com bubble and became popular digital platforms such as Amazon, eBay, Priceline, and Shutterfly. These websites became popular because people saw how they could make their lives simpler, and they were easy to access. Having the ability to click into different websites and links on one platform made it easier to find whatever someone is looking for. In addition, the W3 made it easier for people to communicate and share information.

Another thing that helped the transition to digital platforms is disruptive innovation. “Disruptive innovation is an innovation that helps create a new market and value network” and is a term used “to describe innovations that improve a product or service in ways that the market does not expect.” (Christensen). All digital platforms were once a website like Facebook. Before Facebook was launched, MySpace was one of the most popular websites. Unlike MySpace, Facebook was able to control its growth and more secure. The MySpace owners wanted to focus on ad revenue while Facebook focused on its users. Facebook kept changing and improving its features throughout the years to make it easier to interact with friends. MySpace, on the other hand, didn’t change much and maintained relatively the same. Facebook created a disruptive technology that made them a much better platform overall than MySpace and continued to grow as one of the largest companies in the world. Digital platforms rely on the userbase, and without users, a platform would only remain a website.

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1. **Moderation defines platforms: analyze 3 major implications of this assertion.**

Platforms like Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, and Twitter moderate the posts and comments their users make. The phrase “moderation defines a platform” means that the content a platform allows users to create/upload defines the values and beliefs of the platform. Platforms have rules that users must abide by, and they get to choose what posts stay or get removed. Despite platforms abiding by government regulation, content moderation questions how much freedom of speech one actually has. It’s also unknown how much content a platform removes and the difficulty of content moderation. The United States first amendment says that people have the freedom of speech, but when it comes to posting stuff on social media, some posts get removed for breaking the rules. For example, according to Tarleton Gillespie, Twitter was criticized for years for allowing hate speech and harassment.

For a while, the moderators and admins didn’t do anything to protect the victims, but soon after, general counsel Vitaya Gadde announced changes to their policies (Gillespie, pgs. 24-25). Platforms at this time were also expected to stay neutral, to allow all voices to be heard. However, platforms must take action against the user performing the crime when problems like hate speech arise. This, however, creates an argument of freedom of speech on a platform, and if a user believes they didn’t do anything wrong, they will try to fight it and demand what they believe is the right thing. For example, a Reddit moderator, Sarah Gilbert, wrote about her experience as a moderator on a community she moderates. She states that many people didn’t understand what happened to comments the subreddit moderator team removed, and people expressed dissatisfaction (Gilbert, p. 15). It is hard to find the boundary between protecting users and removing the content that breaks the rules (even if many people like that content). However, if people were provided the reason something was removed, they were more likely to accept it, and there would be less conflict (Gilbert, p. 21).

Although many people know platforms have moderators that review posts, it is unclear how many posts are removed. Most platforms have an automated system that checks posts, but the posts that are allowed and then reported must be manually reviewed. Platforms likely keep the number of posts removed to themselves because it could significantly impact their users and their relationships. For example, how YouTube moderates its platform. YouTube has a video recommendation system known as “Up Next” that promotes videos for people to watch. Mark Sargent, a YouTuber, is intrigued by conspiracy theories and uploaded videos on the flat Earth theory. For a while, YouTube recommended these videos, and Sargent’s videos became popular with millions of views. Then, one day, YouTube stopped recommending these videos (along with other people and their conspiracy theories) to combat disinformation (Thompson). YouTube never announced that they would stop showing viewers the videos, but because it didn’t break policies, it was considered borderline content and was allowed to stay up. YouTube does, however, delete videos that violate their rules, such as “inappropriate content,” but as mentioned earlier, the number of posts deleted is unknown.

The final implication of content moderation is the difficulty of content moderation and its psychological toll on employees. As mentioned earlier, it is difficult to distinguish between the posts people want to make and what is considered “borderline” for a platform's policy. Most platforms have an automated system to review posts, but some posts need further review, or people report posts to have moderators look at them. Content moderators are paid a low wage and have to look at content that someone found disturbing or offensive. Most people who work these jobs last for a few years or “burn out” and leave (Chotiner). Sarah T. Roberts, a professor of information studies at U.C.L.A., recalls an instance of a content moderator who repeatedly said they were fine and could handle it. However, when the content moderator was having an intimate moment with his girlfriend, he stopped and shoved her away because of an image he’d seen at work that day. Although people may not like their posts getting reported/removed, the people reviewing the posts also have to review why a post was reported and could suffer psychologically from a traumatic post.

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1. **People use more than one platform: explain why these patterns of behavior matter.**

It’s important to use multiple platforms because it benefits the user and advertisers. In addition, users care about their privacy on platforms, specifically social network sites (SNS). SNSs like Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, and Twitter all have different goals and offer various services. Snapchat is a networking platform people use to share photos and short videos with each other. Instagram is a platform to share photos and videos with friends to inform them what your life is like. Facebook is used to connect with friends and family and to follow anyone that interests a user. Despite these platforms offering services, it’s important to use more than one platform for security reasons.

One platform that repeatedly has data breaches and shares data with advertisers is Facebook. According to Jezer-Morton, Cambridge Analytica obtained the Facebook data of 50 million accounts in early 2018. This wasn’t the first time Facebook had a data breach, and recently, it was revealed that over 530 million accounts were leaked, including the CEO of Facebook. This leak was found in 2019 and supposedly fixed the same year, but Facebook didn’t notify its users. By using different platforms, users can leave a platform they believe is a security threat without needing to migrate anything over and still be connected with friends and family. When someone feels that a platform doesn’t align with what they need or believe in, they’ll likely leave that platform. For example, say someone wanted to quit Facebook for collecting tons of data on users, but also use Snapchat. They could leave Facebook without changing their network behavior and still have access to friends and family on Snapchat.

It is also important for advertisers to use multiple platforms because they can establish a presence on SNSs. For example, according to Boyd and Ellison, bands were welcomed on MySpace and established a relationship between MySpace and fans. Bands wanted to contact fans, and fans wanted attention from their favorite bands (Boyd and Ellison, p. 217). This is one of the early promotions between an organization and users. Nowadays, many corporations use SNSs to interact with consumers to retain customers or to get new customers. “Advertisers are empowered through data to better understand and engage with their audiences.” (Gillespie, p. 335). Advertisers that use multiple platforms can see which platform most of their consumers use and try to retain those customers and attract new ones. Additionally, customers can provide insightful feedback to improve the business.

Disruptive technology can also influence the use of more than one platform and is a good thing. Improving on current technology influences existing companies to improve their products/services. Additionally, disruptive technology means consumers can compare which company does better and can provide feedback to either company. This change means more competition and lower prices in a market. An example of a disruptive platform is Waze. Waze is a navigation platform and allows users to mark things on the road such as police, stopped cars, traffic, and weather hazards. Waze started a community in the navigation/travel world and allowed users to communicate. Waze users who used other navigation platforms like Google Maps or Apple Maps may use whichever platform provides a better experience. Having options to use different platforms allow people to stay connected no matter what platform they use and benefits corporations who can gain insight into their consumer behaviors.

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1. **Platforms are largely defined by demand-side economies of scale: describe how these successful companies are managed differently from supply-side economies of scale**

Like Google, Apple, Amazon, and Facebook, many platforms that exist today are demand-side economies. These platforms invested in their own companies by “mass communication and brand building” (Alstyne and Parker, p. 26). These companies stimulated demand because people saw what the company was offering, which sparked interest, causing demand. Now that companies have more demand and a large user base, they listen to the feedback given from their consumers and give them what they want. For example, Facebook is a well-known and highly used social media site. A study done to see the use of Facebook in Kenya by Susan Wyche et al. showed that people in Kenya preferred to use social media but couldn’t afford to use it daily. It is cheaper to talk to someone for 30 minutes on Facebook than on the phone, but not many people can afford to buy a phone and have access to the internet (Wyche et al., p. 39). By making Facebook available worldwide, it brings in demand and people wanting to join the platform.

Demand-side economies also create value between users and businesses. When a platform does well, larger companies seek to buy the platform and expand it into their existing userbase. For example, Facebook bought WhatsApp, and as WhatsApp was becoming popular, SMS users felt left out and felt obligated to use alternative messaging apps like WhatsApp (McAfee and Brynjolfsson, p. 123). Businesses and users expand the platforms they used based on what other consumers are using. Another example is Uber bumping up prices to encourage more drivers to participate when car supply couldn’t keep up with demand. Uber had to incentivize drivers to participate and keep up with the demand when there weren’t enough cars. Supply-side economies of scale companies rely on the creation of goods and services to set the economic growth. For example, industrial companies like Carnegie Steel and Standard Oil compete for lower prices. These companies have access to large amounts of steel and oil (large supply), which means they are more competitive (especially if you have a monopoly). Since they have a large supply of materials, they create the market and can sell for as little as they want. The industrial revolution focused on the supply-side economies of scale while platforms focus on the demand-side (Alstyne and Parker).

Platforms like Facebook and Amazon create a user database that can be used to leverage their platform and build new products and services. When a platform realizes there is a demand for something among their userbase, they can acquire information to see how to implement the demand onto their platform. Supply-side economy companies depend on people that really need something or are wealthy. As McAfee shows, the higher the price of a product or service, the more suppliers will appear (McAfee and Brynjolfsson, p. 136). The demand-side economies of scale platforms thrive more than the supply-side because users can access the various services platforms offer at a low price. For example, Netflix adds films based on demand, and its users can access those films at a low cost per month. As a result, demand-side economies are more agile and willing to expand compared to supply-side economies.

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