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UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY
Department of Communication, Media and Film

Acknowledgments

Research and Analytical Articles

Creative Articles

Acknowledgements

We want first to acknowledge that the University of Calgary and all those who teach, learn, and work within it, including the authors and editors of this journal, occupy Treaty 7 territory. In the spirit of respect, reciprocity, and truth, we honour and acknowledge Moh'kinsstis, and the traditional Treaty 7 territory and oral practices of the Blackfoot confederacy: Siksika, Kainai, Piikani, as well as the Îyâxe Nakoda and Tsuut'ina nations. We acknowledge that this territory is home to the Métis Nation of Alberta, Region 3 within the historical Northwest Métis homeland. Finally, we acknowledge all Nations – Indigenous and non – who live, work, and play on this land, and who honour and celebrate this territory. This sacred gathering place provides us with an opportunity to engage in reconciliation, a duty we all have as occupants of this land.

The Motley team is proud to present the second issue of the Motley Undergraduate Journal! This second issue provided more opportunity for the University of Calgary's talented students to showcase their academic work, as well as signifies the Motley's expansion into publishing work from other universities within Canada. The sustained success and quality of this journal are possible thanks to the collective efforts of a number of key people. Dr. Maria Bakardjieva, Professor and Chair of Communication and Media Studies at the University of Calgary, as well as the Editor in Chief of the Motley, continued to provide guidance and incredible support for the journal throughout the production of this second issue. The Department of Communication, Media, and Film at the University of Calgary continued to give the project decisive support.

The entire faculty of the Department of Communication, Media and Film backed the initiative and donated their time, valuable perspectives, and expert feedback on submitted manuscripts. A special 'thank you' to those who nominated and reviewed submissions: Maria Victoria Guglietti, Mark Machacek, Ronald Glasberg, Samantha Thrift, Dr. Brad Clark of Mount Royal University, and graduate students Xenia Reloba de la Cruz, Bray Jamieson, Emilie

Charette, Brennan Chaudhry, Amanda Zanco and Claire O'Brien. Dr. Maria Victoria Guglietti played a central role in providing mentorship to the editorial team and spurring students into action with submission nominations.

Students and faculty, who volunteered their time and acted as reviewers and peer editors, have been integral to the realization of this issue. Our team has grown significantly since the first issue, and the Motley is lucky to have such a dedicated and talented team of undergraduate students to operate it. I want to give special recognition to Junior Managing Editor, Skye Baxter. Her fresh ideas, assistance, and passion were invaluable throughout the production process, and I am beyond ecstatic to see where she leads the Motley this year as she takes over my role as Managing Editor.

A special thanks is also owed to the phenomenal student authors who contributed their work to the journal. This issue's articles continue the tradition of excellence that our initial student authors began. Your ideas and creativity are a testament to the excellence of the teaching and learning that takes place in undergraduate programs at the University of Calgary and beyond, and they will continue to inspire others.

The Motley is freely and publicly accessible thanks to the Public Knowledge Project's, Open Journal Systems (OJS) platform operating out of Simon Fraser University. OJS allows academic journals to freely utilize their publication software and training resources, with a mission of making academic knowledge accessible to all citizens. The entire OJS library team at the University of Calgary offered the journal team invaluable assistance with building the site, resolving bugs, and providing continuous guidance.

The Motley builds upon the example and inspiration gleaned from other student groups and prior student journals. As the first Managing Editor of The Motley and a former Red Deer Polytechnic student, I wish to acknowledge that my love for the publication process was sparked and my skills were first learned through the invaluable instruction I received from two key members of the Editorial Board of Red Deer Polytechnic's Agora Journal, Dr. Jacqueline Cowan and Dr. Heather Marcovitch. I was also fortunate enough to attend and learn from the National

Student Journal Forum (2023), which was an invaluable experience for fine-tuning the journal for this second issue.

Lastly, on behalf of the Motley team, I thank you, the readers of this journal, for giving us your time and attention in a world where everyone and everything are fighting for it. We hope you are inspired, educated, and invigorated by the work you find on these pages, and that you will join us again for the next issue! Although my time as Managing Editor is coming to an end, I will always feel an incredible sense of pride and joy in this journal and the efforts of students and faculty alike to bring this project to fruition. I know I am leaving the journal in capable hands, and I look forward to witnessing the growth, and continued success of this journal as the Motley moves forward.

- Melissa Morris, Managing Editor

Letter From the Editor, Maria Bakardjieva, PhD.

The second issue of the Motley Undergraduate Journal has burst out of the gates thanks to the collective efforts of a committed crew of authors, student and faculty reviewers, editors, and talented managers. And what an awesome proof of the effectiveness and worthiness of these efforts it is! Its articles directly reflect the experience of a generation immersed in digital communication, routinely juggling devices and apps, navigating new and old media formats at every step and for all practical purposes of their daily life. Yet, an important transformation has occurred. At the hands of The Motley's contributors, these experiences, devices, and apps have been turned into objects of intense scrutiny, a scrutiny informed by the critical wisdom of philosophers and theorists encountered in university classes. This opportune meeting of youthful perceptiveness and time-honoured theoretical perspectives has allowed the Motley authors to pose and answer some essential questions about the media environment in which most of us swim like fish in water without paying much attention to its properties. Well, this new issue is here to shock us out of our stupor.

All in all, the second issue of The Motley comes to show once again that if you are trying to find on campus the bright analysts, the good writers, the inquisitive young minds willing to reach beyond the minimal requirements and engage with the big issues, one sure way to do it is to start an undergraduate journal. If you start it, they will come. They will bring to the table their fledging competence and confidence as researchers, media critics, and active citizens armed with a scholarly lens, willing to lead their communities to a better understanding of the communication media that shape so many of our social relationships and our vision of the world.

- Maria Bakardjieva, Editor in Chief

The Motley Editorial Team

Maria Bakardjieva PhD. Editor-in-Chief

Dr. Maria Bakardjieva, Professor and Chair in Communication and Media Studies at the University of Calgary. Her research examines the social construction of communication technologies and the use of digital media in various cultural and practical contexts with a focus on user agency, critical reflexivity and emancipation. She has numerous publications in leading journals and influential anthologies. The books she has authored and co-edited include Internet Society: The Internet in Everyday Life (2005), Socialbots and Their Friends: Digital Media and the Automation of Sociality (2017), Digital Media and the Dynamics of Civil Society: Retooling Citizenship in New European Democracies (2021), and How Canadians Communicate (2004 and 2007). Between 2010 and 2013, she served as the editor-in-chief of the Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication. Her current projects investigate the role digital media play in citizen engagement and democratic participation. Dr. Bakardjieva teaches courses in communication theory and research methodology, communication technology and society, digital media and democracy. She works to promote undergraduate research activities in Communication and Media Studies and engages in knowledge mobilization and community outreach intended to advance the public understanding of issues related to Communication and Media Studies.

Melissa Morris, Managing Editor

Melissa Morris is the founding Managing Editor for The Motley. She graduated with a BA (Honours) in Communication and Media Studies in Spring 2023. In addition to her role with The Motley, she is the Director of Student Affairs for the Students in Communications Club. In the first two years of her undergraduate degree, she published two papers in the Agora Undergraduate Journal, and won a Student Writing Award. Her Honours thesis Cottagecore and Colonialism: an Analysis of Visual Discourse in the Cottagecore Aesthetic Subculture delved into political ideology and subcultural identity expression through visual methods such as fashion. Her thesis presentation placed second at the 2023 Arts Undergraduate Research Symposium. Her other areas of academic interest include intersectional feminist research, queer studies, and governmental policy concerning communication and media. Her experience publishing and editing with the Agora Journal spurred her passion for highlighting the ideas of student authors. Melissa has a passion for building community and empowering students to share the depth and variety of their knowledge with others. She plans to pursue a career that brings together her passion for building community, research, and global affairs.

The Motley Editorial Team

Skye Baxter, Junior Managing Editor

Skye (she/her) is currently in her third year of a combined degree, studying Communications, Political Science, and Statistics. Over the summer, she was awarded the PURE Research Grant from the University of Calgary in order to conduct a political critical discourse analysis, which has sparked her love of research and academic writing. With a special interest in political communication, feminist media studies, rhetorical analysis, the politics of representation, and literary studies, Skye takes a great interest in understanding the role that communication plays in social identity and collective discourse. She eventually hopes to pursue a career that combines her passion for writing, research, and community involvement.

Bray Jamieson, Assistant Editor

Bray (he/him) currently serves as the Motley Undergraduate Journal's Assistant Editor. Bray is a recent graduate student of both the Communications (Honours) and Philosophy departments at the University of Calgary. He is currently working towards obtaining a J.D. from the University of Alberta, with the intention of working towards a career in the field of communication law and policy.

Rune Bhattacharya, Peer Reviewer & Peer Editor

Rune (he/him) is a Copy Editor and Reviewer with the Motley. His current career goal is to be a sessional instructor in COMS, as well as to apply for a MA in COMS at the University of Calgary. His special areas of interest are antisemitism and political illiberalism. Rune is an avid book collector and reader and enjoys horror movies. If he could get a permanent position as a research assistant in a counter right-wing extremism organization that would be a dream job!

Brandon Eby, Peer Reviewer

Brandon Eby is a trans nonbinary 4th year undergraduate student in the department of Sociology at the university of Calgary. They have participated in independent research through their work on the paper 'The Role of Antiziganism in Brexit', have participated in research projects as a research assistant, and have participated in campus community building through numerous clubs. Eby has also been involved in campus organizing around food security efforts with Food Justice Now and Students for Direct Action. They are planning on pursuing a master's degree in Sociology after their undergraduate degree. They are interested in Activist informed research, with a special focus on decoloniality, challenging and disrupting existing power structures, the lived experience of Roma in Canada and Ukraine, and Queerness.

Eby aspires to participate in Community informed, activist sociology, and is heavily inspired by decolonial and activist scholars, such as Margareta Matache, Marquis Bey, David Graeber, and Sara Ahmed.

Natasha Bodnarchuk, Peer Reviewer & Peer Editor

Natasha Bodnarchuk (she/her) is a copy editor, reviewer, and author of The Motley Journal second isse. She is in her fourth and final year of her BA (Honours) in Communications and Media Studies. Natasha's piece "I Was There Too..." explores the impractical uses of technology and challenges notions of digital efficiency. Natasha is an avid writer and reader. She is thrilled to be part of the Motley Journal and looks forward to reading other students' work.

The Motley Editorial Team

Nickey Goulden, Peer Reviewer

Nickey is a 4th year undergraduate majoring in Communications and Media. Her focus is hopefully using this degree to break down divisive communications barriers and foster critical media literacy in a wide range of demographics. Or maybe she'll finally figure out how to turn herself into a snail and run away to live in the woods. It won't be a particularly fast escape, but she's pretty sure no one will think to look for her in snail form.

Luke Pye, Peer Editor

Luke Pye (he/him) is a Metis undergraduate who is working towards a Major in Media Communications and a Minor in Museum and Heritage Studies. In this volume of the Motley, he worked as both author, reviewer, and editor and is very excited to see all of the Motley's hard work come to full fruition. Luke hopes to eventually work as a program coordinator or a copyeditor for non-profit organizations to help those in need gain the tools they require to thrive! Luke is also the author of the article, “Dungeons and Dragons and the Critical Failure: A Thematic Analysis of the TTRPG Communities Reception of the Leaked OGL 1.1”, available to read in this issue!

Haley Pelletier, Peer Reviewer & Peer Editor

Haley Pelletier (she/her) recently graduated with a combined Communications and Political Science degree. She is a peer reviewer and editor for the Motley Undergraduate Journal. Through her role with the journal, she hopes to gain formal experience in publishing, editing, and facilitating this unique undergraduate opportunity for the Communications department and its students.

The Motley Editorial Team

Chloe Deschamps, Peer Reviewer

Chloe Deschamps (she/they) is an undergraduate student working towards a degree in English with a minor in Film Studies. Their involvement in Motley was inspired by an interest in editing for other student journals and an interest in work that is unconventional and interdisciplinary. She is hoping to find a place conducting graduate research in one of her fields of study.

Ariadna Alvarado, Peer Reviewer & Peer Editor

Ariadna (she/they) is a fifth-year undergraduate Communications student with a minor in Political Science. They were also an author for the first issue of The Motley Undergraduate Journal with a piece on visual culture and race. Currently, she is keen on producing video essays, practicing analogue photography, web programming and dancing to K-pop. Although uncertain whether her plans will change, they aspire to work at the intersection of UX/UI Design and Front-End Web Development.

Kabir Singh Bedi, Peer Reviewer & Peer Editor

Kabir (he/him) is a third-year undergraduate student here at University of Calgary, double majoring in Communication and Media Studies and International Relations, and has been involved with The Motley Undergraduate Journal since 2022 as a Peer Reviewer. As someone actively involved on campus, he finds working with Motley as another opportunity to stay involved, learning along the way as he reviews some of the articles and suggests changes. He looks forward to continue his term with Motley and reviewing more articles.

Aressanna Challand

Aressana Challand (she/her) is in the fourth year of her Bachelor of Arts, double majoring in Communication and Media Studies and Law and Society. She is interested in pursuing a career within policy and social affairs. Challand's research interests currently focus on the communication of social and environmental issues. She is interested in discourse analysis because of the opportunity is provides to assess what is not discussed in mainstream communication. Her contribution to the Motley analyzes how Western news media reports on Indigenous homelessness. Challand noticed the increased visibility and public fatigue of homelessness post-pandemic. She wanted to understand how the media navigates the complex historical, social and economic factors that contribute to homelessness and the representation of its most vulnerable group.

Mohana Holloway

Mohana Holloway (she/her) is a recent graduate from the Broadcast Media Studies program at Mount Royal University in Calgary, Alberta. She is currently at Arizona State University, in Phoenix, Arizona, pursuing her Master's degree in Sports Journalism. Mohana has been a sports fan her whole life, particularly the Canadian Football League. Combined with her passion for storytelling, she was inspired to pursue a career in the sports journalism field. Her most recent project was a short documentary film about transitioning out of professional athletics. Mohana is an advocate for women and diversity in sports. She hopes to highlight voices and stories that often go unnoticed through her journalism. Mohana would also like to pursue sports communications and media relations.

Asha Nenshi Nathoo

Asha (she/her) is a third-year student at the University of Calgary studying political science and communications with a certificate in global citizenship and pluralism. Asha has expressed her passion for social advocacy and civic engagement through journalism, debate, speech, Model United Nations, and volunteering within various communities. She is honoured to be able to publish a paper in The Motley that takes a deeper dive into the inequities of two recent refugee crises from an academic lens rooted in communications studies. Asha hopes that her work will contribute to a body of literature that will allow global leaders and citizens to more inclusively respond to future humanitarian crises. Asha is currently the co-chair for the University of Calgary Chancellor's Scholars Ambassadors Club. Over the past two summers, she has worked with ATB Financial in their Inclusion & Reconciliation and Client Care departments. Following her undergraduate studies, Asha hopes to pursue law in order to continue advocating for justice, especially for those who are vulnerable or historically marginalized. Asha is a passionate advocate for a society and world where compassion, understanding and equity are primary drivers.

Demilade Odusola

Demilade (pronounced day-me-lah-day) (she/her) is a 2023 graduate of the University of Calgary. She completed her studies at the University of Calgary with two degrees: BA, Communications and Media Studies and BSc, Biological Sciences. As a communications scholar, her interests are popular culture, social media and digital communications/marketing, and feminist/women media studies. Demilade is keen on understanding how different communications theories help to explain and allow one to understand the behaviour of individuals and how society works, particularly in media spaces. These interests are what prompted her first published article featured in the Motley Journal. As Demilade moves forward, she aspires to be the top communications professional with a focus on digital communications, brand management and event coordination.

Luke Pye

Luke Pye (he/him) is in his 3rd year of his BA in Communication and Media Studies and a peer reviewer and editor for the second issue of the journal. In addition to his role on the editorial team, Luke is the author of “Dungeons and Dragons and the Critical Failure: A Thematic Analysis of the TTRPG Communities Reception of the Leaked OGL 1.1". His piece explores the Online Gaming Licence Leak and the eeffect the actions of Wizards of the Coast during this crisis has had on their brand and the impact it may have on the TTRPG community. One of Luke's career goals is to work as a copyeditor for either the municipal government or a non-profit organization.

Daman Preet Singh

Daman (he/him) is a first year student in he Communications and Media Studies department at the University of Calgary. His research interests are in media representation, creativity and pop culture and is looking forward to explore more research possibilities as his degree goes. He is also keen about journalism and photography as mediums of story telling, and has been exploring different forms of expression in the latter. Right now, he's working as the visuals editor at the university's student run news publication and is looking forward to engage more with the student run organizations at the campus.

Taylor Van Eyk

Taylor (she/her) is a 3rd year Communications and New Media student at the University of Calgary. She takes a keen interest in the construction of Canadian Indigenous history and identities, that of which has captivated and impacted her throughout her life. She explores this topic through both academic research and visual arts with abstracted concepts. In her academic career, and as a life goal, she would like to make sense of her Identity as a mixed Indigenous woman and her family's history by way of manifesting her ideas and knowledge in visual art and thoughtful literature. In her free time, she is a bread baker and a creator of pastries. However full-time, she is also a human servant to her five-pound Pomeranian whom she loves more than anything.

Natasha Bodnarchuk

Natasha (she/her) is a copy editor, reviewer, and author of The Motley Journal. She is in her fourth and final year of her BA (Honours) in Communications and Media Studies. Natasha's piece "I Was There Too..." explores the impractical uses of technology and challenges notions of digital efficiency. Natasha is an avid writer and reader. She is thrilled to be part of the Motley Journal and looks forward to reading other students work.

Madison Daniels

Madison Daniels (she/her) is a graduate international student at the University of Calgary majoring in communications and media studies. She is a PURE award recipient with a rich background of research assistant experience. Currently, she is in the Communication, Media, and Film Master's program researching the disruptive communication practices between the producers and consumers of entertainment crowdsourcing companies (e.g., Kickstarter, Indiegogo, LegionM, and Patreon) through a political economy approach. Her interests include queer visibility, the entertainment industry, audience reception, and technology.

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A Critical Discourse Analysis of Indigenous Homelessness: On Social Problems and Silences in Alberta News Media

Aressana Challand

Abstract

Following the COVID-19 pandemic, homelessness became a much more visible and dire social crisis within Calgary and Edmonton. Despite comprising a fraction of Calgary and Edmonton's overall population, Indigenous peoples disproportionately represent the homeless population but are rarely discussed by the news media. This Indigenous media deficiency is sharpened by the lack of qualitative research that studies the communication of Indigenous homelessness in the news media. Drawing on Van Dijk's critical discourse, this study employs critical discourse analysis to ask, "How is Indigenous homelessness discussed as a social problem in Alberta news media?". This research constitutes the first qualitative study on the discourse of Indigenous homelessness in news media. Findings identified the dominant themes of homelessness: accidentally becoming homeless, homeless individuals as welfare freeloaders, violence, danger, social disorder, the criminalization of homelessness, drug addicts and alcoholics. Together, findings suggest that these dominant themes operate to blame individuals, remove responsibility from the system, create public resentment, construct public fear, and dehumanize homeless people through situational links to poverty, disorder, disease, and violence. This study argues that homeless people undergo a process of othering, leaving them primarily spoken for by journalists in the news media. This study offers insight into Indigenous themes of homelessness, including the overrepresentation of homeless statistics, the cycle of homelessness and reconciliation. However, the main findings identify the operation of a Western discourse, where the ideology of individualism and the cultural values of hard work, wealth, property, and self-sufficiency silences the settler-colonial legacies attributable to Indigenous homelessness. Alberta's news media discussions of homelessness disenchant the unique oppressions Indigenous peoples face which increase their vulnerability to becoming homeless. Conclusively, this analysis reveals the importance of studying the communication of social problems through an Indigenous lens to deconstruct hegemonic portrayals and reinstate the voices of our most vulnerable.

Keywords

Critical discourse analysis, Indigenous discourse, homelessness, settler-colonialism

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Homelessness in Canada is a long-term social problem that continues to be provoked and shaped by the 'intersecting crises' of racism, the overdose crisis, the lack of affordable housing, and the aftereffects of the Covid-19 pandemic (Mauboules, 2020, p. 43). A 'social problem' in the literature refers to the negative consequences derived from systems, such as government and institutions, rather than individual choices (Lawrence, 2000, p. 36, as cited in Best, 2010, p. 78). This is key to the study because homelessness culminates as the consequential social problem of the intersecting crises. Mass media, aside from personal experience, is a primary resource for the public to learn about homelessness (Krewski et al. 2004, as cited in Calder et al., 2011, p. 4). Particularly, news media serves as a critical forum to portray the current state of homelessness and its causes (Hackett et al., 2012, p. 12, as cited in Schwan, 2016, p. 42). The news media is a powerful tool in informing public perception through its discussions of homelessness. General trends in research show a gap in the study of Indigenous homeless portrayals. Qualitative research focused on the news media's discussion of homelessness is essential in promoting Indigenous discussions given their disproportionate homeless population and inadequate representation in scholarship. This study attempts to fill these gaps by asking the question, "How is Indigenous homelessness discussed as a social problem in Alberta news media?" through a qualitative, critical discourse analysis.

Indigenous peoples overwhelmingly encompass Alberta's homeless population, representing 5% of Edmonton's population but 51% of Edmonton's 2016 Homeless Count (Current State of Homelessness in Edmonton) and 3% of Calgary's population (Calgary Homeless Foundation, 2016) but 30.1% of Calgary's 2022 Point-in-Time Count (Calgary Homeless Foundation, 2022). Despite this egregious representation, communication studies severely lack a comprehensive qualitative analysis of the portrayal of Indigenous homelessness in news media. Reviewing the literature, analysis studying the communication of homelessness in Canadian news media is largely quantitative (Best, 2010, pp. 74, 77; Klodawsky et al., 2002, p. 126; Mao et al., 2012, p.1; Richter et al., 2012, pp. 620, 622; Schwan, 2016, p. 34; Schneider et al., 2010, p. 147). This study is the first of its kind, inspired by Van Dijk's critical discourse analysis to investigate the power structures of the news media. Accordingly, this study follows Van Dijk's notion that news discourse is characterized by its silences, where "'(i)nformation that could (or should) have been given'" (Van Dijk, 1986, p. 178, as cited in Huckin, 2002, p. 352) is purposely left out to advance a certain discourse. As one of the most vulnerable populations in

Canada, research is needed to properly acknowledge the silences towards Indigenous peoples in the media and how dominant themes of homelessness generate deficiencies in their homeless portrayal.

Methodology

The sample for this study includes Alberta news media coverage on Indigenous homelessness in Edmonton and Calgary. These cities were chosen as 55.5% of all Indigenous peoples reside in Western Canada (Statistics Canada, 2021); the top three cities include Edmonton (Statistics Canada, 2021). Calgary is included in this sample for its unique characteristic as the first Canadian city that adopted a failed, but comprehensive 10-year plan to end homelessness (Gaetz et al. 2013, as cited in Schwan, 2016, p. 43; Schneider et al., 2010, p. 151). Given the absent inclusion of discussions on Indigenous homelessness in Canadian news media (Ritcher et al., 2012, p. 630; Schwan, 2016, p. 64), purposive sampling is used as the sampling method to ensure Indigenous homelessness is included within the study's sample.

The sample dataset is chosen from five news articles published between 2021-2022, where homelessness became exacerbated and increasingly visible to the public because of the economic, health and social crises following Covid-19 (Mauboules, 2020, p. 43). Selective criteria from Calgary and Edmonton local news media were sourced through ProQuest and Google News, including *The Calgary Herald*, *The Edmonton Journal*, and *The Calgary Star*. The sample dataset's search criteria included one or both keywords 'Indigenous' and 'homelessness'. To connect with social problems, articles within the sample dataset were searched for keywords such as 'violence', 'systemic discrimination', 'shelter', 'social barriers', 'racism', 'trauma', 'domestic violence', 'mental health', 'suffering', 'colonialism' and 'reconciliation', although the existence of these keywords was not necessary in case of media exclusion. These articles included a word count of at least 600 up to 5,500 words. This enables analysis to dive deeper into the discussions of homelessness produced, given the small sample. From the sample dataset, the samples selected for this study include: *Edmonton shelter storage shouldn't be an annual winter tradition* (Gerein, 2022), *'I don't feel safe': Crime and safety always top of mind for downtown residents* (Herring, 2022), *Opinion: Wetaskiwin homeless camp shows disconnect between reconciliation and reality* (Larson, 2021), *In the shadow of an arena:*

How one hockey-loving, oil-rich Canadian city is again displacing Indigenous people (Mosleh, 2022), and *Tackling homelessness is up to every Edmontonian* (Sohi, 2021). The dominant themes of homelessness in the news media were studied at the micro-level of critical discourse in accordance with a set list of questions for each article (see Appendix). After identifying these semiotic elements, the article's social and political context was researched to explore the legitimacy of the claims made about homelessness. The analysis focused on investigating the textual silences and interdiscursivity of the sample to identify a discourse within its set of ideologies.

Analysis: The Dominant Themes of Homelessness in Alberta News Media

Becoming Lost and Falling into Homelessness

The complexity of homelessness is heightened by the COVID-19 pandemic yet obscured by Alberta's news media discussions on how individuals become homeless. Four of the five articles under study linked individuals becoming homeless with the transitory verbs of 'slipping', 'falling' and becoming 'lost' (Table 1). Homelessness is constructed as a pervasive part of everyday life; it can happen to anyone who loses their economic footing, experiences hardships that lead to poor life choices and cannot find stability to permanently remove themselves from homelessness. These descriptors imply that homelessness is waiting to catch anyone when they fall. As this is something that could happen to anyone, it is the individual's fault for allowing themselves to become homeless. Arguably, Indigenous peoples experience a heightened risk of 'falling' into homelessness as their familial networks are destabilized by addiction-related abuse and family separation stemming from the legacies of settler-colonialism (Kneebone et al., 2015, as cited in Lindstrom et al., 2020, p. 64). Thus, Indigenous peoples do not experience a 'slip', but a systemic push into homelessness from these hardships.

Additionally, bad luck is constructed as a pervasive yet latent force of homelessness within this theme. Relating this theme to the literature that cites homelessness in Canadian news media as an "individual trait" (Schwan, 2016, p. 57), bad luck individually finds people as they 'fall' into homelessness. The complexity of homelessness is simplified through the implication of accidental forces that semantically validate the claims that anyone could happen to be homeless. This disenchants the unique oppressions Indigenous peoples face that make them more

vulnerable to becoming homeless. Through this theme, it becomes logically sensical that because anyone can become homeless, those who do become homeless simply did not try hard enough not to prevent their fall, rather than being pushed to the edge of an already fragile situation.

Table 1

News Media Descriptions of Becoming Homeless as Accidental

Article	Situation
Sohi	"Given how easy slipping into houselessness can be…" (2021).
Gerein	"While there are good things in the package that will hopefully prevent more Albertans from falling into homelessness…" (2022).
Mosleh	"(H)e soon got lost in the system and ultimately the streets…" (2022).
Larson	"(F)olks who have nowhere else to go…" (2021).

Note. Statements are derived from four of the five articles sampled. Quotations are highlighted to identify the themes present for 'becoming lost' and 'falling into homelessness.'

Homeless Individuals as Welfare Freeloaders and a Tax Advantage

The housing crisis was the most prevalent social problem attached to homelessness throughout the sample (Table 2). Additionally, Herring, Sohi and Gerein's articles linked the action of addressing homelessness to the public advantage of saving taxpayer funds (2022; 2022; 2021) (Table 2). This creates the knowledge that homeless individuals are at the root of a massive public expense. By discussing how expensive homelessness is (Table 2), news media

construct a salient theme that homelessness is preventing taxpayer funds and government subsidies from alleviating other social issues like "an already strained emergency room and our backlogged justice system" (Sohi, 2021) (Table 2). Blame is attached to homeless individuals for creating such a strain on resources that it leaves Edmonton with "little discretionary funding left to tackle other priorities" (Gerein, 2022) (Table 2). Furthermore, Paquette, an Indigenous Edmonton city councillor (CBC News, 2017), furthers what Van Dijk calls polarizing, syntactic strategies (2007, p. 127) by referring to homelessness as "their issue" (Table 2). Problematically, the news media propagates the notion that homeless individuals are freeloading off welfare reserves and directly hindering collective social progress (Table 2). This theme powers the validation of attitudes that blame, resent, and deny compassion toward the homeless. As such, homeless individuals are perceived as lazy by straining tax funds. Although the theme of 'falling into homelessness' creates the understanding that becoming homeless is accidental, the characterization of homelessness as a welfare burden individually blames homeless individuals for depleting public funds that could be used elsewhere. This shifts the narrative to homelessness as a social problem for the citizenry, as opposed to a social problem for those left vulnerable on the streets.

Table 2

Discussions of Housing Affordability, Taxpayer Expense, and the Burden of Public Funding

Article	Statement
Herring	"It's a vicious cycle, and it's expensive to taxpayers," said Smith, who said the cost of keeping a person in jail is magnitudes greater than providing them with subsidized, affordable housing (2022).

Sohi	Addressing houselessness is also a cost-saver for governments and taxpayers… Getting people into housing diverts them from a costly stay in an already strained emergency room and our backlogged justice system, and allows our first responders to focus on other vital emergencies (2021).
Gerein	(C)ouncil appears set to withdraw $7.5 million from an emergency reserve to pay for a temporary shelter of 209 spaces in the west end… As well, the move will use up most of the available money in the reserve, which means the city has little discretionary funding left to tackle other priorities (2022). "That surplus is four times greater than our entire annual budget and yet we are the ones who have to use our (stabilization reserve) to try to solve their issue," Paquette said. (2022, as cited in Gerein, 2022)
Mosleh	"Missteps in city planning created a downtown that lacked affordable housing" (McKeen, 2022, as cited in Mosleh, 2022).
Larson	We must invest in their known solutions, which include permanent housing (2021).

Note. Statements include the entire sample. Bolded quotations represent the identification of the themes of homelessness being discussed as 'welfare freeloaders' and a 'tax advantage.'

Solving Homelessness as Citizen's Collective Responsibility

While becoming homeless is constructed as an individual accident left to the discrete forces of bad luck and where resentment lingers towards yielding public funds, the theme of citizens' collective responsibility to end homelessness is also persistent (Table 3). This collective effort is

not framed as an act of public good, but as an individual benefit to increase safety on the streets for citizens (Table 3). In Sohi and Mosleh's articles, this collective effort extends to the gratification felt through individuals' and businesses' self-sacrifice in promoting public safety (Table 3). Solving homelessness is not for the benefit of homeless people but for the increased safety of citizens and the pleasure felt in dealing with 'charity' cases. There is a clear division between the rights to security that citizens feel owed and the rights to safety that have become an inaccessible privilege for homeless people. This theme disassociates homeless people from being seen as deserving of help because the lines between homeless individuals and homelessness become intertwined. Homeless people lose their agency and become characterized as the social issue they find themselves in. Although they 'slip' into homelessness, they become blamed, sidelined and demonized from receiving support as human beings. This suggests that the themes of violence, destitution, social disorder, and danger also exist within Alberta news media to criminalize homelessness and foment public fear.

Table 3

Discussions of Collective Efforts, Citizen Responsibility and Safety

Article	Statement
Herring	"...it's delivering on that feeling of safety from all of us doing our individual parts" (Thompson, 0:00-0:48, 2022, as cited in Herring, 2022). "(W)e need to come together to be able to work together to make sure that people feel safe coming into the downtown" Inspector Clare Smart, Calgary Police Service (2022, as cited in Herring, 2022).
Sohi	From a city councillor's office that started the process… it was a collective effort. Her experience is a reminder of the duty we all have to support fellow

	Edmontonians, and to ourselves, to ensure that no one goes unhoused in our city (2021).
Mosleh	"The business community is having to make a decision about the role that we want to play in this," McBryan said. "And I think for the vast majority, everyone sort of put up their hand and said, 'How can we help and what can we do to make this better?" (2022).

Note. Statements include three of the five articles sampled. Bolded quotations represent homelessness as being linked to actions of collective responsibility and positioned as a threat to citizen safety.

The Violence, Danger, Social Disorder, and the Criminalization of Homeless People

Emerging from the COVID-19 pandemic, the dominant themes of homelessness linked to violence, crime, danger and destitution escalated in severity. Herring (2022) and Mosleh's articles (2022) furthered the knowledge of homeless individuals as violent, dangerous, lethal and unhinged by describing homeless people through the disorderly actions of 'punches', 'screaming loudly', 'flailing', 'shouting' and 'curses at them angrily' (Table 4). This dramatized verbiage reduces the homeless individual's humanity by positioning homeless people as the source of social disorder with no additional context. Within these news articles, homeless people's social disorder sets the scene of public danger. Furthermore, dominant homeless themes on social disorder link homeless individuals to the symbols of poverty and filth (Table 4), where Larson links their living environment to "ragged tents and tarps" (2021) and "a porta-potty and an overflowing garbage dumpster" (2021). Homelessness becomes collectivized under the living conditions that Larson describes as "hell" (2021). As well, homeless people symbolize carriers of diseases, including Covid-19 (Larson, 2021) and shigella (Gerein, 2022). These living conditions again inform the public of the risk that homeless people pose to them, inciting the message to stay away from homeless people.

Table 4

Homelessness Linked to Themes of Violence, Danger, Disease, and Social Disorder

Article	Statement
Herring	(A) man punches a utility box, screaming loudly in agony (2022). Farther down the platform, another man lets out a guttural yell and hurls a string of profanities at no one in particular. Yet another staggers toward commuters and in aggressive, rapid-fire speech, launches into a conspiratorial rant (2022).
Larson	I see 20 or so ragged tents and tarps, held down against the incessant gale with strategically placed sticks and rocks. There is a porta-potty and an overflowing garbage dumpster. People mill about bundled in ill-fitting layers… (2021). There have been many COVID outbreaks in emergency shelters across Canada (2021).
Gerein	(O)ur city is seeing big safety worries right now with encampments, tent fires, frostbite and shigella infections (2022).

Mosleh	"You said you'd give me 10 bucks for that point!" a young, agitated fellow in sagging jeans and a sports cap screams at her, flailing his arms (2022). As a shouting match about some drug deal gone awry carries on (2022). When the two first responders arrive, the man curses at them angrily and says he doesn't need any medical attention (2022).

Note. Statements include four of the five articles sampled. Bolded statements identify homeless people's descriptors linked to themes of violence, social disorder, danger, and disease.

With the prevalence of social disorder, violence, and deviance (Table 4) and the rise of crime in Calgary and Edmonton's downtown, homelessness has become criminalized. The news media's prominent discussions of homelessness inform citizens about new dangers. The concerns for citizen's safety on transit (Table 5) further social anxieties and public fear surrounding homelessness. This discursive strategy focuses on homelessness as the issue, rather than the social problems that produce homelessness. With discussions prioritizing citizen's personal accounts of their lack of safety on transit (Table 5), homelessness is a problem not only for public funds but for the safety of citizens. Within these themes, the urgency for homeless individuals has become lost. Dominant themes of violence, crime and disorder utilize traditional stereotypes of homelessness which operate to dehumanize homeless individuals, alienating them through fear and stigma. Such stigmas arise when the news media poorly informs the public about homelessness and denies homeless individuals the opportunity to be seen as human. This demonization enables homeless individuals to be silenced by remaining nameless and when identified by news media, described by their passion for alcohol and drugs.

Table 5

Citizen Safety a Top Concern in News Media

Article	Statement
Herring	Crime and safety in Calgary's core and throughout the city have become a mounting worry for residents and leaders in the first months of 2022, coinciding with a broader societal move out of the COVID-19 pandemic (2022). "There's a level of enhanced fear for the everyday Calgarians who go, 'What about me?'" Boyd said (2022, as cited in Herring, 2022). That's a concern for Ward 7 Coun. Terry Wong, who said he's been hearing from constituents who feel unsafe navigating inner-city streets (2022). "Transit is just not safe anymore. I wouldn't take my younger sisters, I wouldn't take my niece or nephew on the train…" Soles said (2022, as cited in Herring, 2022).
Mosleh	Anne Stevenson, the city councillor in downtown Edmonton, has heard numerous complaints from residents who are scared to use the transit system, especially in the core (2022). Last month, there were several reports about transit users feeling unsafe in the stations due to gang violence, open drug use and harassment (2022).

Note. Theme amongst two of the five articles sampled, in both Edmonton and Calgary's downtown. Bolded quotations identify language which criminalizes homelessness by prioritizing citizen's feelings of danger and vulnerability.

Reinforcing Dominant Themes of Homelessness: On Silences and Othering

Under the force of these dominant homeless themes, homeless people undergo a process of othering where they lose their agency and are primarily spoken about by journalists (Table 6). Homeless people were rarely given the space within the sampled news articles to discuss their experiences of homelessness. When they were included, their representation was limited only to their personal accounts of drug and alcohol use (Table 7). This connects with the literature, where studies cite homelessness as being primarily portrayed through substance abuse in the news media (Huckin, 2002, p. 359; Klodawsky et al., 2002, p. 126; Schneider et al., 2010, p. 159). Additional findings in the literature note homelessness being framed as "an irresponsible lifestyle choice" (Klodawsky, 2002, p. 135). Taken with the literature, this study shows the continued portrayal of homelessness remains consistent with contemporary themes. Homelessness is much more complex than a drug and alcohol addiction, but these individual causations simplify its deep socio-economic causes. The news media inadequately discuss homelessness by reverting to common descriptions, trapping homelessness within its stereotypes.

Table 6

Homeless People's Voices

Name	Description	Indigenous?	Speak for themselves? Or Spoken About?
Man	(A) man punches a utility box, screaming loudly in agony (2022).	Unknown	Spoken about by a journalist (Herring).

Man (2)	(A)nother man lets out a guttural yell and hurls a string of profanities at no one in particular (2022).	Unknown	Spoken about by a journalist (Herring).
Another	Yet another staggers toward commuters and in aggressive, rapid-fire speech, launches into a conspiratorial rant (2022).	Unknown	Spoken about by a journalist (Herring).
Groups	(S)everal groups of people sit on the grass, immobile and unresponsive (2022).	Unknown	Spoken about by a journalist (Herring).
Man	One man told me that when he was too thirsty, he had to drink from the lake. He said that made him feel sad (2021).	Unknown	Spoken about by a journalist (Larson).
Man	“It’s down,” he says indifferently, untroubled as he lights the foil from underneath… (2022).	Unknown	Speaks for themselves and is spoken about (Mosleh).
Fellow	“You said you’d give me 10 bucks for that point!” a young, agitated fellow in	Unknown	Speaks for themselves and

	sagging jeans and a sports cap screams at her, flailing his arms (2022).		is spoken about (Mosleh).
Man	(Y)oung man with a red jacket and tattoos on his face; he's writhing in agony (2022).	Unknown	Speaks for themselves and is spoken about (Mosleh).
Laura Janvier	"It's anti-freeze," she says with a wink and a laugh (2022).	Yes	Speaks for themselves and is spoken for (Mosleh).

Note. Statement derived from four of five articles sampled. Bolded quotations reveal the lack of personal identification amongst homeless people, allowing them to be spoken about by the journalist. Gerein's article did not include a direct discussion of homeless people.

Table 7

Homelessness Discussed Through Individual's Drug and Alcohol Addictions

Article	Statement
Herring	Many people they meet are facing crises linked to mental health and addictions (2022).

Sohi	It makes our whole community safer to help people who are struggling and vulnerable — perhaps struggling with mental health or addictions (2021).
Mosleh	He pulls out a nickel-sized wax-paper bag, dumping a few small, dark, brown and black clumps onto a piece of tinfoil… He shrugs when he's asked what he's about to use, his eyes not leaving the task at hand… "It's down," he says indifferently, untroubled as he lights the foil from underneath and inhales the smoke through a long metal pipe… (2022). "It's mostly fentanyl," explains a woman… before adding that it could also be contaminated with benzodiazepines… or maybe carfentanil, an opioid a hundred times more potent than fentanyl (2022). Laura Janvier, wearing reflective sunglasses and a snug Columbia jacket, looks around before lowering the white wool scarf tied around her face and taking a gulp from a vodka bottle tucked into a purse… "It's anti-freeze," she says with a wink and a laugh (2022).

Note. Statements derived from three of the five articles sampled. Bolded quotations reveal homeless people's few opportunities to speak for themselves to be linked to their drug and alcohol addictions.

The statements made by three unnamed homeless individuals that "'It's down (drugs)" (Unknown, 2022, as cited in Mosleh, 2022), "'It's mostly fentanyl'" (Unknown, 2022, as cited in Mosleh, 2022) and "'you said you'd give me ten bucks for that point!'" (Unknown, 2022, as cited in Mosleh, 2022) are among the four statements made by current homeless people within the sample (Table 6). The fourth account was made by Laura Janvier, the only Indigenous homeless person who spoke for themselves about her homelessness who was introduced as "taking a gulp from a vodka bottle tucked into a purse" (Mosleh 2022) and explained her situation through alcohol, stating "'(i)t's anti-freeze" (Janvier, 2022, as cited in Mosleh, 2022)

(Table 7). These statements harness a strategy of discourse that relies on embedding "subjective experience" (Van Dijk, as cited in Meyer, 2001, p. 21) to validate social representations, known as the common perception of a group (Van Dijk, as cited in Meyer, 2001, p. 21). Through very few of their own words, homeless people legitimize the perception of 'careless' druggies and alcoholics who do not deserve help. Besides Laura, all other homeless people in the sample were not provided with their names, known as a man, woman, group or a fellow (Table 6). Without their names, homeless people lack common identification with others, are stripped of their power to share their personal stories and become generalized as homeless, instead of as people who are homeless. This makes it easier to resent or lack compassion for those who are nameless.

The Overrepresentation of Indigenous Homeless Statistics and Reconciliation

Of the news articles sampled, Indigenous homelessness was directly discussed in Larson, Sohi and Mosleh's articles. The primary themes directly linked to Indigenous homelessness were the statistics of overrepresentation, solving homelessness as an act of reconciliation and the mention of the 'cycle of homelessness'. Indigenous homelessness was contextualized by statistics of overrepresentation, where "they comprise five percent of the city's population but more than 50 percent of people experiencing homelessness" (Mosleh, 2022), "70 percent of children in government care have Indigenous heritage" (Mosleh, 2022) and "(w)e see the results of this trauma in the overrepresentation of Indigenous people among those experiencing houselessness" (Sohi, 2021). These statistics speak for the entirety of the Indigenous homeless problem by focusing on population density. The Indigenous community is categorized as the leading population of homelessness within these statistics. While homelessness is a social problem, it is largely an Indigenous problem. Indigenous homeless representations are fueled by the dominant homeless themes which implies that this community is inadequate and especially lazy, violent, and comprised of drug addicts and alcoholics.

Furthermore, the theme of 'falling into homelessness' relates to the theme of the "cycle of homelessness" (Larson, 2021) and 'history repeating itself' (Larson, 2021; Mosleh, 2022). The 'cycle of homelessness' perpetuates the idea that Indigenous people are controlled by an external force to repeatedly fall in and out of homelessness. Their relationship to homelessness is normalized as persistent and inevitable, given 'history repeating itself' (Larson, 2021; Mosleh,

2022). Rather than the force of bad luck, history is contextualized as the force of Indigenous homelessness. As history cannot be changed, Indigenous peoples are linked to an enduring legacy. The call for reconciliation (Table 8) is conducive to citizens' collective responsibility to end homelessness. Reconciliation is a collective duty which ignores calls for the government to intervene. The dominant themes of homelessness blame and demonize homeless individuals, erasing their individuality, personal stories, and humanity. The discrimination, trauma, abuse, fetal alcohol syndrome and oppression at the root of Indigenous homelessness are erased within these dominant themes. Particularly, Indigenous themes of homelessness do little to subvert the discourse these dominant homeless themes construct.

Table 8

Statements for Reconciliation

Article	Statements
Larson	(T)he disjunct between lip service being paid to reconciliation and the truth is stark (2021).
Gerein	(H)ousing can be an important reconciliation effort (2022).
Sohi	Addressing homelessness and poverty is fundamental to our reconciliation efforts (2021).

Note. Statements derived from three of the five articles sampled. Bolded quotations identify the theme of 'reconciliation' when articles discuss Indigenous homelessness.

The Discourse of Indigenous Homelessness: On Western Ideologies

The legacy of settler-colonialism is evident in the white power structures that still dominate and control the news media (Haque & Patrick, 2015, as cited in Jahiu and Cinnamon, 2021, p. 4550) today. When employing Van Dijk's model of critical discourse analysis, a Western ideology remains prevalent amongst Alberta news media. Thus, the social values central to the Western ideology that manipulates the discussion of Indigenous homelessness stem from the "contemporary nation-state values premised in neocolonial and neoliberal principles which are in direct opposition to Indigenous philosophies and experiences" (Lindstrom, 2020, p. 18). The principles of welfare, housing and community are not homogeneously understood across cultures. As journalists retain the power to speak on homelessness, their cultural values control the discussion of Indigenous homelessness. Importantly, the dominant ideology should not be taken as the status quo, but as the form of knowledge that retains the privilege to construct the discourse of news media. Therefore, the communication of Indigenous homelessness legitimates "relations of power abuse (dominance) in society" (Van Dijk, 2015, p. 467) to maintain hegemony. In this sense, even the themes of resistance that link homelessness to the failure of social structures, such as reconciliation, are submerged by the logic that denies homeless people their voice, separates blame from the government and social systems, makes individuals blameworthy through bad luck and addiction and foments resentment and fear through the growth, complexity, criminalization, and cost of the homeless problem in Calgary and Edmonton.

Individualism, Personal Welfare, and the Cultural Values of a Western Discourse

The themes of the 'welfare drainer', the 'social delinquent' and the 'drug addict' are constructed via cultural values embedded within Western ideologies on "property, ownership and personal wealth" (Lindstrom, 2020, p. 31). Homelessness, as a taxpayer's burden, is separated from other social issues as a social problem that is undeserving of public welfare. This theme is heavily influenced by the West's ideological emphasis on individualism, where society upholds the values of "hard-work, self-sufficiency, individual merit-systems, and accumulation of individual wealth and private property" (Lindstrom, 2020, p. 31). In Western discourse, public welfare is legitimized only when social problems are worthy of public support. This stems from

the ideology's creation of a specific, "'deserving poor'" (Garlington, 2014, p. 289, as cited in Lindstrom, 2020, p. 33). The themes of drugs, alcohol, 'falling' and laziness validate the knowledge that homeless people drain the system and do not deserve public funds. This discourse gives those in power the ability to decide who receives help and which populations are seen as "deficient and dependent" (Bastien, 2016, as cited in Lindstrom, 2020, p. 33). In this study, homeless people are seen as dependent and disorderly. As Indigenous homelessness is not understood as a distinct community social problem, it follows this discourse.

By investigating the social context of housing affordability in Calgary and Edmonton it is evident that Indigenous peoples face a far greater shortage of housing that makes them acutely prone to homelessness. According to Edmonton's 2021 Administrative Count's Annual Report, Indigenous peoples experience drastic income inequality because of systemic discrimination where the median income of Alberta's Indigenous households in 2016 was $29,522 as opposed to the $42,717 of non-Indigenous individuals (p. 35). In addition, there is very little Indigenous-owned housing for Indigenous peoples who become homeless, where the 2016 census found that only 273 Indigenous-owned housing existed for the over 3,000 Indigenous homeless peoples in Calgary (Lindstrom et al., 2020, p. 6). With less income to cushion rising inflation rates, barely any houses to turn to and their inhibition towards submitting to white-controlled social services (Lindstrom, 2020, pp. 45, 53), the Western discourse on homelessness silences the reality that Indigenous peoples are not in fact taking too much from the system; their homelessness is the product of not having the appropriate resources to begin with. It is this ideology of individualism cemented within the Western discourse that frames Indigenous people as greedy thieves of public funding. Deconstructing the social context shows their severe lack of public support.

On the Control of a Western Discourse

According to Van Dijk, social power is directly linked to a specific group's ability to control the cognition of other groups (2015, p. 469). Although homelessness continues to persist as an ever-growing social problem post-COVID-19, the way the news media discuss homelessness has not changed. By continuing to discuss homelessness through a Western discourse, the news media can "reproduce dominance and hegemony" (Van Dijk, 2015, p. 472).

The hegemony of white power structures continues to silence the personal experiences of homelessness except for recounts of drugs or alcohol and links homeless people to the escalation in violence to control the narrative of criminalization. For Indigenous peoples who are homeless, this discourse further reduces them to the prejudice that they need Western, authoritative assistance, reducing them to settler-colonial logics of paternalism.

Under a Western discourse, Indigenous peoples are not differentiated from other homeless demographics. This discourse silences the largely structural causes contributing to their overrepresentation in the homeless population. Under this discourse, addiction to alcohol and drugs is portrayed as standing in the way of Laura's ability to achieve permanent stable housing, where "she sometimes worries her living situation could be jeopardized because she drinks and sometimes uses drugs" (Mosleh, 2022). The Indigenous peoples portrayed in these articles did not simply become addicted to alcohol and drugs as a disposition of their race and then became homeless; they turned to alcohol and drugs to cope with the legacies of discrimination against their race. Homelessness is not a biological disposition, but a social legacy. The Indigenous populations represented lack regular community support, where their forceful separation from family "draws them to alcohol" (Lindstrom, 2020, p. 40). It is not alcohol that foments their homeless crisis, but the isolation experienced from the many systemic barriers that continue today. Western discourse focuses on these themes, silencing the colonial legacies that have established and upheld many contemporary social problems. This construction of homelessness is not the reality of homelessness, but a social representation which furthers hegemonic power structures.

Understanding Homelessness as an Indigenous Social Problem

In Lindstrom et al., (2020, p. 41), Menzies introduces a definition of Indigenous homelessness, where "homelessness is a condition that results from individuals being displaced from critical community social structures and lacking stable housing" (2009, p. 14). Specifically, individuals do not just become homeless by chance, Indigenous peoples become homeless because of their historical displacement. Through this definition, homelessness is an Indigenous social problem; a notion silenced by Western ways of thinking. This study serves as a critical starting point for research to contribute qualitative findings to how the news media portrays

homelessness with a focus on Indigenous peoples. This study is limited by its small sample which analyzes five news media articles, experiencing further limitations with its focus on two urban cities within Alberta. Future research could contribute a broader analysis of how Canadian news media discuss Indigenous homelessness or focus on another province within Canada to engage in comparative studies. Such research would also diversify the sample and could potentially study and compare different news outlets. This study was also limited by the small time frame to conduct research and the article's publication within the years 2021-2022. As such, future research could analyze how discourse has been constructed, sustained, or shaped over time. Lastly, it is important to acknowledge that as a piece of qualitative research, reflexivity in the analysis and findings exists. While links were made to literature on Indigenous homelessness (Lindstrom et al., 2020), Indigenous homelessness is still analyzed through an outside, non-Indigenous lens.

However, this research challenges the silences of news media which construct an ill-informed social representation of homelessness. This study reveals how Western discourse operates to remove blame from the system and maintains colonial power hierarchies by stripping the Indigenous people of their agency and voice. When Indigenous peoples are silenced and spoken for, this allows for the continued proliferation of Western ideologies that misconstrue, invalidate and other homelessness. Homelessness is an Indigenous social problem, not a population phenomenon. When this ideology is delegitimized to halt the stigmatization of poverty, reconciliation can be better pursued by giving Indigenous peoples the space to humanize themselves and move beyond colonial discourse.

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Appendix

Questions for Discourse Analysis

- Are there any metaphors in the article?
- Who is included/excluded within the social representation of homelessness?
- Who carried speaking power?
- How often do homeless people speak in the article?
- How is homelessness characterized?
- Does the news article have any implications about homelessness?
- How do people discuss homelessness?
- What stereotypes/prejudices circulate homelessness?
- Is there a narrative?
- How are Indigenous peoples discussed? Is this different from homelessness?
- Who is talked about the most?
- Who do news articles bring in to primarily speak on homelessness?
- What social issues are being discussed the most? How are they contextualized?
- How is the Indigenous person depicted through images and text?
- How is homelessness understood as a growing problem?

- What/who is being blamed?
- Are these discussions homogenous?
- Does it look like the Indigenous community agrees?
- Is there enough space for Indigenous voices?

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Colin Kaepernick, Nike & Dreaming Crazy

Mohana Holloway

Abstract

This paper examines the aftermath of Nike's 2018 advertising campaign, "Dream Crazy", featuring the polarizing ex-NFL player Colin Kaepernick. Nike's choice to feature Kaepernick was a groundbreaking one, as Kaepernick was at the forefront of the Black Lives Matter movement. In contrast, it was also hypocritical, in terms of it being driven by the quest for profit and enhanced brand recognition, as much as by concerns for social justice. "Dream Crazy"' was also hypocritical when contrasted with Nike's previous brand actions, which suggests that their actions were even more disingenuous than they first appear. This paper uses theoretical concepts such as media framing, hegemony, and racial capitalism, and applies a case study approach to the launching of "Dream Crazy" to evaluate Nike's actions as a brand. Through this analysis, it is found that despite appearing as a progressive brand siding with the quest for social justice, Nike's actions were arguably more self-serving than selfless. Compared and contrasted with the behaviour of other comparator brands, it seems evident that Nike opportunistically capitalized on Kaepernick's activism. This is important, as more and more brands adopt activism as a marketing tactic, it is integral that they remain sincere with their actions, as power dynamics have shifted from corporation to consumer.

Keywords

Nike, Colin Kaepernick, Dream Crazy, case study, brand activism, media framing, hegemony, racial capitalism

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It is often said that within sports, "there is no place for politics" (Thoburn, 2021). Most of the time, this unspoken rule is obeyed. Outwardly, the sporting world is the embodiment of glitzy, showy patriotism, with national anthems, giant flags, and military flyovers. Sports media and the American public often frame these acts as nationalistic, but politically neutral. A 2021 New York Times article demonstrates this, by stating, "The playing of the national anthem and 'God Bless America,' patriotic ceremonies are as ubiquitous at sporting events today as first downs, home runs and slam dunks" (Adams, 2021). It is argued that love for a country has no political party, and every individual can join together in paying respect to the flag and singing the national anthem. The reality, however, is that there is an inherent tension between entertainment, profit, and morals in today's world of sports. Moreover, the nature of our capitalist system is that at the end of the day, corporate interests are prioritized over other things, such as social justice issues. However, when former NFL quarterback Colin Kaepernick took a knee during the playing of the national anthem at a preseason game in 2016 in protest against police brutality in the United States, the sports world was dramatically altered forever. The facade of political neutrality in sports was no longer possible to maintain.

Kaepernick's protest was tremendously polarizing, as was made evident by the sharp contrast in reactions following the kneeling. Sports fans, politicians, and the general public all held stances on Kaepernick, which reflected a deep divide within American society (Boren, 2020). On one side were those aligned with retaining what was claimed to be a sense of "dignity" and respect for their country. On the other were social justice activists concerned with making systemic changes to a society which they felt to be inherently racist (Sangha, 2019). When Nike made the controversial— and extremely polarizing—decision to feature Kaepernick, amongst other individuals belonging to minority groups, in an extended advertising campaign titled "Dream Crazy," it seemed that the company was endorsing social activism, considering the American political climate at the time (Bacon Jr., 2016, para. 17). Although Nike's advertising campaign was seen by some as groundbreaking, specifically in taking a public stance against a form of cultural hegemony that disadvantages minority groups, it was also arguably self-serving and hypocritical, as Nike's main objective of the campaign was to boost brand recognition and profits.

In 2016, the Black Lives Matter movement gained significant traction on a global scale, stemming from a series of American Black men being shot by police officers that summer (ABC News, 2016). As numerous protests erupted, America's omnipresent racial tension reached a near-boiling point. In addition, critical race theory, the idea that racial inequities are a key shaping factor of society and law, came to be a heated topic of debate within American society (Zurcher, 2021). 2016 was also the year that Donald Trump was elected President of the United States. American society became highly politicized, pitting those believing in and fighting against racism and injustice, against those in denial.

At the same moment, Colin Kaepernick was the starting quarterback for the San Francisco 49ers. Kaepernick's series of protests began during two 2016 pre-season games, with Kaepernick choosing to kneel instead of stand during the national anthem. During the third game, on August 26th, Kaepernick's actions were noticed by the public, specifically on Twitter (Boren, 2020). After the third game, when his protest began to be scrutinized within both traditional and social media spheres, Kaepernick publicly addressed the controversy. He was adamant that his protest was aimed at dismantling the injustice that Black people and people of colour face in America (Doehler, 2021, p. 46). He said that his aim was not to disrespect the national flag or the U.S. military (who often performed the flag ceremonies at NFL games). Nevertheless, Kaepernick's protest made him into a de facto spokesperson for the Black Lives Matter movement, and thus a controversial public figure. This was only exacerbated by the media's subsequent framing of him and his cause.

"Media framing" is a concept first popularized by Robert Entman in the 1990s. It describes the process by which the media tells their audience which perspectives are the "correct" ones to have regarding certain issues (Doehler, 2021, p. 47). Research has found that the 2016 coverage of Kaepernick in the mainstream press was largely homogeneous, and mostly negative (Sangha, 2019). Moreover, key media frames were principally focused on negative coverage of Kaepernick's action itself, rather than on the issues he was concerned with (Sangha, 2019). As media sites and even former president Donald Trump continued to frame Kaepernick in a negative manner condemning his protests, Kaepernick filed a grievance against the NFL in 2017. Despite that, he ultimately was forced out of the sport in 2019 (Boren, 2020).

In 2018, Kaepernick became involved in Nike's "Dream Crazy" campaign. He began with a simple tweet of a black and white image of himself, accompanied by the caption "Believe in something, even if it means sacrificing everything. #JustDoIt" (Sangha, 2019). Coinciding with the 30th anniversary of Nike's trademark, "Just Do It" slogan, Nike then released a commercial of Kaepernick, in which he urged individuals to follow their dreams, regardless of what society might say (Kemp, 2022, para. 4). In the commercial, Kaepernick shared the stories of NBA player Lebron James and American tennis player Serena Williams, and the racism they have faced throughout their careers. The commercial also featured lesser-known athletes belonging to disadvantaged minority groups, such as wrestler Isaiah Bird who was born without legs (Kemp, 2022, para. 5). Throughout the video, Kaepernick shared messages of empowerment, for example stating, "What non-believers fail to understand is that calling a dream crazy is not an insult, it's a compliment" (KPIX CBS SF Bay Area, 2018, 0:27). Along with Kaepernick's graphic, Nike also released a number of other photographic advertisements featuring systematically disadvantaged athletes who had made societal breakthroughs through their respective sports (Wieden & Kennedy, 2018).

Reflecting the criticism that Kaepernick received when he first kneeled in protest, Nike faced significant amounts of backlash over their "Dream Crazy" campaign. Some Twitter users went so far as to post videos of themselves burning their Nike apparel (Bostock, 2018). As a sign of the depth of the controversy, Nike stock fell by 3.2 percent in the immediate aftermath of the Kaepernick commercial (Thomas, 2018). President Trump also took to Twitter to denounce Nike, asserting that both Kaepernick's and Nike's actions were unpatriotic (Sangha, 2019). However, after a short time, public opinion began to turn, and "Dream Crazy" began to see a positive response, with Nike's online sale figures rising 31 percent over a two-day period, and their social media presence rising by an extraordinary 1,678 percent (Linnane, 2018). Part of the explanation for the turn-around is that a significant proportion of Nike's core demographic consists of those belonging to ethnic minorities: 19 percent Latino, 18 percent African American, and 5 percent Asian (Munoz, 2019). In response to the divided opinions on "Dream Crazy", Nike CEO Phil Knight stated, "It doesn't matter how many people hate your brand as long as enough people love it" (Kemp, 2018).

Though featuring a polarizing figure like Kaepernick bore a significant element of risk as a marketing decision, Nike was able to brand itself as a socially responsible company that was seeking to help break down barriers to participation in sports– in this case, racial barriers. Nike has an extended history of utilizing celebrity endorsements within their advertisements, including basketball legend Michael Jordan (Spence, 2009, p. 7). Nike's 1984 endorsement deal with Jordan proved to be one of the most successful ever to that point (Spence, 2009, p. 10). It was estimated to have increased its revenue by over one million dollars (Spence, 2009, p. 10). But the Kaepernick campaign was different. It was openly political in that it was framed around, and thus intended to shed light on, social inequality, while simultaneously improving their rapport with current and potential customers. They were even able to use the controversy to "freshen" their brand slogan of "Just Do It". Through "Dream Crazy", Nike re-identified itself (and thus its customers) with values of determination and grit. Natalie Welch, a former employee of Nike's advertising firm Wieden and Kennedy, once stated "that even in a primarily white-dominated industry, Wieden and Kennedy's early emphasis on diversity and inclusion helped foster creativity" (Restrepo, 2022, para. 17). It is important to note that "Dream Crazy" was not meant to be a radical departure from Nike's traditional brand messaging. Instead, the Kaepernick ad campaign was built on Nike's previous marketing decisions. Yet it took their impact to a higher, and much more overtly politicized level. Following the public's shifted reaction to "Dream Crazy", Nike stated that "the company stood against racism and discrimination in any form," and that it believed "in the power of sport to create an equal playing field for all" (Urvater & Vandegrift, 2021, para. 23).

"Dream Crazy" proved to be a groundbreaking advertising campaign, as it called for a fight against cultural hegemony. Hegemony as a concept was explored by the early twentieth-century Italian Marxist philosopher, Antonio Gramsci. He described it as the means by which the ruling political class secures consent to dominate others through cultural, political, and economic means (Bates, 1975). Cultural hegemony leads to, and builds upon, societal inequalities such as classism, racism, and patriarchy (Cole, 2020). According to a Gramscian analysis, those who were critical of Kaepernick and "Dream Crazy" were perpetuating hegemonic ideals, while Nike, through their implicit support of the Black Lives Matter movement, directly opposed them. Considering the fact that a large number of existing and potential Nike customers sided with social activism, the "Dream Crazy" campaign was brilliantly

conceived. It also had significant positive impacts on the brand. Most significantly of all, it suggested a turning point in the art of branding. 66 percent of respondents in a post- "Dream Crazy" Sprout Social survey indicated that they wanted brands to take public stands on social issues (Urvater & Vandegrift, 2021, para. 9). Even more dramatically, 80 percent of teenagers, a major portion of Nike's demographic, sided with the Black Lives Matter movement (Urvater & Vandegrift, 2021, para. 9). Because Nike appealed to their main demographic by outwardly supporting social justice activism, the advertisement not only won an Emmy in 2019 but also elevated Nike's top scores of customer recommendations, according to Bloomberg (Watson, 2020). This was very different from the conventional understanding of that point, which held that consumer brands should avoid partisan political controversy (Meyerson, 2021, para. 3).

Despite Nike's advertising being groundbreaking in terms of smashing traditional industry boundaries to advocate for social justice, one may wonder whether the Kaepernick ad was also a smartly calculated move, perhaps with ulterior motives behind it. Using Kaepernick as their celebrity spokesperson may have been a marketing decision that had Nike's corporate interests prioritized over any social justice responsibility concerns. Barry Sangha (2019) has argued that Nike has a history of profiting off Black popular culture, which implies a level of inauthenticity behind the whole campaign. In that characterization, "Dream Crazy" could be argued to be a textbook example of "racial capitalism". Nancy Leong (2013) describes this as the process of deriving social and economic value, typically through the exploitation of radicalized groups in society. The concept of racial capitalism connects value to racial identity, which implicitly has colonialist roots (Melamed, 2015, p. 77). That is why some say that Nike saw Kaepernick's fight for justice as a marketing opportunity, rather than an opportunity to show a true affinity for the cause (Munoz, 2019). The argument also holds that Nike recognized that their demographic included a significant number of individuals who were engaged in activism, which could have been an integral part of their decision to launch the campaign.

The whole conception of "Dream Crazy" was arguably contradictory to its premise. "Dream Crazy" was ostensibly targeted at the hegemony of sport. Yet hegemony and capitalism go hand in hand. As a vehicle of the capitalist system, Nike's principal motive behind advertising is to increase brand popularity, and through that, to increase profitability. It is not too cynical to argue that Nike and its sister companies are willing to jump on political bandwagons if it is felt

that that can increase market share. Journalist Dave Zirin puts it this way: “Nike has used the image of rebellion to sell its gear while stripping that rebellion of all its content” (Carrington & Boykoff, 2018, para. 8). This captures the contradictory nature of Nike recognizing the system of oppression they are fighting, yet at the same time, their business model may contribute to the social issues they are supposedly against.

Another contradictory aspect of Nike’s self-ascribed brand persona of “social awareness” is the fact that they themselves have come under fire for human rights violations. Nike has an extensive history of being accused of using sweatshops and sweated labour to make their products (New Idea, 2019, para. 2). They have also faced numerous allegations of gender discrimination (Carrington & Boykoff, 2018, para. 9). One example of this was in 2017 when presumably “Dream Crazy” was being conceived, there were reports of a Nike sweatshop incident in which 360 female Cambodian workers collapsed, due to exhaustion as a result of being overworked (McVeigh, 2017, para. 2). Furthermore, it was reported that at one point, Nike was on the verge of dropping their endorsement deal with Kaepernick because of his controversial reputation (Bain, 2018). Considering the fact Nike has had previous brand scandals for discrimination, and the fact Kaepernick was almost dropped prior to “Dream Crazy”, Nike’s corporate actions appear even more cynical and hypocritical.

In 2018, a survey found that 64 percent of consumers are driven by what is described as the “belief mindset”, in which they reward brands that are vocal about issues they are interested in (Edelman, 2018). Another Edelman survey found that the majority of millennials are belief-driven buyers and that 53 percent pay attention to how companies respond to political and social matters (Urvater & Vandegrift, 2021, para. 9). Following the success of “Dream Crazy”, other companies have emulated Nike. For example, in 2020, the makeup brand L’Oréal Paris shared an Instagram post expressing its support for the Black Lives Matter movement. The post consisted of a graphic stating, “Speaking Out is Worth It”, and the brand captioned the post by stating “L’Oréal Paris stands in solidarity with the Black community, and against injustice of any kind. #BlackLivesMatter” (Elan, 2020).

In comparison to Nike, L’Oréal Paris’s statement displayed aspects of “racial capitalism” and associated hypocrisy. L’Oréal Paris’ principal demographic consists of women aged 25-34

(SimilarWeb, 2022). This is a group that is often associated with concerns about racial inequities (Davis, 2019). Through L'Oréal's choice to be vocal about the Black Lives Matter movement, it can be argued that they attempted to utilize this to their advantage. Yet, L'Oréal was also hypocritical like Nike, for their public support of activism was arguably belied by their actions. For example, shortly after L'Oréal's post, Munroe Bergdorf, a Black transgender model, accused the brand of racial hypocrisy. In 2017, Bergdorf was fired by L'Oréal for speaking out against racism (Elan, 2020, para. 4). Bizarrely, given their ostensible stance, the company's assertion was that Bergdorf's actions did not "line up" with the brand's values (Elan, 2020, para. 5). Just as Nike has come under fire for discrimination in the past, so has L'Oréal Paris, yet both brands took public stances on social issues when it was convenient for their marketing strategies. Similarly, in 2017, Audi released a Super Bowl advertisement that advocated for equal gender pay, which garnered over 4 million views in two days (Lips, 2017, para. 6). Yet despite branding themselves with feminist messaging, Audi has no women on their executive team (Mahdawi, 2018, para. 7). This phenomenon, sometimes referred to as "woke-washing", has been demonstrated by countless other corporations, including Pepsi, and fashion brand Stylenanda (Mahdawi, 2018, para. 5). Although Nike's "Dream Crazy" and other campaigns like it outwardly supported the dismantling of oppression, these cases also display the short-term opportunism for brands to adopt an activist stance, solely driven by raising profits.

Through the analysis of "Dream Crazy", and similar cases that have followed it, it is evident that there has been a change in power dynamics within the marketing world. As noted in Bains' (2018) article, "Nike's Kaepernick ad is what happens when capitalism and activism collide", he argued that in the past corporations sat at the centre of the marketplace (para. 27). Changing values, demographic shifts, and the notion of "brand accountability" mean that now consumers occupy that position (Bain, 2018). If a brand executes activism successfully, it can prove to be extremely beneficial commercially, as exemplified by Nike's rising stock prices in the immediate aftermath of "Dream Crazy". But it is not always so simple; brand activism can backfire. As more corporations attempt to adopt a stance of brand activism, consumers are also using social media to hold them accountable to ensure that "authenticity" is a key factor behind their actions. An example of this is the 2020 "Pull Up or Shut Up" campaign, launched by Sharon Chuter, an executive in the beauty industry (Duarte, 2020). This campaign is only one of many, but it specifically targets "activist" beauty brands which are not transparent about the lack

of diversity amongst their employees. As consumers have shifted to being concerned with political and social activism, it can be beneficial for million-dollar corporations to take public stances on social issues such as racism or discrimination. To be perceived as a legitimate entity, it is integral that brands participate in tangible philanthropic activities and retain ethical labour laws in order to remain credible with their activism (Ganti, 2022). This in turn will not only raise company profits, but it will also ensure that a brand has a positive perception of its target demographic. In addition, visible brand activism demonstrates accountability, which is integral from an activist standpoint (Khan, 2021). For example, a 2018 Funterra Survey found that if a brand is not actively helping consumers improve their environmental and social footprint, it can run the risk of alienating 88 percent of its customers (Townsend, 2018). Despite its bottom-line success, “Dream Crazy” might have been even more profitable had Nike adopted (and lived by) ethical practices in every facet of their brand.

In conclusion, Nike’s “Dream Crazy" was both groundbreaking and hypocritical. Through the adoption of a polarizing stance by featuring a controversial figure like Colin Kaepernick during a time of significant social and political divide, Nike was walking a marketing tightrope. Nike wanted to be seen as a socially responsible brand that sided with racial justice. The messaging behind the advertisement campaign clearly resonated extremely well with Nike’s target demographic, as made evident by their boost in sales (Linnane, 2018). “Dream Crazy”, however, was inherently contradictory: an anti-establishment message being used to enhance corporate profit. Moreover, Nike is a corporation that has faced allegations of discrimination, yet it was aligned with an anti-discrimination message. Furthermore, the fact that Kaepernick was nearly dropped from his Nike endorsement shortly before the advertisement was released, and the fact that Nike had not demonstrated their efforts to support social justice movements prior to the campaign, raise concerns about what their true motives are. Some may have said in the past that there is no place for politics in sports. However, as the power in the market shifts from brand to consumer, and as more brands are expected to partake in activism, the lines between politics, sports, and making a profit will inevitably begin to blur. If billion-dollar corporations, and the media professionals working alongside them, choose to engage in activism, they should also be equally prepared to be held to a certain standard of authenticity by the consumers.

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Night and Day: An Investigation of the Difference in International Response to the Syrian Refugee Crisis vs. the Ukrainian Refugee Crisis Through the Theoretical Lens of Constructivism

Asha Nenshi Nathoo

Abstract

The world is currently facing the largest refugee crisis in the post-war era. Since the Syrian civil war began in 2011, millions of Syrians have been forced to leave their homes and seek safety in other states. A few years after the major influx of Syrian refugees, Russia's invasion of Ukraine prompted a Ukrainian refugee crisis. Close to a quarter of Ukraine's population had to seek refuge in Europe, North America, and beyond. Although these crises were similar in nature, the international response toward each of them differed greatly. Constructivism is a dominant theory in the field of communications & media studies and international relations that examines how social construction frames the way that individuals interpret the world around them. This paper examines some of the main tenets of constructivism and then utilizes constructivism to help understand the global response to the Syrian refugee crisis compared to the Ukrainian refugee crisis. Through employing a constructivist lens, this paper finds that both the social ideas around the identity of each group of refugees and the nature of each conflict played a large role in shaping the distinct response toward the Syrian refugee crisis compared to the Ukrainian refugee crisis. The paper concludes with a discussion of the limitations of constructivism and some potential further areas of research that this analysis may be applicable. With a better understanding of inequities that exist in dealing with refugee crises, global leaders and citizens are better equipped to deal with future humanitarian crises.

Keywords

Syria, Ukraine, social constructivism, international relations, framing, refugee crisis

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Russia's invasion of Ukraine has triggered one of the world's largest refugee crises. Over 8 million Ukrainians (approximately 19% of the country's population) have sought refuge in Europe, North America, and beyond (UNHCR, 2023). Although this situation has widely been referred to by officials as the largest humanitarian crisis the continent has faced in the modern era (Global Detention Project, 2022) - it must be noted that only a few years prior, many of the same states and institutions were challenged with the Syrian refugee crisis. Since the Syrian civil war began in 2011, more than 6.7 million Syrians (approximately 31% of the country's population) have been forced to flee their homes and seek safety as refugees in other states (UNHCR, 2022). While these two events may have been similar in nature, the policies instituted by states and international institutions, the services provided to the refugees, and the public opinion of each situation were vastly different. This paper aims to answer the question – how does constructivism help to understand the difference in the global response toward the Syrian refugee crisis vs. the Ukrainian refugee crisis? Constructivism can demonstrate how the dominant social ideas regarding the identity of refugees and the nature of conflict shaped the distinct response toward the Syrian refugee crisis compared to the Ukrainian refugee crisis.

This paper will begin by highlighting the core tenets of constructivism and analyzing the difference in the global response to the two crises. It will then examine these differences through the theoretical lens of constructivism. Constructivism is particularly useful in this specific analysis as it combines the disciplines of international relations and media studies to demonstrate how certain values and social perceptions can become institutionalized, then impact behaviour and policy.

Article 3 of the 1951 Refugee Convention declares that all member states, "shall apply the provisions of this Convention of refugees without discrimination as to race, religion, or country of origin" (UNHCR, 2023). It is important to note that while progress has been made toward this mandate, prejudice still exists. This paper seeks to reveal some of the underlying bias that prevails among individual states, intergovernmental organizations, nongovernmental organizations, and the media. A greater understanding of these global structural inequities and a clear example of how they have revealed themselves through refugee crises will better equip academics, scholars, world political leaders, and individual citizens to advocate for a more just international order.

Methodology: Core Tenets of the Constructivist Lens

Constructivism draws upon the fields of sociology, psychology, and history to perceive the world as socially constituted (Baylis et al., 2020; McCourt, 2022). For constructivists, human interaction and political practices stem from ideational factors rather than material ones (Finnemore & Sikkink, 2001). In this sense, knowledge, legitimacy, symbols, concepts, and categories are key in shaping how individuals interpret the world around them. Thus, constructivism has often been referred to as more of an approach than a theory that directs individuals to examine the processes and relationships that underpin political and social life (Adler, 2005). Nicholas Onuf (1989) was one of the first to introduce the term constructivism to international relations (IR) when he asserted that individuals exist not in a world given by nature, but rather in a "world of our making." Another original, acclaimed constructivist, Alexander Wendt (1992), famously wrote "Anarchy is what states make of it" (p. 395). In other words, with the absence of an international governing body, it is in the hands of states to characterize IR as either conflictual or cooperative (McCourt, 2022; Weber, 2013). Wendt claimed that IR was not only restricted to the fixed interests of rational actors responding to physical forces. His thought diverged from the prominent ideas of mainstream realism and liberalism because these theories did not allow for the "redefinitions of identity and interest" which are constructed by social practice (Wendt, 1992).

Adler (2005) argues that constructivism is a middle ground between mainstream IR theories and critical IR theories because it "is interested in understanding how the material, subjective, and intersubjective worlds interact in the social construction of reality" (p. 320). Another important facet of constructivism is its emphasis on the importance of non-state actors. It highlights that even the most permanent structures were once ideas conceived by individuals and then widely diffused until they were taken for granted (Karkalanov, 2016). Drawing on these constructivist principles, Benedict Anderson (2006) introduced the concept of the 'imagined community' which asserts that nations are created through a sense of belonging to a particular community. The norms, ethnicity, language, and other values of that community remain imagined because the majority of the people within the nation will never encounter one another (Anderson, 2006).

In his book, *The New Constructivism in International Relations*, McCourt (2022) notes that while constructivism explores the impact of norms on world politics, constructivism also needs to examine the creation of those norms in the first place. Constructivism tends to focus on qualitative rather than numerical methods of analysis (Bertucci et al., 2018). While some have argued that constructivism rejects scientific measurement and objectivity, a more nuanced investigation of the approach finds that it utilizes a precise form of interpretation to understand a particular situation, rather than merely explain it (Hollis & Smith, 1990).

Like many other IR theories, there are significant disagreements within constructivism itself. Andrew Abbott (2001) labels the social pattern that constructivists have fallen into as fractionation, where scholars have been sorted into fractal distinctions according to given criteria. For example, the United States (US) IR field tends to claim that constructivism is not scientific enough, while the United Kingdom (UK) field tends to claim that it is not critical enough (McDavid, 2022). Despite these criticisms and divisions, constructivism remains a useful approach to understanding why contemporary global political actors do what they do, as well as what motivates and justifies their behaviour (Karkalanov, 2016).

Review: Issue Analysis

This analysis will first outline the differences in treatment toward Syrian and Ukrainian refugees primarily by European states and intergovernmental organizations before employing constructivism to explain these differences. In 2014 and 2015, as Muslim Syrian refugees set foot into the continent – the European Union's (EU) Dublin Convention required the country that first registered an asylum seeker to administer the application and provide housing. This left refugees in continuous fear of being repatriated (De Witte, 2022). As EU countries disagreed about how to share the responsibilities of Syrian refugees and there was significant pushback from many Central European countries, governments across the continent tightened their migration policies (CBC, 2022). Among other policy changes, in 2016, the UK halted their child refugee program, Italy's chief of police called for the deportation of migrants, and Slovenia closed its border to all asylum seekers (Vonberg, 2017). Other studies found that in France and Switzerland, Muslim applicants were less likely to receive citizenship status than Christian applicants (Emeriau, 2022; Valentino et al., 2017). Only several hundred Syrians in France have

been able to receive citizenship over the last decade (Nafakh, 2022). Another major issue facing Syrian refugees in Europe is restrictive family reunification policies which often create feelings of uncertainty (UNHCR, 2021).

In contrast, when the Ukrainian refugee crisis began in 2022, the EU activated the Temporary Protection Directive. This provides Ukrainians fleeing the country and their immediate family with residence, health care, and the right to work and study in host EU countries for up to three years (Ghadakpour, 2022; De Witte, 2022). Syrian refugees never received this type of treatment and were not permitted to work until their asylum applications were approved. According to the Stanford Immigration Policy Lab, waiting one additional year for asylum decisions was shown to lower the probability of being employed by about 4.9% due to 'skills atrophy' (Esposito, 2022). During the first year of the Syrian refugee crisis, dealing with one million refugees was depicted as unprecedented and impossible, but in 2022, over two million refugees arrived in Europe within the course of two weeks, revealing the falsity of the claim that Europe could not handle that many refugees within months (Khalid, 2022). Furthermore, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) reported that Ukrainian refugees' immediate access to employment combined with their educational profile and existing social networks generally facilitated smooth integration into EU countries (OECD, 2022). Some other accommodations that have been provided include 'welcoming classes' in Germany that are assisted by Ukrainian refugee teachers, employment programs that match the skills of Ukrainian refugees to jobs in Poland, and mobile intercultural teams to provide Ukrainian refugees with social-emotional support in Austria (Karasapan, 2022).

Theoretical Analysis:

Identity of Refugees

Constructivism helps to understand how the difference in the dominant social perceptions between the Syrian refugees compared to the Ukrainian refugees shaped the global response toward them. Although the material conditions of both groups were similar – they were both humans facing violent atrocities in need of security and safety – distinct ideas were created about their identity. Following 9/11, the false 'all brown people and Muslims are terrorists' narrative spread across the Western world as a result of the tendency of the news to link Muslims with

terrorists, the responses to terrorism that disproportionately targeted Muslims, and the limited positive depiction of Muslims in media (Corbin, 2017; Khalid 2022). Yet, recent research has shown that the most significant terrorist threat in Europe and North America is likely to come from white supremacists (Jones et al., 2020) proving that this 'brown, Muslim terrorist' narrative is primarily socially constituted. As constructivism explains, this socially constituted narrative has led to certain political practices, particularly in response to Muslim Syrian refugees.

During the height of the Syrian refugee crisis, the Pew Research Centre study found that in eight of the ten European nations surveyed, half or more respondents believed that incoming refugees increased the likelihood of terrorism in their country (Wike et al., 2016). In comparison, a Migration Policy Centre study at the height of the Ukrainian refugee crisis found that 93% of survey respondents in eight European countries were supportive of accepting Ukrainian refugees (Drazanova & Geddes, 2022). Similar sentiments exist in Canada where an online Angus Reid Institute study found that four in five Canadians supported the government's plan to allow an unlimited number of Ukrainian refugees into the country, compared to only 39% of Canadians who supported the government's plan to resettle 25,000 Syrian refugees in Canada in 2015 (Sachdeva, 2022). In addition to race and religion, the social construct of gender also plays a role in attitudes toward refugees. The Syrian refugee group consisted of more men than the Ukrainian refugee group, as men aged 18-60 were prohibited from leaving Ukraine to defend their country (Karasapan, 2022). Male refugees tend to be depicted as more prone to crime, violence, and radicalization (Strickland, 2016). As a result, several Syrian refugee programs including Canada's, excluded single males (Barton, 2015).

This difference in societal attitudes toward Syrian and Ukrainian refugees has also been observed in the public rhetoric of politicians and world leaders. For example, in February 2022, when referring to Ukrainian refugees, Bulgarian Prime Minister, Kiril Petkov told journalists, "These people are intelligent. They are educated…This is not the refugee wave we have been used to…people with unclear pasts who could have been terrorists" (CBC, 2022). Likewise, in 2015, Hungarian Prime Minister, Viktor Orban described Syrian refugees as "poison" (Pearson, 2018) and then in 2022, went on to exclaim that Ukrainian refugees should be "welcomed by friends in Hungary" (Global Detention Project, 2022). All of this goes to show that the social construction of race, religion, and gender has led Europeans and North Americans to feel more

affinity with Ukrainian compared to Syrian refugees (Koning, 2022). This social construction of identity is one factor that has contributed to the material state and intergovernmental policies that have been more positive toward Ukrainian compared to Syrian refugees.

Portrayal of Conflict

Furthermore, how the Syrian civil war and the Russian invasion of Ukraine have been portrayed have influenced the treatment of refugees in both crises. The conflict in Syria has not received the same international media coverage as the invasion of Ukraine (Pietromachi, 2022). Since October 2021, US and UK governments have used intelligence to report daily on the build-up of Russian arms surrounding Ukraine (Mezzofiore, 2022). This attention, combined with the hundreds of international journalists who travelled to Ukraine in the months before the start of the war, along with the foreign correspondents who were forced to leave Russia due to press restrictions, allowed a strong, pro-Ukrainian narrative to build up across the Western world (Aslund, 2022). Yet, as the Syrian civil war gained momentum from 2011 to 2015, the Western world did not have the same understanding of the situation because no predominant international narrative of the conflict arose (CBC, 2022). Several journalists from Al-Jazeera, CBS News, NBC News, France's BFM TV, and Daily Telegraph have also been criticized for their description of Ukrainian refugees as civilized unlike their earlier stigmatization of Syrian refugees (Acu, 2022). For example, in his reporting about the Ukrainian crisis, NBC foreign news correspondent, Charlie D'Agata made a discriminatory comment when he stated "This isn't a place, with all due respect, like Iraq or Afghanistan…This is a relatively civilized, relatively European - I have to choose those words carefully too- city, where you wouldn't expect that or hope that is going to happen" (Rahman, 2022). Furthermore, France's BFM TV reporter, Philippe Corbe also took an orientalist approach when he asserted "We're not talking here about Syrians fleeing the bombing of the Syrian regime backed by Putin. We're talking about Europeans leaving in cars that look like ours to save their lives" (Harding, 2022). In this way, the media created a narrative that people should care about Ukrainian refugees simply because their lives were similar to Europeans.

Moreover, the majority of traditional media channels have illustrated Russia's invasion of Ukraine as an apparent right vs. wrong situation. Especially in Europe, it is increasingly clear-cut

that Putin is the common enemy ruling an authoritarian, repressive society while Ukraine, the democratic, free society, is obviously the innocent victim (Aslund, 2022; Koning, 2022). In contrast, it has become politically risky for states or intergovernmental organizations to commit to choosing a side in the Syrian war. One must choose between supporting the corrupt, inhumane, dictatorial government of Bashar Al-Assad or the extremist, jihadist, Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) – not to mention the countless other ethnic, religious, and foreign parties who are also involved in and have complicated the conflict (Esposito, 2022). The shortage of coverage of the Syrian civil conflict and the fact that it has not been framed to fit into the same distinct black-and-white boxes as the attacks on Ukraine has led to the lack of coherent, universal, humanitarian policies toward Syrian refugees.

Conclusion

The theory of constructivism can be used to explain how social constructions and resulting discourse have shaped the difference in the international response toward the Syrian compared to the Ukrainian refugee crisis. First, the way in which the identity of both groups of refugees was perceived created more international sympathy toward white, Christian, and Ukrainian refugees compared to racialized, Muslim, and Syrian refugees. Second, the dominant, explicit coverage of the Ukrainian conflict compared to the limited, ambiguous coverage of the Syrian conflict led to international policies that more favourably treated Ukrainian refugees. While constructivism is useful in understanding this situation, it does not account for a number of material factors. Some of the other material factors that another IR theory may consider include the proximity of Syria and Ukraine to the countries that were taking in refugees and the expected length of time that the refugees would remain in the host country. Constructivism also does not consider that the Ukrainian refugee crisis occurred several years following the Syrian refugee crisis, so the international system may have been able to learn from some of its mistakes.

While this paper examined the international response to refugees - perhaps some findings could also be extrapolated to investigate how international institutions have responded to other humanitarian crises in Global North vs. Global South countries in the modern era. It is also important to note that while Western and European policies generally favoured Ukrainian over Syrian refugees, many Ukrainian refugees (especially those of colour) also faced discrimination

(Mezler & Wolf, 2022). There are countless stories of the struggles faced by non-white students and migrant workers who did not fit the 'typical Ukrainian' image being stranded at borders, beaten by sticks, and denied access to accommodation and transportation (Luquerna, 2022). Although this paper generally examined the treatment of Syrian versus Ukrainian refugees, future research could also be conducted on the differences in treatment between refugees within the same crisis. With the recognition of these international biases, perhaps the international community can better reflect on how to use the response to the Ukrainian refugees as a model for future refugee responses, regardless of the social construction of the refugees and conflict.

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The People vs. Megan Thee Stallion: Anti-fandom, Spreadable Misogynoir, and Faux Fandom

Demilade Odusola

Abstract

This essay explores the online response to the shooting incident involving hip-hop artist, Megan Thee Stallion and her and fellow rapper Tory Lanez. In this essay, the theories of spreadable misogyny, by Suzanne Scott, and anti-fandom, by Jonathan Gray, are employed to examine the ways in which Stallion's anti-fans engaged in spreadable misogynoir towards her, particularly in the aftermath of the shooting. The essay analyzes the dynamics of online fandom, the reframing of Stallion as a culprit rather than a victim, and the erasure of her identity as a Black woman. It discusses the ways in which memes and commentary on the situation by fans, anti-fans, and other celebrities were used to minimize the Stallion-Lanez shooting and the effect that had on Stallion, other Black female celebrities and other Black women. The essay also highlights the complex position Black women are placed in when seeking justice for themselves. Furthermore, it investigates the emergence of a faux fandom for Lanez built on demonizing Stallion. Through an examination of social media reactions, memes, and public discourse, this essay highlights the pervasive misogynoir faced by Stallion and Black women in and outside the music industry and the challenges they encounter in asserting their autonomy and seeking justice for the harm done to them by their male counterparts.

Keywords

Misogynoir, Megan Thee Stallion, anti-fandom, spreadable misogyny

UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY
Department of Communication, Media and Film

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Hip-hop artist Megan Thee Stallion (real name Megan Pete) rose to fame in 2018 following the release of her album Tina Snow (Walters, 2021). She became a mainstream success with the 2020 album Good News. Known for hugely successful tracks like "Hot Girl Summer" (2019) and "WAP" (2020), Stallion's musical persona is one that celebrates Black women's sexual autonomy and empowerment. However, her "sexually charged lyrics" (Rajah, 2022, p. 59) have received mixed responses from audiences. Not surprisingly, some hip-hop fans have taken to social media over the years to criticize Stallion's risqué lyrics even though they feature comparably sexual themes to many popular male rappers. Like other women artists breaking into the male-dominated hip-hop genre, Stallion has been subjected to criticism by hip-hop fans and social media users alike for not being able to rap "for real." The concepts of situational authenticity, by Geoff Harkness, and hero vs. celebrity, by Robert van Krieken, will be used to explain such criticisms. Despite these criticisms, Stallion continues to use her music and rap to "set an example for all ladies to embrace their confidence and sexuality" (Gillam, 2022, para. 2). While Stallion's sex-positive music for women has been an oft-cited "problem" for her online critics, a shooting incident in 2020 became a new focal point for online "haters" that seek to undermine Stallion's worth as a Black female hip-hop artist. In this essay, I employ the theories of spreadable misogyny by Suzanne Scott, and anti-fandom, by Jonathan Gray, to illustrate how the shooting of Meg Thee Stallion perpetuated the narrative that Black women's safety is of less concern than their male and/or white counterparts.

Stallion was shot in July of 2020, but it was not until December 2022 that Tory Lanez was found guilty of shooting Stallion (Begert et al., 2022). Lanez, like Stallion, is a hip-hop artist who gained increased popularity following his viral Instagram lives during the quarantine period of the COVID-19 pandemic (Leftridge, 2020). During the two-year period of the Stallion-Lanez case, the situation had been subject to much speculation on social media and in the news and popular culture. When news reports of the situation first came about, Stallion was not forthcoming about being shot, claiming to have injured her foot by stepping on glass (Begert et al., 2022). When she confirmed that she had actually been shot, many social media users speculated that she had lied to protect Lanez, who had been a suspect in social media discourse since news of the shooting first broke. Stallion eventually clarified that she had held back from disclosing her shooting as she feared she, or other people involved in the shooting may endure police brutality, stating, "I didn’t want to see anybody die...I didn’t want to die" (Begert et al.,

2022, para. 23). She also noted increased tensions between police and Black people in the wake of George Floyd's murder less than two months earlier, as well as wanting to avoid being tagged a "snitch" (Begert et al., 2022, para. 24) as reasons for not opening up sooner. Stallion attempted to keep things under wrap away from the internet and only named Lanez as her shooter in August 2020 after his team was "going to these blogs lying…dragging it" ("Megan Thee Stallion claims," 2020). Eventually, Stallion admitted to trying to protect Lanez ("Megan Thee Stallion claims," 2020). The entire ordeal between Stallion and Lanez is a clear example of the lengths Black women often go to protect other people – and specifically Black men – even at their own expense. Still, public response was divided, with some fans supporting Stallion while other commenters used this as an opportunity to further demonize her.

According to Gray (2003), an anti-fan is someone who "strongly dislike[s] a given text or genre, considering it inane, stupid, morally bankrupt and/or aesthetic drivel" (p. 70). This definition of anti-fan is well-suited for the hip-hop fans and social media users who have expressed their dislike of Stallion because of her skill and ability, or lack thereof in their opinions, when it comes to rapping. This strong dislike of Stallion by her anti-fans has resulted in what Scott terms spreadable misogyny, or in Stallion's case, misogynoir, which refers to the intersection of gender and race-based discrimination faced by Black women.

In her analysis of the "idiot nerd girl" and "fake geek girl" memes, Scott (2019) argues that male-dominated online fan communities have used misogyny to limit women fans' access to certain fandoms. She refers to this as "spreadable misogyny" – that is, sexist media messages that are deliberately spread and circulated by (male) fans who have "position[ed] themselves as antibodies" to attack or fight against women who are seen as viruses (Scott, 2019, p. 84). According to Scott, spreadable misogyny is seen in the "idiot nerd girl" and "fake geek girl" memes, which are employed by "fan boys" to "protect" their fandom by keeping women out. In these online fandoms, women are deemed to be unknowledgeable "interlopers" who only want to attract attention from fan boys (Scott, 2019, p. 93). Spreadable misogyny excludes other fans, that is, female fans, based on their gender. As such, this article builds on Scott's work on spreadable misogyny as well as Gray's work on anti-fandom to explore the ways in which Stallion's anti-fans engaged in spreadable misogynoir following her precarious shooting in 2020 up until Lanez's guilty verdict in 2022.

Figure 1

Screenshot of compiled tweets on Stallion by Twitter users

(Bones, 2021; OTL, 2022; Tkd.xyz, 2022).

As alluded to earlier, Stallion has had many anti-fans since the inception of her career, with many claiming she is not a "real rapper" as displayed in the tweets shown in Figure 1 (Bones, 2021; OTL, 2022; Tkd.xyz, 2022). The archetypal definition of a real or authentic rapper, as underscored by Harkness (2012), is "a black male from the urban core, who is non-commercial, underground, highly skilled, and true to himself" (p. 288). In his article, Harkness (2012) goes on to discuss the idea of situational authenticity as one that occurs when an

individual negotiates "realness" by highlighting some characteristics of said realness or authenticity and minimizing other characteristics (p. 288). The boundaries of situational authenticity in rap are drawn or negotiated by rappers and their audiences as a way to determine insiders and outsiders (Harkness, 2012). Based on this concept, the archetypal definition of a "real rapper" is likely what the Twitter users employ when disqualifying Stallion as one.

Following the shooting with Lanez and his consequent guilty verdict, many claimed that their dislike of Stallion was because she was bringing "a Black man down" (Draggur, 2022; Rvzhxd, 2022). All of these examples and more can be found by searching "Megan Thee Stallion" alongside the words and phrases "trash," "real rap," "real rapper," and other similar words or phrases. In tweets such as the ones cited above, many hip-hop listeners express their displeasure with Stallion and her music. In accusing Stallion of attempting to tear a Black man down, these anti-fans put her in a complex position of either choosing to seek justice for the harm done to her or taking part in the downfall of a Black man by ruining his reputation and sending him to jail. This was an especially difficult situation for Stallion to have experienced given that the shooting had occurred just months after the murder of George Floyd and the consequent #BlackLivesMatter movement, which highlighted the oppression of Black people, and specifically Black men, at the hands of American police. This reframing of anti-fans' dislike of Stallion for being a traitor to her race and being on the side of the oppressor gave them a shield under which to hide while perpetuating spreadable misogynoir against her.

Aside from the opinions shared by social media users, what was also interesting to observe were the male hip-hop artists whose social media posts further fuelled Stallion's anti-fandom. Rapper, 50 Cent, for instance, posted a meme (Figure 2) that likened her situation to that of Jussie Smollett, an actor who lied about being a target and victim of racial and homophobic hate (Pop Crave, 2022). The rapper also made another meme post (Figure 3), making light of the situation when the shooting was first reported. In the meme, he references a scene from the movie Boyz N The Hood, where the character Ricky was shot. These memes posted by 50 Cent – and subsequently circulated by his online followers – exemplify spreadable misogynoir by showing how Black women's safety is not taken seriously by society. The use of memes to make light of such a critical situation, particularly by a fellow rapper in the music industry who had, ironically, built his public persona on having been shot, was appalling. It demonstrated the misogynoir that Stallion and many other Black women face where their safety

is not given the same level of concern as their male and/or white counterparts. Referring back to Scott's points, I argue that these memes that made fun of and accused Stallion of lying about her situation also served as additional evidence of anti-fans' dislike of Stallion and why she could not be considered a "real" artist in the Hip-Hop industry – which is notably male-dominated. These memes were a way for anti-fans to try to push Stallion and her majority-female fanbase out of Hip-Hop.

Figure 2

Screenshot of meme-tweet by rapper, 50 Cent

(Pop Crave, 2022).

Figure 3

Screenshot of meme posted by 50 Cent on Instagram

(Ivey, 2020)

Apart from minimizing Stallion's experiences and overall causing her distress, the reframing of the situation to antagonize Stallion bore a consequence of a "faux fandom" for Lanez that was built on demonizing a victim of assault. I use the term faux fandom because Lanez's celebrity expanded in the wake of his shooting Stallion. Lanez was "not a household name" before the shooting and his case involving Stallion (Begert et al., 2022). While a guilty verdict was likely not desired by Lanez, his popularity has increased since the ordeal. Following the shooting, Lanez's profile as a celebrity rose. In May 2020, prior to the shooting, Lanez was reported to have had 9.2 million followers on Instagram (Leftridge, 2020). However, Lanez gained almost 3 million followers on Instagram, with a current follower count of 11.9 million (Lanez, n.d.), even after the guilty verdict. He has also garnered support from fans and the entertainment industry, like Joe Budden (Begert et al., 2022). Evidently, being found guilty of shooting at a Black woman – even as a celebrity – is not enough for a (Black) male artist to lose support. For the most part, support for Lanez has not been due to fans' genuine appreciation of

his work as an artist. Instead, his fame is founded on notoriety – an inferior type of renown based on media discourse, rather than talent (Boorstin as quoted in van Krieken, 2018, p. 11). Lanez's newfound fame is also an illustration of van Krieken's (2018) argument that celebrity is ordinal and a sliding scale: Lanez has become more of a celebrity since reports of Stallion's shooting. Ultimately, the assault on Stallion granted Lanez a faux fandom predicated on misogynoir.

Building off of Scott's work, in addition to the "humorous" memes circulated by 50 Cent, spreadable misogynoir was also evident in other high-profile artists' social media comments that minimized Stallion's experience. Canadian-born rapper, Drake, alluded that Stallion had lied about getting shot in a song he released in 2022 titled *Circo Loco* (George, 2022). As well, Joe Budden a well-known podcaster (and former rapper), used The Joe Budden Podcast as a platform to discuss his perspective on the Stallion-Lanez shooting during the assault trial (George, 2022). Budden's remarks discredited Stallion, targeting her character in ad hominem attacks. He stated that he had witnessed Stallion do "horrible things" to people he knew and that "[y]ou can't just treat my friends…a certain way" (George, 2022; Meara, 2022). While Budden and 50 Cent did eventually issue public apologies, their decisions – as colleagues of both Stallion and Lanez – to minimize and trivialize Stallion's shooting while it was still a hot topic in media, (likely) knowing the appeal it would have to anti-fans, can be seen as a deliberate attempt to reframe Stallion as the culprit rather than the victim. The misogynoir evident in public discourse surrounding Lanez's shooting of Stallion reframed her as unbelievable, as harming a Black man and, thus, as complicit in white supremacy.

This reframing can be explained by van Krieken's (2018) idea of the hero versus celebrity and the concept of celebrity as ordinal. In his article, van Krieken (2018) describes the hero as someone who is authentic and has "deep" achievements, whereas a celebrity is synthetic, has "shallow" achievements, and is regarded as being "famous for being famous" (pp. 10-11). Additionally, van Krieken (2018) proposes that the framing of celebrity has an "ordinal quality rather than a nominal category" (p. 12). The ordinal quality of celebrity means that one is not either a celebrity or not, but rather "more or less of a celebrity" (van Krieken, 2018, p. 12). In this sense, celebrity is a sliding scale along which individuals move. These ideas of hero vs celebrity and the ordinality of celebrity are exemplified in Stallion's case. I argue that many anti-fans view of Stallion as "trash" or not a "real rapper" arise based on their view of Stallion as a celebrity and not a hero. In addition to that, Stallion's identity as a Black woman and her

position on the celebrity scale compared to other celebrities – including other Black women like Beyoncé and Rihanna, who are inarguably bigger celebrities or even heroes – affords anti-fans the opportunity to trivialize her shooting and reframe her from victim to culprit.

The reframing of Stallion as someone trying to "bring a Black man down" not only dismisses her experience as the victim of a shooting, but also erases her identity as a Black woman. In a now-deleted tweet reposted by another user, a social media user took to Twitter to say "[w]e really failed as a black community bc why we let the white law get involved in a drunk fight that coulda been talked out" (Natalie, 2022). As other Twitter users pointed out, this tweet and others like it harmfully reconstruct the situation and downplay the impacts it had for the real victim, Stallion. By calling the shooting a "drunk fight", Stallion's experiences are trivialized, and her accounts of the event are called into question. It also downplays what justice for Stallion should look like as something to be "talked out" between people instead of the trial with a guilty verdict. As aforementioned, it erases Stallion's Blackness and ostracizes her from the Black community as someone plotting against the downfall of the community by rightfully seeking justice against a guilty Black man.

Overall, it is clear that online anti-fandoms facilitated the spread of "misogynoir" in response to Lanez's assault on Stallion. This anti-fandom consequentially resulted in a faux fandom for Lanez – her shooter – which is also based on misogynoir. Stallion's identity as a Black woman, coupled with her confident sexuality, has been the contention of many people for a while. As such, the shooting gave anti-fans a mask under which to engage in spreadable misogynoir towards her. Moreover, the memes were harmful to not only Stallion (and her mental health) but also to all the Black women who witnessed other people joke about the harm that was done to someone just like them.

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Dungeons and Dragons and the Critical Failure
A Thematic Analysis of the TTRPG Communities Reception of the Leaked OGL 1.1

Luke Pye

Abstract

In the field of communication, there has been a distinct lack of a focus on table-top roleplaying games (TTRPGs), most notably Dungeons and Dragons. Research on this topic could provide a deeper insight into how a shared hobby can help large groups organize meaningful action in response to perceived threats to their ways of life. In the wake of the January 2023 Open Gaming Licence (OGL) Leak, hobby game company Wizards of the Coast, publisher of Dungeons and Dragons, has seen unprecedented drops in sales and customer retention. This report uses thematic analysis to find common patterns and themes present in the reporting of the OGL leak from both traditional media outlets, as well as creators on TikTok. Using the themes found in these sources, the sentiments of the respective comment sections have been recorded to find what effect the actions of Wizards of the Coast during this crisis has had on their brand and the impact it may have on the TTRPG community. The research concluded that many customers within the Dungeons and Dragons community had already harboured negative views of Wizards of the Coast regarding previous business practices and found the leaked OGL was the straw that broke the camel's back. This sentiment led to a substantial portion of the Dungeons and Dragons community cancelling subscriptions to D&D Beyond, a Wizards of the Coast service, and moving their buying power to other competitors within the TTRPG community. This has begun a shift towards the dethroning of Wizards of the Coast and Dungeons and Dragons as the top of an RPG monolith and a renaissance of independently published TTRPGs.

Keywords

Thematic Analysis, audience reception, audience perception, TTRPGs, role playing games, Dungeons and Dragons, user generated content, Wizards of the Coast

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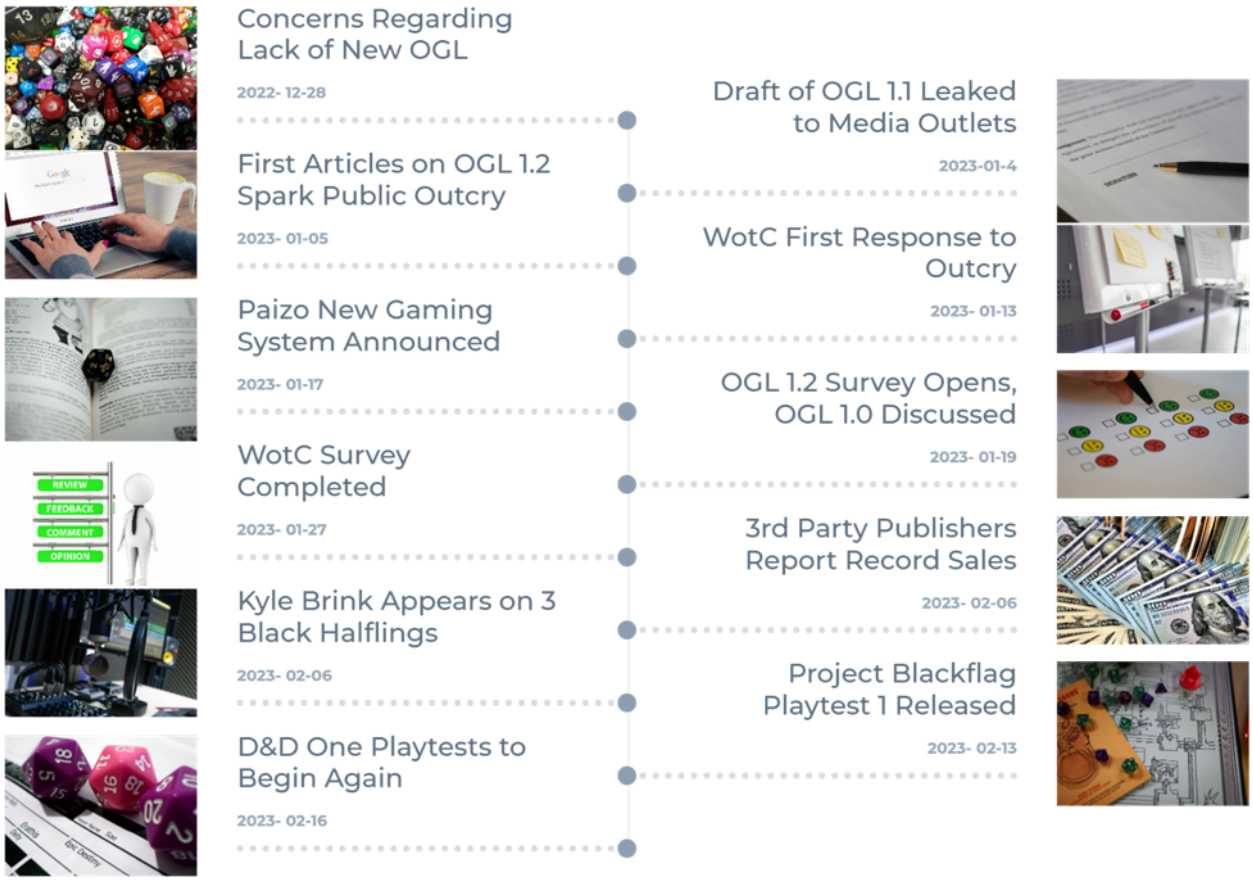
Figure 1

Timeline of OGL 1.1 Fiasco



Note. Abbreviations include, OGL = Open Gaming License, WotC = Wizards of the Coast. A playtest refers to the process of sending sections of the game to select community members to test the contents to find any issues with the content for the sake of balancing and debugging the game system before release.

Research Objective

When I started my research into the January 2023 leak of Wizards of the Coast's (WotC) new Open Gaming License, it was because I had seen the initial reaction when it was first leaked on TikTok and had, along with the community surrounding table-top roleplaying games (TTRPGs), a strong reaction to what seemed like the end of the hobby. As the situation developed, I started to see that the actual wording of the document, as well as what it meant from

a legal standpoint, was being sensationalized greatly by people posting on TikTok which led me to want to find out what was going on and if the facts surrounding this incident could overcome the hype that had been building and increasing the vitriol the community was directing towards WotC. So, I decided to look deeper and research this issue further.

I aim to further our understanding of the effect an audience's perception and reaction to changes regarding the intellectual property they are tied to through both the themes and patterns present in the selected samples, but also through the comment sections present within the samples. By looking at not only the reactions from media outlets and prominent content creators, but also the response from their community, I will get a more holistic idea of how communities/subcultures respond to perceived changes within their cultural artifacts. This study aims to provide a thematic analysis of the WotC OGL 1.1 leak and how this incident has affected the way the D&D community and the TTRPG community at large engage with D&D content. This is relevant to the field of COMS because it will provide an underexamined perspective on how changes in the commodification, digitization, and licensing of a hobby like D&D can lead to community action in pursuit of social/corporate change.

Specifically, I looked at how the D&D community through media outlets, content creators, and commenters view themes surrounding the commodification of D&D as a brand that was reported by WotC to be "under-monetized." (Codega, 2022), the trend towards digitalization that seems inevitable through both One D&D and changes in the OGL, and the perception of community action as a positive/negative reaction to a leaked document. Along with these three themes, I also collected the overall reaction of the comment sections attached to the samples regarding the new versions of the OGL, as well as the sentiments commenters have concerning WotC as a company and subsidiary of Hasbro. I believe this will also be relevant in future research into what communication decisions/crisis management styles would be more effective in maintaining customer retention for a brand. This is why my research question is as follows:

> *Through the analysis of the events surrounding the OGL 1.1 leak, can we see if the public's perception of the commodification, digitalization, and licensing restrictions of D&D has altered Wizards of the Coast's brand image?*

By looking at these themes, I believe that I will find that the actions of WotC have led a substantial portion of their customer base/audience to move towards other TTRPGs that are analogous to D&D, or at least similar styles of RPGs. This would be because they find the proposed OGL to be blatantly disrespectful to creators/publishers who have worked hard creating unique content that has helped make D&D as popular as it is today. This kind of behaviour can be seen across many different IPs and corporations who faced a financial emergency due to a lack of communication with their audiences and not listening to what those audiences are looking for.

Literature Review

Since the early aughts, tabletop roleplaying games (TTRPGs) have increased in popularity, seizing the imagination of people of all ages due to the increased access of Web 2.0. Now in 2023, TTRPGs have become so culturally ingrained that publishers are moving to online content alongside merchandise, actual-play podcasts, and television shows. As D&D gained mainstream popularity after the WotC acquisition of TSR Publishing and D&D, they saw an opportunity for free advertising and the subsuming of the competition through the OGL 1.0 in the 00s (White, 2018). This allowed the D&D community and independent publishers to create and distribute their own content using elements from D&D with the requirements that the added content be labelled D&D compatible and that 50% of profits go to WotC and OneBookShelf. (Lemon, 2016)

In 2022, with the announcement of One D&D (what would have been the sixth edition), WotC expressed intent to move the publishing of new books and content to the digital realm and have it include new game rules that would be backwards compatible with the fifth edition. As the D&D community felt anxiety at this new proposed direction, a new OGL (1.1) was leaked by i09, a popular media outlet. It would reduce the publisher's/creator's rights to content generated, proposed a royalty structure that was unfavourable to creators, and a subscription pyramid for access to added content that would traditionally be a one-time investment as a rulebook. In response, the D&D community mobilized by cancelling subscriptions to D&D Beyond and supporting other systems like Pathfinder to force WotC to reconsider its positioning.

This literature review seeks to connect previous research on the effects of commodification, digitalization, and restrictive licensing on other TTRPGs and IPs to see if they had the same effect that the 2023 OGL incident has had on the D&D community. In today's cultural landscape, TTRPGs are increasingly becoming a major source of revenue for publishers beyond the sale of the core books into products such as real-play podcasts and merchandise. This has led to a trend towards the commodification of a hobby that previously prided itself on the free distribution of ideas, which has led to discontent within the community. An example of this situation can be seen with the Swedish gaming company RiotMinds, who in 2010 announced on their own discussion forums that they were working on 'the bomb' (Thorén, 2020). This turned out to be a full digitalization of their content, including publishing, which immediately created a divide between the company and its audience and led RiotMinds to the brink of bankruptcy until they managed to crowdfund enough money to start funding physical products again. This could have worked if it were implemented over time rather than all at once, the final nail in the coffin was the paywall that RiotMinds placed between their audience and the content that was previously accessible. In this case, digitalization was considered a negative thing because the audience considered it a threat to their access and enjoyment of their hobby, which was blatantly being commodified to obtain the maximum amount of money from their consumer base.

Despite the previous example, the commodification of TTRPGs is not an inherently negative thing, as can be seen by Critical Role, a real play podcast that was popularized by its use of D&D and, in return, ended up popularizing D&D for a whole new generation of post-2000 players. Critical Role eventually accepted sponsorships, most notably WotC, which led to the podcast becoming commodified further through the introduction of unique merchandise, subscription rewards, and their own D&D setting, Tal'Dorei, which canonized the podcast into D&D itself. Between August 2019 and October 2021, Critical Role generated approximately 9.6 million USD in revenue through these revenue streams (Švelch, 2022), of which approximately 50% went to WotC. This is the kind of revenue that WotC could threaten by implementing restrictive licensing, as Critical Role currently is not beholden to continue using the D&D system for their podcast and has previously done short campaigns using other systems for guest stars, which maintained the same number of viewers which shows that their fan-base will follow them to whatever system they choose. Beyond this kind of community action, Jenkins observed that

> …fans have gained visibility as they have deployed the web for community building, intellectual exchange, cultural distribution, and media activism. Some sectors of the media industries have embraced active audiences as an extension of their marketing power, have sought greater feedback from their fans, and have incorporated viewer-generated content into their design processes. (Jenkins, 2002)

Without realizing it fully, WotC has set up its own audience as a major component of their content and revenue generation which could lend them power over decisions made at a corporate level due to their increased buying power.

Methodology

For this report I decided to use a qualitative methodology in the form of a deductive thematic analysis so that I could explore themes I saw present in my initial reading of the samples. This was to see if the discontent from the D&D community regarding the OGL has been caused by commodification, digitalization, and restrictive licensing policies. I explored this through the collection and analysis of both articles from traditional media outlets and TikToks made by creators within the community along with general sentiment responses from their comment sections. For the content of the samples, I primarily used semantic coding to look more so at what the content/creators were saying rather than purely implicit meanings.

In the preliminary stages of my data collection, I started by collecting articles that either explicitly explained the history of the OGL leak, which had already been resolved by the time of collection or was firsthand reporting on major events surrounding the OGL leak as it was happening. I used this initial data to create a comprehensive timeline of events, represented by Figure 1 at the beginning of the report, to both inform my data collection by giving me a range of time to look at as well as provide context on the various events for the sake of both me and you the reader. I then looked at articles from within the selected time range (Dec 2022 – Mar 2023) to find more context on the major events as well as minor events that provide context for how smaller publishers reacted, were affected, and responded to the events as they unfolded. As I started to understand the events as told by these media outlets, I started collecting my secondary data, the TikToks.

In my collecting of TikToks, I wanted to avoid selection bias, as I frequently use TikTok to look at TTRPG content, so I started collecting by looking up the hashtags #OGL, #OGLLEAK, #OPENDND, and #WOTC and selected TikToks by starting at the first results and working my way down. I saved the TikToks that pertained to the leak and had publish dates that coincided with events on my timeline to ensure that the reactions from both the creators and comment sections were timely and without the gift of hindsight. I believed these selections would give me the most comprehensive data as it would give me reactions that are more detailed and may provide a more honest opinion as most independent creators have no monetary incentive to be biased in the reporting of the events.

To code both datasets, I used a program called NVivo, which is used for qualitative research, to find the most common terms used textually in the articles and the transcripts of the TikToks. This allowed me to see which terms popped up most frequently and where they popped up, which made the coding process overall a lot easier for this section of data collection and confirmed that they had mentioned commodification and licensing issues a lot, along with referencing the OGL and WotC directly. Surprisingly, I found very little confirming my initial observation of digitalization as a theme, but I decided to keep it in as it was one of my preconceptions I wanted to explore. My final surprise was the presence of community action as a recurring theme in the data, which expressed itself as large collective actions like mass-cancelling D&D Beyond subscriptions and supporting independent publishers, or as smaller community action like spreading word that D&D Beyond users should remember to export any user-generated content like character sheets or world-building documents.

This helped me develop my categories for collecting the sentiments of the comment sections through both my preconceptions and patterns found in the data itself which ended up finalized as **OGL**, **Commodification**, **WotC**, **Digitalization**, and **Community Action**. A special category, **Neutral**, was added as I collected my next dataset as I was encountering a decent number of comments in my samples that did not pertain to any of my selected subjects or themes. So, when I started recollecting my tertiary data, I included these outlying comments in the neutral category by themselves without any parameters so the reader would be able to see the amount of discourse in the comment sections that did not address the subjects or themes selected for this dataset. Then, I collected the sentiment reactions of the comment sections of both

datasets by reviewing a set number of comments for each sample based on the average amount of comments per sample in each dataset, 50 for TikToks and 15 for articles. The parameters I selected to represent the sentiment on my chosen themes were **Positive**, **Negative,** and **Neutral**, which would allow me to record the positionality of each comment for each category.

Findings

After coding each dataset and recording the sentiments present in their comment sections regarding the OGL, commodification, WotC, Digitalization, and Community action, I found that some of my preconceptions had proved to be present in the data collected, while others proved to be far different than previously imagined. My initial reaction to the samples was that the community seemed to be worried primarily about creator's rights to their work and the fear that digitalization would lead to WotC using licensing policy changes to legally acquire these unique creations without having to compensate or recognize the original creator. As I did more digging, however, I found that while there was concern over creator's rights, there was less fear surrounding the digitalization of D&D and more support for it rather than condemnation from the community.

This was because digitalization had made D&D more accessible during the pandemic through the online mediation of D&D through virtual chatting services and Virtual Tabletop Simulators (VTTS). Another boon of digital accessibility is that having D&D as a digital product makes it readily accessible to the differently abled, whether it's the ability to have content read aloud for the visually impaired or having the content reformatted for those with dyslexia and dyscalculia. For these reasons, I left digitalization in the datasets despite very little feeling about the data one way or another within the community because it is important to show that digitalization can lead to a more accessible D&D, even if that is not the primary focus of this report.

Media Outlet Response

In selecting my sample base to both create Figure 1 and provide myself with deeper context regarding the entire series of events, the traditional media outlets were almost split in positionality on a few of the themes and very one-sided on others. The samples had a focus on

the issue of commodification as ultimately a negative thing in the context of the changes that the OGL would bring. For example, Montgomery likened WotC to a 'gold-hungry dragon' that was ultimately slayed by the collective action of the D&D community and finished their article, "The diverse party of adventurers came together and slew the gold-hungry dragon — this time. Now they're organizing to ensure they never find themselves trapped in the dragon's clutches again." (Montgomery, 2023)

Figure 2

Article sample word bubble.

Note. A word bubble was generated using the 250 most frequent words found within the dataset. Common contractions and conjunctives were excluded to better represent the data.

This sentiment, while not always so black-and-white about the behaviour of WotC, is echoed across all the datasets, even when the samples try to either justify the actions of WotC or support them directly. Specifically, Codega had defended WotC in December 2022 when the first

rumblings of a new OGL were being felt in the community. (Codega, 2022) Codega eventually decried WotC for not staying true to their previous statement that the OGL would stay in effect for One D&D as it had for the fifth edition. (Codega, 2023a)

The only other theme that was as unanimous as the negative response to D&D's commodification was community action. Every article lauded the sheer force of will the D&D community mustered over the OGL changes, which resulted in various forms of collective action like the mass-cancellation of D&D Beyond subscriptions, drafting and signing an open letter to WotC and Hasbro, using their buying power to support other independent publishers, and smaller acts of support within the community. The bottom line seems to be: After a fan-led campaign to cancel D&D Beyond subscriptions went viral, it sent a message to WotC and Hasbro higher-ups. Codega (2023b) herself said that the immediate financial consequences of subscription cancellations were the main thing that forced them to respond because of a "provable impact" on their bottom line.

Along with this attention-grabbing tactic, D&D community members that work in legal professions worked with the community at large to draft a letter to WotC demanding that the OGL 1.1 be retracted and appealed to the community to boycott WotC until the OGL has been changed. In response, 77 407 community members have signed it as of the writing of this report (Downs, 2023). This kind of community response is reflected by the samples themselves, with various articles expressing that WotC is too little too late, having broken the trust of the community (Plante, 2023) and that the OGL 1.0 was a 'masterstroke of community support'. (Evans-Thirlwell, 2023) Kyle Brink, executive producer of D&D at WotC, expressed in an interview that WotC was not receiving the respect it deserved (Hall, 2023d). It is apparent in the response from media outlets and the community that respect is a two-way street, and with the OGL 1.1, WotC is not respecting their community.

While all this community action was taking place, the media outlets I sampled noticed that all these individuals who were 'fleeing D&D and WotC' (Hall, 2023a) were flocking to TTRPGs made by independent publishers. These publishers themselves were taking their own actions in response to the OGL leak, such as announcing project Black Flag and the Open RPG Creative license (ORC) (Russell, 2023). These decisions were being funded by community

members who had started using their buying power to support these projects and publishers, doubling most of these publishers' sales and, in Paizo's case, buying up eight months of product in January 2023 alone. (Hall, 2023c) In the end, the community action worked and convinced WotC to move the OGL and the System Reference Document (SRD) into the Creative Commons, permanently making D&D accessible to the community and publishers. (Hall, 2023b)

Content Creator Response

Figure 3

TikTok sample word bubble.

Note. Word bubble was generated using the 150 most frequent words found within the dataset. Common contractions and conjunctives were excluded to better represent the data. This figure used fewer words than Figure 2 because this dataset contained significantly fewer words than the first dataset.

While traditional media outlets seemed to present a more measured response giving WotC the benefit of the doubt, content creators went in the other direction and immediately showed their disdain for the proposed OGL 1.1 as well as for the response to community concerns (or seemingly lack thereof). Like the previous data set, content creators on TikTok had a big focus on the commodification of D&D but differed in that they also placed a great emphasis on community action by directly providing a call to action for their audiences rather than just acknowledging the efforts of others within the community. This can be seen in the Touchstone_Dice (2023) sample, where the video stitches two other clips, one from the Critical Role TikTok and one from RollForCombat, and expresses that WotC relies on their recurring D&D Beyond subscriptions to make a profit on their online services. This means that by cancelling, loyal long-time users of D&D Beyond have the power to force WotC and Hasbro to reconsider the OGL to save their biggest revenue stream.

The other side of community action, within TikTok more specifically, is the work being done to fight misinformation about what the OGL means for content creators and the community. This is, in part, since the OGL 1.1 was leaked, which makes it difficult to verify if the rumours were true or if the leak was being misread and used to make sensationalized, uninformed content. SideQuests Was one such creator who made TikToks early on in January 2023 that debunked rumours that were either unfounded or misunderstood and explained what the old OGL said, what the leaked OGL 1.1 said, and what it meant from the perspective of an independent publisher who has used the OGL previously. (SideQuests, 2023a)

Beyond community action, content creators directly expressed their disdain for WotC directly rather than having to remain ‘professional’ like journalists need to when reporting on events. This has given the community the ability to, in no uncertain terms, state how they feel about OGL, WotC, and Hasbro without the fear of losing credibility in the newsroom. This allows the community to provide an honest reaction that generally is echoed by a content creator’s following, which usually has similar values to their chosen creators. This can be seen in scene_four’s video on what the OGL is, where he said,

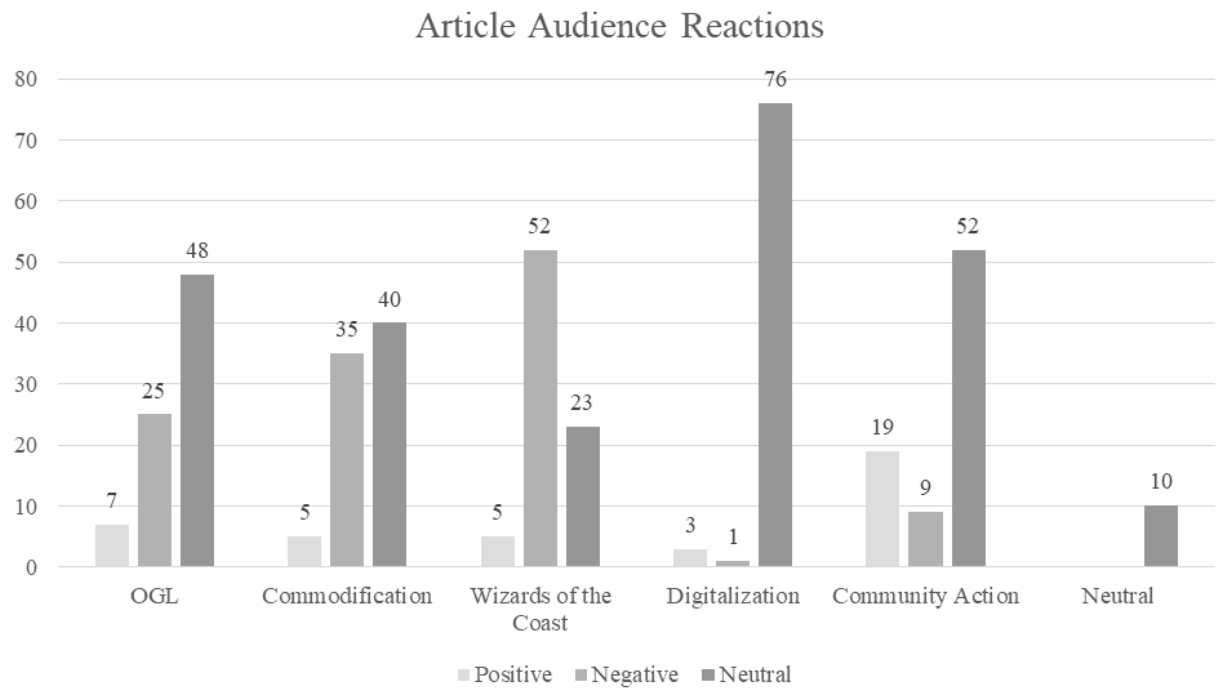
> I'm not qualified to comment on the changes, but it does look like a garden variety case of corporate greed from Hasbro and Wizards of the Coast. The vibrancy and diversity of

> the TTRPG sphere emerges from the free exchange of ideas, and I'll continue to support the creators who champion that. (scene_four, 2023)

We can see that in many ways, both datasets share most of the same sentiments and are expressed in the fundamentally diverse ways that exist due to the difference in medium.

Commentor Sentiment Response

Figure 3



Note. The above table is a representation of the data presented in Table 1. This chart adds all the positive, negative, and neutral values of every article sample together within each theme and represents its total sum. In total 90 comments were analyzed; any sample that did not have an open comment section was not included in this chart. The neutral column only has one bar to represent the total amount of comments encountered within samples that did not pertain to the selected themes and thus did not affect the rest of the data.

After I had collected my data for both traditional media outlets and content creators, I went into the comment sections to see if my previous assumption that a media outlet's/content creator's audience does tend to generally have similar views as their chosen media. There was a vibrant commenting culture within TikTok (see Table 1) that incentivises content creators to both engage with their audience directly and encourage discussion under their TikToks to 'boost their profiles. On the other hand, of the article samples I reviewed, only five had open comment sections (see Table 2) that were semi-easy to access, and the rest did not have any discernable platform for their audience to directly engage with their content. This can be attributed to the culture surrounding traditional media, where audience engagement is mostly considered when selecting the media's content.

Table 1

Article Comment Section Reactions to Selected Themes

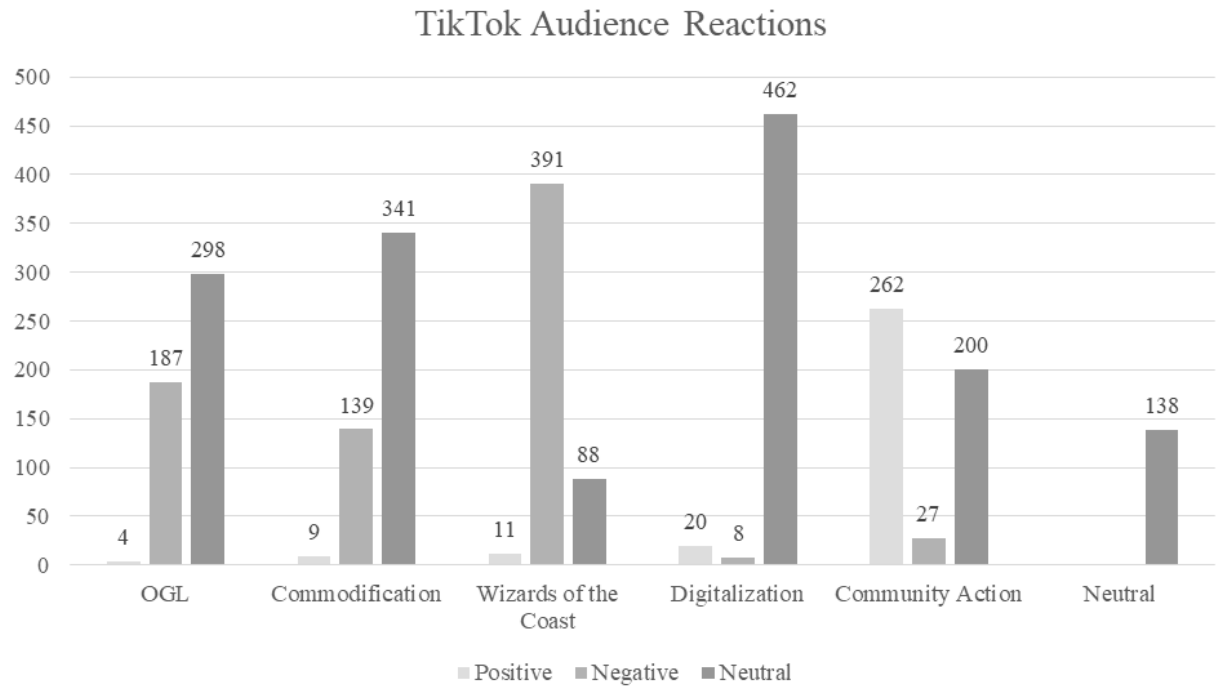
Articles	OGL Pos/Neg/Neu	Commodification Pos/Neg/Neu	WotC Pos/Neg/Neu	Digitalization Pos/Neg/Neu	Community Action Pos/Neg/Neu	Neutral
Brink, 2023	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Codega, 2022	1/6/7	2/5/7	2/6/6	0/1/13	0/2/12	1
Codega, 2023	4/3/8	1/0/14	1/4/10	0/0/15	0/2/14	0
Evans-Thirlwell, 2023	0/10/3	0/10/3	0/11/2	0/0/13	5/3/4	2
Hall, 2023a	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

Hall, 2023b	2/4/8	2/6/6	2/10/2	2/0/12	4/1/9	1
Hall, 2023c	0/2/10	0/3/9	0/9/3	1/0/11	10/1/1	3
Hall, 2023d	0/0/12	0/11/1	0/12/0	0/0/12	0/0/12	3
Law, 2023	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
McCauley, 2023	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Montgomery, 2023	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Plante, 2023	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Russell, 2023	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

Note: The titles for the sample articles were too long to put into the tables directly, so the in-text citations have been used instead for readability. The codes Pos/Neg/Neu stand for Positive reaction, Negative Reaction, and Neutral Reaction. This was done to provide the data for every article used in one table in a readable manner. It is also worth noting that most of the sampled articles did not have an in-website comment section, so they have been recorded as N/A, while the rest will be coded. This will be done to provide a full view of the audience accessibility and positionality on these media websites so they can be compared to the TikTok samples. Due to each article having a varying number of comments, only the first fifteen comments listed under each video at the time of collection were used to try to provide an equal basis for analysis. The process for selecting comments for this data was to use only primary comments and only visible replies to avoid entering a biased echo chamber surrounding the primary comment. I also recorded the reaction of each comment to each of the categories to get a more intersectional perspective on the comment sections' positionality regarding these themes and any comments that didn't pertain to any of the selected themes were placed in the neutral column.

I found that in the TikTok samples, out of all the selected themes and subjects, they were the most unanimous on digitalization and their opinion of WotC during the incident. For digitalization, as talked about earlier, the dataset was mostly unconcerned about it as an issue but had a larger response in support of it than I initially thought due to fear of losing accessibility gained over the pandemic. As for WotC, the vitriol seen in the previous datasets is emphasized here where comments analyzed had a negative reaction to WotC and their brand, separate from D&D, that hadn't died away after the announcement to place D&D in the creative commons. This is due to the loss of trust within the D&D community.

Figure 4



Note. The above table is a representation of the data presented in Table 2. This chart adds all the positive, negative, and neutral values of every TikTok sample together within each theme and represents its total sum. In total 628 comments were analyzed; any sample that did not have an open comment section was not included in this chart. The neutral column only has one bar to represent the total amount of comments encountered within samples that did not pertain to the selected themes and thus did not affect the rest of the data.

Along with that distrust came complete disgust at the commodification perceived by the community regarding the attempt to institute royalty and subscription structures that would be directly affecting these commentors. The same sentiments regarding the perception of WotC as nothing more than a power-hungry corporation are shared between the comment sections of both datasets. The biggest split between the comment sections of both datasets is that the article comment sections seemed to have more comments that either did not pertain to the content of the article or were more argumentative within the comment section than was observed in the TikTok comment sections. This is due to a lack of direct interaction from the writers of these articles, so there is less discourse focused on the content and more focused on tangential conversations.

Table 2

TikTok Comment Section Reactions to Selected Themes

TikTok Videos	OGL Pos/Neg/Neu	Commodification Pos/Neg/Neu	WotC Pos/Neg/Neu	Digitalization Pos/Neg/Neu	Community Action Pos/Neg/Neu	Neutral
Beardic Inspiration, 2023	0/10/37	0/7/40	1/43/3	0/0/47	19/3/25	3
Cast Party: A D&D Podcast, 2023a	0/14/26	1/5/34	2/24/14	0/1/39	25/3/11	10
Cast Party: A D&D Podcast, 2023b	0/0/8*	0/1/7*	1/5/2*	0/0/8*	6/1/1*	1*

Cast Party: A D&D Podcast, 2023c	0/7/26	0/13/20	0/32/2	0/1/33	22/0/12	16
Draveis, 2023	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
geek the gm, 2023	0/16/16	0/9/23	0/27/5	0/1/31	12/0/20	18
JuliaGeez, 2023a	0/10/8*	0/5/13*	1/15/2*	1/0/17*	7/2/9*	2*
JuliaGeez, 2023b	0/8/29*	0/22/15*	0/32/5*	1/0/36*	22/3/12*	6*
M. Werewolf, 2023a	0/1/17*	0/3/15*	0/14/4*	2/0/16*	16/0/2*	4*
M. Werewolf, 2023b	0/5/24	2/7/20	0/21/8	1/0/28	26/1/2	21
Major Illusion, 2023	0/8/4*	3/2/7*	0/8/4*	1/0/11*	2/1/9*	5*
Miles, 2023	0/17/16	0/5/28	1/22/10	1/1/31	23/2/8	17
scene_four, 2023	1/13/23	0/15/22	1/26/10	0/0/37	13/6/18	13

SideQuests, 2023a	3/6/5*	3/2/9*	2/5/7*	4/0/10*	3/2/9*	3*
SideQuests, 2023b	0/16/34	0/12/38	1/46/3	0/0/50	9/1/40	0
Smurph, 2023	0/26/15	0/12/29	0/35/6	6/2/33	29/0/12	9
Touchstone _Dice, 2023	0/30/10	0/19/21	1/36/3	3/2/35	28/2/10	10

Note: The titles for the sample TikToks were too long to put into the tables directly, so the in-text citations have been used instead for readability. The codes Pos/Neg/Neu stand for Positive reaction, Negative Reaction, and Neutral Reaction. This was done to provide the data for every TikTok used in one table in a readable manner. Due to each TikTok having a varying number of comments on each video, only up to the first fifty comments listed under each video at the time of collection were used to try to provide an equal basis for analysis. It is also worth mentioning that some of the sampled TikToks either did not have fifty comments, which will be denoted by an * beside the data, or had the comment section disabled, which will be denoted with a N/A. I decided to leave these ones in to try and provide an unbiased view of the sample without pruning TikToks that had a smaller reach than others, as even large TikTok accounts can have low interaction on certain videos. The process for selecting comments for this data was to use only primary comments and only visible replies to avoid entering a biased echo chamber surrounding the primary comment. I also recorded the reaction of each comment to each of the categories to get a more intersectional perspective on the comment sections' positionality regarding these themes, and any comments that didn't pertain to any of the selected themes were placed in the neutral column.

Implications and Limitations of Findings.

This research implies that as an audience of a massive IP, the D&D community has proven that it is possible to organize large collective community action over the internet without requiring in-person mediation like a lot of digital activisms. On the other side of the coin, this incident should be considered by large corporations who are seeking to make changes to existing licencing agreements that affect what is effectively a large contactor network and implement these changes over time with more interaction and feedback from their community. As for limitations within these findings, I had found most of the way through my research errors within my datasets due to my not considering that each comment should be placed under the same scrutiny as the others to ensure the results are not skewed. This setback required me to recollect the same data with slightly different parameters and, as such, could have an implicit bias from me as I had already once read these comment sections and was not going in blind. I also was the only researcher who was collecting this data, and while I have done my best to not let any implicit biases impact my research, I am fallible and am, myself, close to the issue as a part of the D&D community.

Evaluation

The study overall has plenty of value to the field of communications as it explores how collective community action can be mediated purely online, which has been a concern with new media for a long time. With this research as precedent, I believe that in the future, more research can be done into how the D&D community and other audiences like it can use their own platforms to enact real change within their communities. It also can be a precedent for research into how user-generated content can itself become part of the originating IP and in some ways become more important to the IP than the original base content. This can be seen in the way that D&D itself has become, in the eyes of its community, more of a culture than a brand. This could lead to very interesting research on how this incident may create a new culture surrounding TTRPGs where it is less of a monolith under WotC and a more collaborative exchange of ideas, which is exactly what the OGL 1.0 sought to do.

While this report is a great stepping-off point, I believe it could present a stronger argument if it did not have the limitation of time and labour. This report, being written over a short three months, immediately ensures that this report can not go as in-depth as I would have liked, and having the proper time to dig in with a larger dataset with many more samples would make this thematic analysis work. Along with that, this report is limited by having only one researcher looking at, collecting, and interpreting the data. This kind of research benefits from more labour to ensure that the research can be in-depth enough, with the ability to collect more data and ensure that the data analyzed is not being skewed by the biases of one person. Despite all of this, I believe that further research into the OGL leak would be beneficial to further our understanding of what draws people into an IP and makes them move mountains to ensure it will be available in perpetuity for newer generations of fans.

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The Algorithmic Bias of Social Media

Daman Preet Singh

Abstract

Social media apps like YouTube and Instagram came as platforms that allowed users to express themselves freely to their friends and families, but corporations changed social media down to its core. Due to the rising popularity of short video-based content on TikTok, platforms like Instagram introduced similar content to capitalize on the hype that TikTok created. In doing so, Instagram made changes to the content promotion algorithm to promote 'Reels' over the other content options. Driven by profits the company stopped caring about their users, leading to backlash from the community. Creators on the platform started playing a visibility game (Cotter, 2019) to grow and be seen in user feeds, the 'game' pushes them to make content they would not be making in the first place and follow trends. In this paper, I am looking at the case of a creator in the photography community affected by these changes in algorithms and analyzing the situation through a critical media theory framework. The study discusses the practices of the platform and the effects on the creator community while also looking at resistance from users. I also discuss a new potential alternative platform to Instagram for photographers, that markets itself as a platform built without an algorithm, for a community.

Keywords

Algorithm, Instagram, creators, political economy, participatory culture

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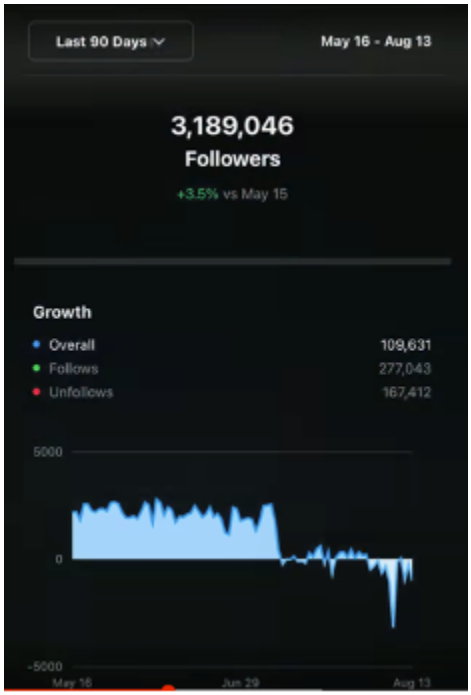
Instagram, as we know it, is the staple picture-sharing platform. It has built itself on the idea that anyone can post anything. The platform has been adopted by creatives all over the globe to showcase their work to audiences and grow as artists. In the last few years, *Meta Platforms*, the owner of Instagram, has been making changes to the app that have changed the core aspects of what the platform was. The changes have been affecting creators on the platform in one way or another. The case I am looking at is that of the content creator Peter McKinnon, one of the most prominent names in the photography community. Looking at that case, I will be analyzing the algorithmic bias of Instagram in the promotion of content posted. The platform boasts itself on its liberation of expression; "…post what you want" (Instagram, 2023) but in practice it is different. Since the release of reels in the summer of 2020, the short videos-based content has been pushed as the 'new' content on the platform which has led to the suppression of picture-based content which the platform built itself on. McKinnon saw growth in his account, gaining hundreds of followers every day until it stopped, and he started losing followers (Figure 1). He started losing followers and engagement on his posts after some changes rolled out in June, as stated in his video titled "*the end of Instagram,*" where he talks about the issue in detail.

Figure 1

Peter McKinnon's Instagram follower insights.

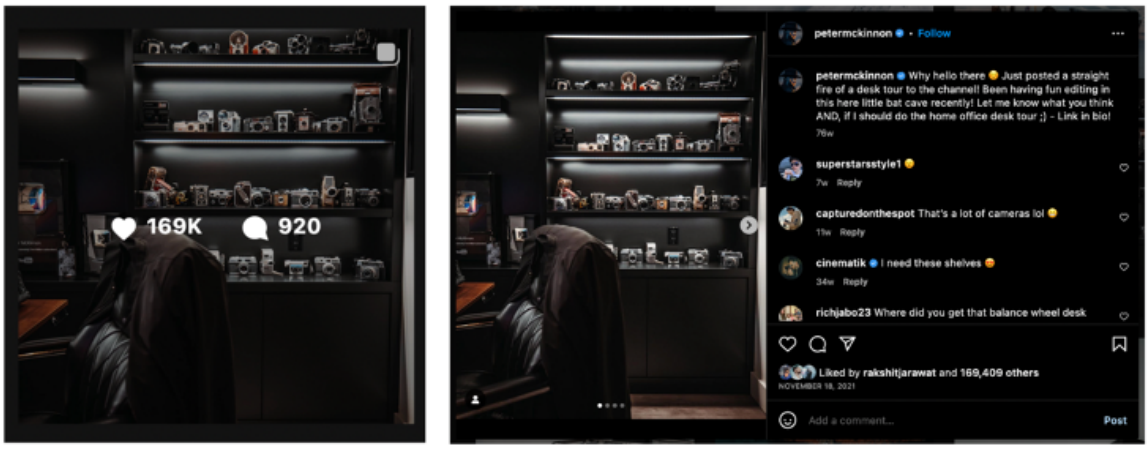


Note. (McKinnon, 2021).

McKinnon backed up his claims about Instagram and its changes with his follower insight reports from the months around the publishing of the video. A quick look through his feed shows how much it has affected his engagement, Figures 2 and 3 compare posts from before the changes and after said algorithm changes, respectively.

Figure 2

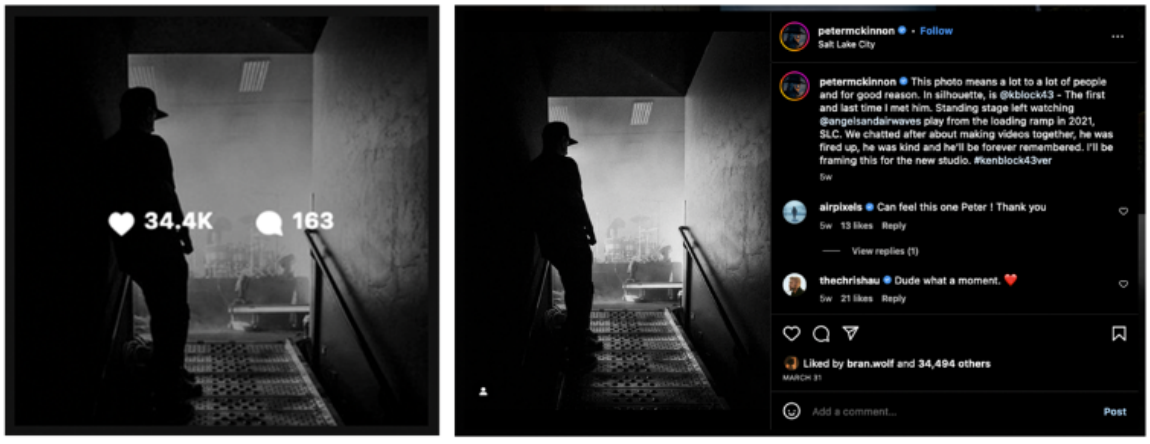
Peter McKinnon's post engagement before the changes.



Note. (McKinnon, 2021).

Figure 3

Peter McKinnon's post engagement after the changes.



Note. (McKinnon, 2023).

Observing the difference between likes makes it clear how adversely the algorithmic changes have affected his online presence. McKinnon went from consistently getting eighty thousand likes to a hundred and twenty thousand likes each post on an average to between thirty-five thousand and sixty thousand likes per post owing to the lack of visibility in his followers' feeds. Such reduced engagement in picture-based content is seen often, pushing people to make content they would not want to make by choice.

Instagram changed its algorithm to effectively 'shadowban' content not aligning with its new targets. Shadowbanning is "when, without notice or explanation, a user's post(s) is prevented from appearing in different spaces on the platform, making the content much less likely to reach non-followers," as explained by Cotter (2021, p. 2) while discussing the practice in the context of influencers. What has changed is that people are seeing less content that they want to see themselves and are seeing more of the content that Instagram wants them to see. Influencers and content creators like McKinnon have been vocal about this issue for a while now, his case stands out to me as he is one of the earliest adopters of the platform for its 'community and creator first' ideologies. In this analysis, I will be looking at this change in the algorithm of Instagram and its biases, through a critical theory framework with lenses of political-economy, digital creativity and participatory culture.

Political-Economy Shaping of Algorithms

Mosco (2009) identifies commodification as one of the main three points for a political economy of communications (pp. 1-2), arguing that new media facilitated the process as it is rooted in the process of digitization, the efficient use of digital networks expands on the commodification of content (p. 135). He also highlights structuration as one of the entry points to a political economy, noting how social action occurs within opportunities provided by social structures (p. 16). Putting emphasis on power and structure concentrates a study on social class which becomes necessary to examine relations and actions within a hegemony (Mosco, 2009 p. 185).

Within the context of Instagram, moving forward with an algorithm that promotes reels more than picture-based content shows how it has commodified artistic expression. The

algorithm is programmed in a way to only boost content that aligns with the company's view of 'profitable,' which, for now, is the new shorts-based content of reels. In order to boost reels, Instagram makes it so people cannot see picture-based content even if they follow the creator. This bias was clearly depicted in the case of McKinnon, who refused to give into the trends and post reels. He saw a decline in his account and a lower reach in the community. Flew & Smith (2021) refer to new media as a business (p. 81), moving towards the trend of short video-based content, attempting to challenge TikTok, Instagram's view for profits changed. Within the business of Instagram, by extension Meta, there is a visible power structure that directs creative choices and actions which places the users at the lowest owing to the company only caring about their profits when policies are made.

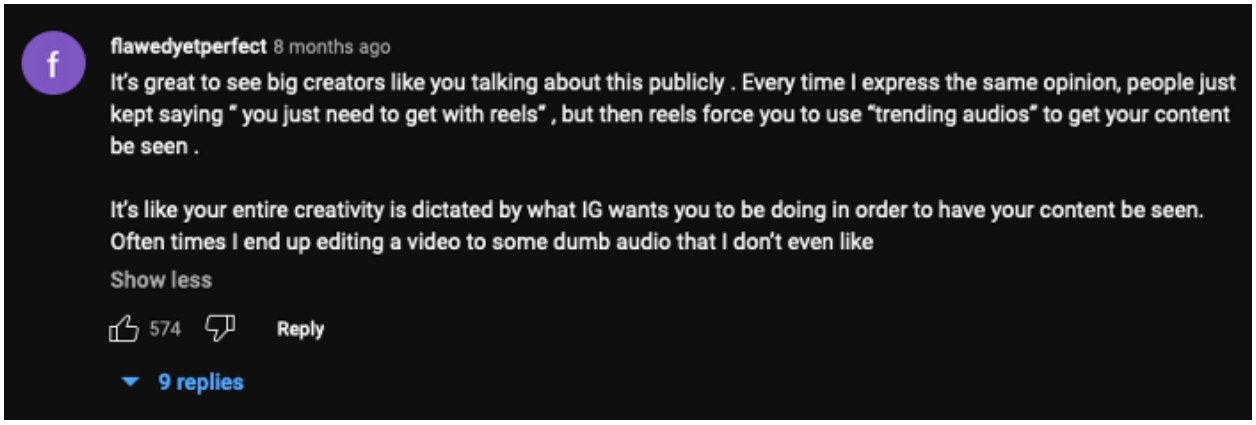
The pictures and community-driven content were not seen as profitable anymore and reels were seen as a platform for advertising through brand partnerships, sponsored content, and promotional culture. As reels have a higher potential for reach and engagement, brands use those to promote their product and advertising, be it in the form of sponsorships and product placement or explicitly structured advertisements. It would be ignorant to say that sponsored content has not been infesting feeds before reels, but the ease of access in reels has made it exponentially more visible. Targeted advertising in the forms of reels and boosted content sits on top of the creative content you chose to follow someone for.

Digital Creativity Being Limited by New Media

Discussions around new media and creativity bring us to the notion of new media fostering creative expression. In the case of McKinnon, Instagram's decision of changing its algorithm, new media is limiting creativity instead of facilitating it. The changes in the algorithm, manipulating content exposure, have led to limitations on what a creator can or cannot do. The discourse in the comments of the video in question talks about how reels force people into standardized content and 'trendy audios' to stay relevant (Figure 4) or even have their audiences see their content, which in turn inhibits artistic expression.

Figure 4

A screenshot from the comment section of 'the end of instagram'



(@flawedyetperfect, 2022)

Horkheimer and Adorno (2012) raise the point of how "culture today is infecting everything with sameness" (p. 53), criticizing the mass production of culture which in turn creates a system where technology gains power over society and puts it in the power of the economically stronger (p. 54). Their criticism of standardization becomes relevant to McKinnon's case study in the digital age with these policy changes standardizing content creation over a medium that was made to express one's creativity. As reflected in the discussion of political-economy, advertising drives this 'culture industry' (Horkheimer and Adorno, 2012), and commodification influences how those in power affect the creative freedom of creators over social media.

Creators cannot do what they want to and feel pressured to do things that don't align with their artistic vision. McKinnon did not want to jump on the hype of reels and switch up the content he built his community on, so he was instead 'punished' for doing what he wanted to and making the content he preferred. McKinnon is one of the many creators that are currently being 'forced' by Instagram in a way to change their primary content and make standardized reels to grow, all to 'play a visibility game' (Cotter, 2019) on a platform that's regulating their content and conditioning their exposure.

According to Cotter (2019), the "game" must be played to attain influence (p. 904). Influence and engagement are vital to growth on the platform, but the creators are unable to grow with the content they want to make or even enjoy making. Limitations as such affect the creative process in the production stage, creators must think first before going through with a vision for a

post on the platform. McKinnon (2022) raises the point of how Instagram has become this "not-so-creative depth of the internet doomscroll" (0:56), unlike the creative and community-driven platform it used to be.

Resistance as Participatory Culture

Jenkins (2006) argues that in participatory media culture, media producers and consumers are transformed into participants interacting with a new set of rules (para 4). Talking about participation in a networked community, Jenkins et al. (2015) propose a good point about members in a participatory culture feeling some degree of social connection (Chapter 1: Defining participatory culture, para 7); this is clearly demonstrated by social networks in creator communities. Resistance and pushback are a big part of networked communities owing to their light structure and openness, leading to a participatory culture formed around resistance.

The community aspect of Instagram, from the creator to their narrowcasted audience, defined the platform and its uses upon inception. In McKinnon's case, his community had formed a relationship with him over the course of a decade, the community became a means of resistance against the platform's algorithmic bias. His community decided to 'battle' the algorithm by engaging with his content and turning on post notifications to boost his work's reach since the algorithm promotes content that people are engaging with. This resistance is common in creative communities, the phrase 'like, comment, share, subscribe' from YouTube came up to encourage post engagement so content could reach more people. This goes to show algorithmic conditioning of content exposure has been here since the gentrification and commodification of YouTube, like what is happening to Instagram right now.

In a form of resistance, McKinnon talked about this new platform called *Vero,* which is a community-driven platform. Switching to a different platform with him, as a form of resistance proved how strong his audience's sense of community is. The platform boasts itself of being an authentic space for connections, talking about how previous platforms have had imbalances between user interests and corporate interests. Vero presents itself as the platform for photographers that Instagram was supposed to be, mentioning how they do not have an algorithm because their incentives are aligned with ours (Vero, 2023, Mission). Discourse in the comments goes on about how Vero is bringing the 'fun' back in sharing pictures again; sharing their work

with other photographers and members of the community who will see the content they want to, with no platform interference.

Conclusion

With this analysis, I set out to look at changes in the Instagram algorithm that are boosting content. The clearest findings come back to the fact that the platform is driven more by profits and commodification instead of the expression liberation it boasts itself on. Since this study was done after the update rollout happened in the summer of 2022, I lacked data on the interactions happening actively between the users of the community. There was a discussion to be had around interactivity and how the experience of resistance and participation has been mediated online, but I could not go deeper into it due to the lack of data in my case study. The platform has shown a trend of bringing in changes and reverting them, as McKinnon (2022) put it "they are trying to fit into a shape that another brand created" (06:48). Around the same time as the algorithm changes, Instagram tried testing a new user interface redesign with full-screen content, attempting to replicate TikTok explicitly (Southern, 2022, para. 4). The backlash Meta faced against this redesign pushed them to revert said changes, showing that the findings of the study about resistance are consistent with user experiences. Peter McKinnon's case is one of many in the creative community that has been punished by Instagram with these new changes in the algorithms. Even though the algorithms make it difficult for them to make the content they want, their communities are resisting it in attempts to liberate expression.

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Anishinaabe Art on Social Media: Viewers' Comments and a Measure of Culteral Literacy

Taylor Van Eyk

Abstract

This study lies within the topic of online Indigenous art perception with the objective of measuring Indigenous cultural literacy on this topic. Indigenous communications and new media research is a niche which is extremely relevant in a media-reliant time. It is also considerably under researched within the whole of communications research, prompting creation and exploration within this field. The increased recognition of Indigenous peoples both off and online makes it reasonable to expect an increase in audiences' cultural literacy. This study aims to measure cultural literacy among audiences interacting with online Indigenous arts. Through a literature review, this study was situated between the gap of existing research focusing on the construction of Indigenous Identity and Culture online as well as perception surrounding Indigenous culture and online art. This research was conducted with the goal of filling this gap between existing research by focusing on a narrow sample within the larger topic. This aims to remedy the lack of Indigenous communications and new media research by studying niches which have been previously generalized or overlooked. Studying the audience perception of online Anishinaabe artists, more specifically the level of cultural literacy within the comments, is certainly a niche yet to be thoroughly addressed. This paper's research of the topic is conducted through a critical discourse analysis of the artists' comment sections followed by the filtering of these findings through a definition for cultural literacy. This is done for the purpose of determining the compatibility of the discursive identity of the comments with cultural literacy, which produces our findings. Overall, this study found that the level of cultural literacy in the sample was healthy, explorative, and growing. Suggesting a shift to more positive views of Indigenous arts which serves as an important indicator of the greater state of Indigenous cultural literacy.

Keywords

Cultural literacy, Anishinaabe, Indigenous Art and Culture, comment sections, critical discourse analysis

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Research Objectives

This study looks at nine social media posts from Anishinaabe identifying artists and the comment sections attached to these posts. These posts display visual Indigenous art, the comments respond to the post and convey perceptions that create narratives which inform the greater discourse of the comment sections. The focus of this study lies in the discursive event of the comment section. The perceptions, opinions, and sentiments of all the comments create a single discursive event. The objective of this study is to determine the level of cultural literacy within these discursive events. When the language choices and signs of the texts in this discourse are broken down and filtered through a definition for Indigenous cultural literacy, a measure for the level of cultural literacy in these comments and thus the audience is then revealed.

The objective of this research is to gain a sense of the level of cultural literacy present online surrounding Indigenous culture. More specifically, how Indigenous cultural literacy is made known within the textual communities of the comment sections in Anishinaabe artists' social media posts. This research was designed with the idea that specific language choices and textual symbolisms can and do signify a measure of cultural literacy. This study had no intention of seeking specific sentiments or opinions, positive or negative, but wished simply to seek out the ways cultural literacy is expressed and measure it to gain a sense of the typical level of cultural literacy present within the given text genre.

Guided by the research question: "*What do the top comments of Anishinaabe artists' social media posts tell us about the cultural literacy of online populations in recent years?"* this study and its subsequent paper aim to present the discourses present in the comments sections through the lens of cultural literacy. The raw data, the discursive texts comprising the comment section, are not explicitly expressive of cultural literacy, so therefore the findings in this paper will not consist of raw data. But its textual signs will be broken down through critical discourse analysis (CDA) and compared with the key language choices and signs within the Indigenous cultural literacy definition from Life Literacy Canada to determine a level of cultural literacy. These signs taken together, with the definition "being able to understand the traditions, regular activities and history of a group of people from a given culture. It also means being able to engage with these traditions, activities and history in cultural spaces like museums, galleries and performances" (2023, para. 1) produce the data that will determine the findings presented in this paper.

Studying a textual phenomenon that exists within social media and analyzing these texts through discourse focused analysis effectively situates it within the communications field, despite the goal of measuring cultural literacy surrounding Indigenous arts.

Situation of Research Question and Study by Way of Literature Review

The research question: *"What do the top comments of Anishinaabe artists' social media posts tell us about the cultural literacy of online populations in recent years?"* Informs a literature review guideline that seeks out how Indigenous identity and arts are governed, influenced, and constructed online, what governs and influences the audience's perceptions of these online constructions, and the way Indigenous art is perceived offline in a broader sense. All of these aspects are measures or at least influenced in some way by the cultural literacy of the online creator, online audience, or generalized audience.

Literature dealing with the ways Indigenous identity and art are constructed online is vital for understanding what governs the samples that this research yields its data from. This literature is also vital for understanding where Indigenous-related studies are currently situated within communications. Understanding what contributes to the Indigenous content we see online contributes to an understanding of the significance and the indicators of online Indigenous cultural literacy and is also an active practice contributing to an individual's sense of Indigenous cultural literacy. Carlson and Frazer (2020) discuss, for the purpose of this study, the creation of Indigenous social media content. The helpful idea of the "settler gaze" (Carlson & Frazer, 2020, p. 5) informs us that the online actions of Indigenous peoples have impacts that extend past the individual. Here, cultural responsibility is expressed as being a key determining force for what Indigenous peoples share online. This is key for situating the study and understanding the topic because it gives vital information on the ramifications of onlookers' perceptions. This informs insight into the potential findings of this study, but more importantly, it helps us understand the posts that this study considers are crafted with the 'settler gaze' in mind, affecting findings in the perception of these posts. Also related to content creation, Lumby (2010) addresses the governing forces of Indigenous online creation specific to social media. This paper discusses the reasons why and how Indigenous identity is constructed online. Key to this study is the idea of validating Indigeneity through Facebook audiences, either Indigenous or not. "Surveillance and self-surveillance" (Lumby, 2010, p. 71) are ideas that describe an individual's need to present

and post as 'Indigenous' as possible online, out of fear of being an Indigenous poser or appearing not Indigenous enough to fit in with the community. These governing forces are good to keep in mind as they motivate the content that informs perception and literacy around Indigenous culture. With this in mind, it is possible the perceptions recorded could be of an almost 'played up' version of Indigenous culture that may not be reflective of the truth offline.

Literature that discusses the formations of perceptions around Indigenous art is crucial to understanding the data that informs the findings of this study. Gaining an understanding of the existing perceptions of Indigenous Culture is helpful for making sense of the signs that are found in the sample, what inspires the expressions here? Leddy and O'Neil (2022) explore individuals' existing perceptions of Indigenous art and asks them to evaluate them for the purpose of greater inclusion of Indigenous Culture within the classroom. Though this paper lies within the topic of education, the measurement of onlookers' perceptions of Indigenous art, compared with their informed perceptions aimed at inclusion is truly relevant. The findings suggested in this paper could very well mirror the findings of my study. I predict that this study's findings will largely be that people are looking to alter their perceptions of Indigenous art in a positive way, becoming more culturally literate as a result. "Through even the most initial level of phenomenological exploration, participants began to view art not merely as decorative, but as communicative. They began to detect their own knowledge gaps, and better still to understand how they might be able to fill them in. They began to develop new levels of literacy for working in decolonizing ways" (Leddy & O'Neil, 2022, p. 14). This paper is again relevant because it evaluates the process of Indigenous art perception, and it discusses connections and challenges onlookers face when developing a perception of Indigenous art. Despite not being relevant to social media, this paper does an excellent job of communicating the type of findings I wish to discover. Similarly, Robinson (2017) and Dion (2009) also discuss the perception of Indigenous Culture by non-Indigenous and Indigenous parties. Though this description is a simplification and both studies have focuses that explore varying facets of Indigenous art, boiled down, they both rely on the perceptions of onlookers to exist. The 2017 Robinson study focuses on the presence of Indigenous language in public. The public nature of this study of course lends itself to the voicing of opinions and narratives. More importantly, this study explores the intended impact of these public language arts. "'Welcome to our community. How do you recognize it?' Through this address, readers are asked not whether they recognize Anishinaabe sovereignty and the

history of the location, but rather how they do. It is an explicit call to perceive place differently" (Robinson, 2017, p. 96). This type of purposeful challenge to perception is significant for my study because it addresses the impact that the art creators explicitly ask from their viewers, I will study how they choose to answer. The 2009 project by Dion asks this in a way as well. Chapter 3 focuses on how audiences choose to answer this. Addressing how preexisting assumptions about Indigenous peoples guide the perceptions and narratives created when these individuals are 'asked' to reassess or reinvent their current stance.

Data Collection and Data Analysis Methods

The whole of this study can be described as a qualitative cross-sectional analysis of discourse that looks at nine posts from three different Anishinaabe artists' Facebook and Instagram pages, (Kewageshig, Pawis-Steckley, and Angeconeb, 2023) and the comments on these posts to gain a sense of what is typical in the discourses of this field/topic. The sample of this study was collected through purposive sampling that followed a set of criteria that assured the relevancy of the sample for the objectives of this study. The samples constituting this cross-sectional had to be from Anishinaabe identifying artists, the artist accounts must have a following of over 8000, the posts must be displaying Indigenous visual art, and the posts had to be fruitful in comments. I did not implement criteria for the content of the comments because I did not want to cherry-pick the results of the findings, I simply wanted to define the sample within a genre. The 'top comments' that represent the discourse that will be studied are selected through the social media sites' relevancy comment filter which placed the most popular and most relevant comments towards the top of the comment thread. The most popular comments are studied with the idea that they capture the majority sentiment of the whole comment thread. These are the comments used in this study.

Data analysis was conducted using many qualitative research methods, before I began breaking down sign meanings with CDA I put the data through a thematic analysis. I felt it would be helpful to have a count and description of the most popular themes or categories within the comments. Conducting a brief thematic analysis allowed me to create categories for the different types of comments, which can be boiled down to positive, negative, and indifferent (usually leaning towards positive). Creating these categories and reviewing the sample with these

categories allowed me to make approximations to the number of comments in each category. This is how I discovered the overwhelming positive discourse within the comment section.

The critical discourse analysis surveys the comment sections as a whole discursive event, as a single unit. I handled the individual comments through thematic analysis and used the most popular sentiments from there to establish a single discursive event. From this 'text' I determined genre, style, discourse, and order of discourse. Determining the genre was the starting point of this analysis, the thematic analysis helped define the genre and the majority style of text in the genre, helping to define the discourse's characteristics. I then identified the primary discourse as 'positive' and then identified the most popular subnarratives that inform the 'positive' discourse. These are 'experience sharing' and 'narratives around healing.' The primary 'positive' discourse is of course comprised of the majority of to-the-point texts that are obviously supportive. The discourses of each comment section were unified through the repeat positive sentiments, this is how the average sentiment of the comment section findings was affirmed. Overwhelming positivity and experiencing sharing may not be characteristic of all discursive texts, and the to-the-point style of the language is stylistic to online comment sections. These characteristics define the genre or personality of the discursive event. All these things taken together define a narrative that is fairly unique to the genre of online Indigenous art perception.

Findings

Both the thematic analysis and CDA helped produce a well-defined identity for a positive and supportive text comprised of healing narratives, personal audience experiences, opinions on topics relevant to the initial post, and of course to-the-point positive words of affirmation. With this well-established discourse identity attached to the data, how can this identity inform the measurement of Indigenous cultural literacy among online audiences? How will this discourse's identity satisfy the study's objective? We now filter this identity and the discursive elements that comprise it through our chosen definition of Indigenous cultural literacy. Life Literacy Canada's definition of Indigenous cultural literacy is "being able to understand the traditions, regular activities, and history of a group of people from a given culture. It also means being able to engage with these traditions, activities, and history in cultural spaces like museums, galleries, and performances" (2023, para. 1) is used to evaluate this discursive identity.

Interpretation of Discursive Cultural Literacy Findings

When reflecting on this definition's criteria for what constitutes Indigenous cultural literacy, the words 'understand' and 'engage' stand out. These are the actions which can be taken to practice cultural literacy. To point out what may seem obvious, the very existence of comments on a post of Indigenous art is engagement with Indigenous culture. The existence of the comments affirms that this discursive event is suitable for measuring Indigenous cultural literacy.

The term 'understand' in the definition raises some questions, how is an understanding of Cultural Literacy expressed in discursive texts? An understanding, specifically of Indigenous culture, is not necessarily an explicit thing. As demonstrated in this study, it is expressed through support and positivity towards the culture. In the discursive event of this study, I have found that the comments which demonstrate the healthiest cultural literacy are those which make personal connections or share experiences. Not only do these comments engage in a positive way, but they also show an advanced understanding of the significance of the art. Comments that make relevant connections between the individual's experience and existing knowledge and the post featuring Indigenous Culture demonstrate healthy cultural literacy because that individual is able to thoroughly understand the artifact and not only engage with it appropriately but in a way that effectively creates a narrative on the topic of the post. Though comments of this nature demonstrate a well-developed sense of cultural literacy, posts that are merely positive also indicate a developing sense of cultural literacy. To an extent, positivity in response to Indigenous Culture demonstrates an understanding of culture. When considering that historical post-colonial rhetoric around Indigenous Culture demonized it and informed a negative perception, the expression of positivity indicates a perception informed by an understanding of Indigenous tradition and not racist rhetoric or legislation.

Largely, the discursive identity of the Anishinaabe artists' comment sections is one made up of positive and occasionally well-developed comments that indicate a healthy emerging level of Indigenous cultural literacy amongst online audiences. Despite a majority of comments indicating good cultural literacy, there are also a handful of comments which demonstrate poor cultural literacy. There are occasional comments in the sample which voice negative perceptions of the art or simply admit to not understanding the point of it. Negativity in response to Indigenous Culture may indicate a perception formed by a misunderstanding of Indigenous

Culture. Indigenous art does not usually ignite negativity of its own volition. Comments stating a blatant lack of understanding indicate poor cultural literacy because it does not meet the basic criteria of the definition.

The majority of positive comments inform a healthy emerging level of Indigenous cultural literacy. Negative comments and comments that lack understanding demonstrate Poor Indigenous cultural literacy, but since these types of comments make up a very small portion of the sample's discourse, the findings of this study are the comment sections of Anishinaabe artists' social media posts indicate a healthy emerging level of Indigenous cultural literacy amongst online audiences.

Implications and Limitations of the Findings

What is so important about deciphering healthy cultural literacy amongst the audience of online Indigenous artists? It implies a better education on Indigenous culture which is vital to reconciliation efforts. Healthy cultural literacy requires exposure and quality education on the cultural topic. The calls to action by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada explicitly "call upon the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada to maintain an annual commitment to Aboriginal education issues" (2015, p. 7) as a reconciliation effort. Since cultural literacy requires understanding that is achieved through education, it is reasonable to conclude that the indication of healthy cultural literacy may be the result of effective reconciliation efforts. The findings of this study can imply the effectiveness of reconciliation efforts. Reconciliation efforts actively work to dismantle racist rhetoric and sentiment through many facets of life and instead replace them with well-informed sentiments that do not harm Indigenous populations or any other population. By this standard, not only do the findings of this study imply the effectiveness of reconciliation efforts they can also imply the want of audiences to create, participate, and inspire reconciliation in their regular online interactions. Looking at positive comments inspired by cultural literacy in this way can imply a significant presence of grassroots reconciliation efforts. This implication has the potential to identify online creators and audiences as being changemakers within Indigenous communities. It is well known that changemakers and reconciliation efforts do not just operate at advanced levels, and work is done on the ground floor. Comments and discourses displaying healthy cultural literacy, like the ones in these

findings, could be used to identify these ground-floor grassroots changemakers and the focuses of their reconciliation efforts.

These findings are limited by the sample which they come from. Arguably, an online sample of three Indigenous artists whose heritage stems from a similar region of North America/Turtle Island can not produce findings that are diverse enough to make generalizations on the level of Indigenous cultural literacy amongst all audiences of Indigenous culture. My own interpretation also limits the findings. Since I am a single researcher who can only speak and interpret from my own experience and education, I am limited in the interpretations I can apply to the discursive identity of the comments. Other individuals may have interpreted the definition of Indigenous cultural literacy differently, assigning a different meaning to the sample findings. They could have considered simply positive comments to be indifferent to a display of cultural literacy. Thus, the cultural literacy findings wouldn't have indicated as healthy of a presence of cultural literacy as they did through my interpretation.

Researcher's Evaluation of the Study

This study was a multistep evaluation of Indigenous cultural presence online. Learning about the governance of online Indigenous Identity and the factors behind audience perception of Indigenous creation helped situate the study's objective and concept within an academic tradition and the field of communications. Though it was hard to pick a clear track for the research to take, new possibilities were constantly becoming apparent, and it made me question the direction of the study. Do the sample and methods make sense for my objective? Is there something more efficient I could be doing with this study?

As addressed in the findings section, this study is limited in its scope and objectives. Considering the vast research opportunities in this field, the scope of this study is quite niche. Sampling such a slim portion of online Indigenous arts with the specific objective of measuring cultural literacy creates obvious limitations for the study's potential. It would have served the study better to use a broader sample, this would help confidently make generalizations on cultural literacy. This would be a surefire way to mitigate limitations. If this study were to have moved away from the measure of cultural literacy all together and instead focused on discursive identity the study would have been less limited by its objectives. Overall, taking a niche approach to a study that could have been more effective in seeking generalizations is likely the

largest limitation here. The vast research gaps in theis field call for research that can effefitvely fill these gaps and providesubstantial knowledge on the related topics.

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I Was There Too: A Visual Ethnography and Analysis on Meaningful Inefficiencies, Data Colonialism, and Digital Parasites Using Facebook Messengers Video-Chat Feature

Natasha Bodnarchuk

Abstract

My visual ethnography uses Facebook Messenger's video-chat feature to 'travel to' and 'be' in different parts of Calgary. By video chatting, I was able to hear and see aspects of various places that I was not physically present in. In the analysis, I draw from Bart Cammaerts' concept of self-mediation to illustrate how I abided by the intended affordances video chatting offers. Additionally, I draw on Gordon and Walter's concept of meaningful inefficiencies to demonstrate how I created a digital experience that was intentionally playful. I disregarded the need to obtain visibility in an online space, thereby challenging notions of governmentality. I reference Ghel and McKelvey's work on digital parasites to articulate the parasitic nature of this experience, not only between the human-computer relationship but also between human-human relationships. Moreover, I discuss how I partially subverted data colonialism, as the places I "went to" via video chat were not tracked on my GPS. This, however, required commodifying the involvement of the person that I was video chatting with; I made their experiences my own. This digital experience contributes to the literature about being visible in online spaces in an alternative way; it was not concerned with curating an online persona or acquiring likes and shares. The screenshots illustrate the technological noise that disrupts the call, further positing the intentional playfulness and inefficiency of the experience. The limitations of this experience relate to themes of resistance. While in some ways I resisted data colonialism, the only way to truly resist one's data from being collected is to create an experience that is offline and untraceable. This experience welcomes the messiness and hybridity of digital platforms and provides an opportunity for purposeful misconnection.

Keywords

Affordances, meaningful inefficiency, governmentality, data colonialism, gamification, digital parasites

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The purpose of this experience is to demonstrate how digital platforms can be used in alternative ways that welcome the messiness and hybridity of technology, rather than oppose it. A visual ethnography is used to illustrate and articulate this digital experience. An ethnography interprets everyday aspects of society and culture. Through participation and observation, an ethnography captures everyday experiences to better understand the society under study. This methodology involved both participating in and viewing aspects of the online and offline space. Incorporating screenshots adds a visual element that aids in illustrating the noise I encountered during this experience and the hybridity of the offline and online space. While many digital experiences focus on attaining visibility, I was curious if my participation could be less about cultivating a visible online identity and more about engaging in ways that are untraceable and playful. I wanted to experiment using a platform that is intended for intercommunication while being uninterested in holding a conversation; seeing through the camera's lens was of more value and importance. While I was aware that my face was being captured in the screenshots I took, I was not concerned with appearing a certain way. My goal was to engage in an online space with a focus on play and inefficiency rather than cultivating an identity.

Analysis of Digital Experience

The images presented in my digital experience titled “I Was There Too” can be understood through theories that analyze new media and society. This experience can be understood as a mediation because I abided by the affordances and technological rules of video chatting (Cammaerts, 2015, p. 4). Refusing to internalize the norms of this app allowed me to construct an alternative way of using Facebook’s Messenger platform. Not only did this experience highlight the power imbalance between humans and computers, but it also explored the ways in which human-to-human relationships may become parasitic through digital mediation. Resistance was a prominent theme throughout this experience. I resisted some elements of data colonialism at the expense of extracting data from the person on the other end of my call and capitalizing on the events of their day. While I adhered to the affordances of video chatting, the process of video calling another person and having them take me to different places opposes the intended and typical uses of Facebook Messengers video chat feature. This illustrates the concept of meaningful inefficiencies as I was not concerned with quantifying my

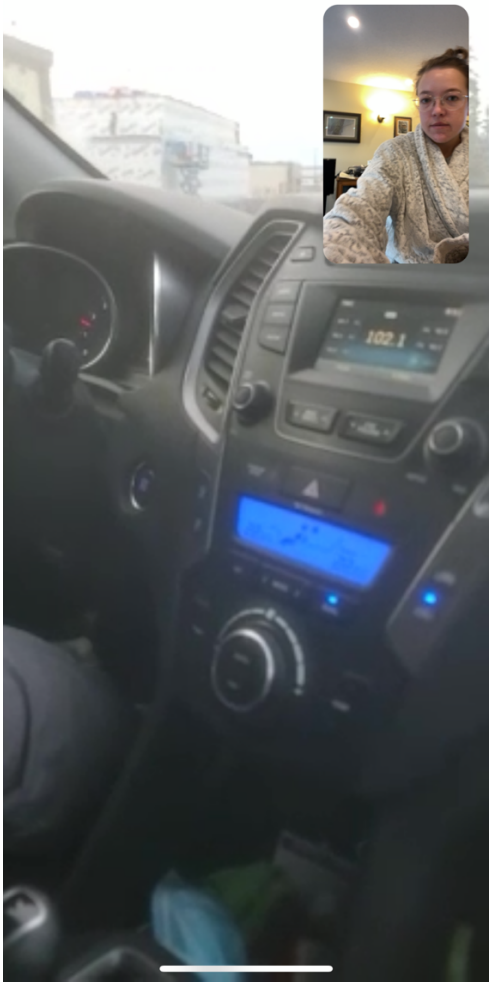
experience—playfulness and exploration were of more value. The purpose of this experience is to demonstrate how digital platforms can be used in alternative ways that welcome the messiness and hybridity of technology.

My digital experience focused less on changing the technological system I was experimenting with and more so on challenging its use. Bart Cammaerts (2015) refers to Michel Foucault's definition of technologies of the self as the ways "individuals internalize rules and constraints" (p. 2). While I intended to use Facebook Messenger's video chat feature in an unusual way, I still abided by its functions. Cammaerts (2015) addresses how technologies, when used frequently, become extensions of ourselves (p. 4). Wandering around the city in this digital way made it seem as though my eyes were the camera lens, and my ears were the speaker. These factors shaped the experience and blurred the "subject-object dichotomy" (Cammaerts, 2015, p. 4). The boundaries between the human senses and digital infrastructure were blurred. Cammaerts (2015) further explores how mediation blends communicative processes such as production and reception (p. 4). During the video call, I was simultaneously producing and receiving information and content. This experience demonstrates an in-betweenness which blurs the boundaries of the physical and digital space. Moreover, this hybridity complicates the concepts of alternative and mainstream. I used a mainstream app for an alternative use, which impacted the dynamics of my participation; it impacted how my identity was shaped in this digital space. Cammaerts (2015) refers to three technologies of the self: disclosure, examination, and remembrance (p. 3). In terms of disclosure, this experience was not concerned with attaining visibility within a platform and, as such, limited the capacity to construct a digital identity. The task of mobilizing this digital experience, however, depended on my ability to use the required infrastructure. This further blends the notions of online and offline; I was simultaneously present in both a digital and physical space. Unlimited data and instant access eased the second technology of the self: examination. I could text, voice call, and video call all in the same place. Combining the affordances of archiving and recording via screenshotting, this experience aids in its memorability because the screenshots allow for easier recollection. These three technologies help build the user's digital identity. This experience, however, was less concerned with cultivating my online self. These technologies were used to resist the intended use of the platform rather than make my online self visible. In addition, Cammaerts (2015) attests that the affordances of

social media allow for communication to be less constrained by time and space (p. 22). Platforms such as Facebook Messenger allow users to communicate from any place at any time, offering the idea of universal outreach, but users must first create and accept connections before they can video chat with another user. This means users are not only relying on a corporate platform but are also usually only connecting with users they already know. These additional constraints may cultivate creativity where an alternative form of engagement, not concerned with likes, shares, or comments, arises.

Figure 1

I was there too



I reach for my phone so frequently that it is as if it has become an extension of myself. One early morning, I called my brother using Facebook's video chat feature on the Messenger app. Using this feature, I could see what he saw: the interior of the car and the blurry, cold exterior outside. The ability to see from his point of view added a personal touch that is not available in a regular phone call. Our interaction abided by the intended and typical uses that video chatting offers. My participation was akin to the discourse of Web 1.0. In this digital ether of cyberspace, it can feel as though one has unlimited access and connections. I felt I could go anywhere and see anything.

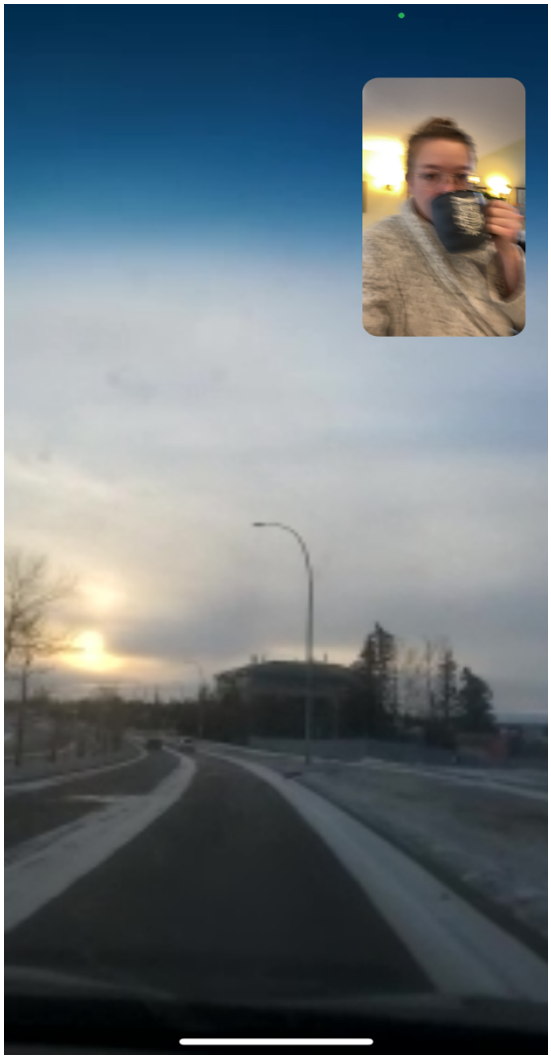
Using this medium of communication in its intended way reminded me of Cammaert's concept of self-mediation. Cultivating my online self was of less importance; I was not fighting for visibility within a platform but was eager to see through the eyes of another lens. With unlimited data, access and connectivity are instant and ease coordination. These screenshots enhance the memorability of this call. While I was using this feature of Messenger in ways that did not change the system, I was

challenging the use of it. I was engaging in an unusual way, free of likes and comments and shares.

To have this type of digital experience (one not constrained by time and space) requires one to have access to devices and platforms. Gehl and McKelvey (2019) argue the human-computer relationship is rooted in "power, exploitation, and inequity" (p. 220). They concur that platforms create private relations; certain information cannot be viewed without the required software (p. 222). My digital experience would not have been possible without a smartphone or a Facebook account. Similarly to how the authors claim the human-computer relationship is parasitic, I argue there was a parasitic element in this experience.

Figure 2

Passenger



Parasites change the logic of systems; they produce hybrid ideas of in-betweenness (Ghel & McKelvey, 2019, p. 224). This idea is present in Figure 3, titled "In transit," which shows an image of me 'on the train.' It was this circumstance where I felt the hybridity of this experience most. I was mutually at home, on the train, and on the screen of each respective phone. At that moment, it became clear that the construction of this digital relationship was not rooted in mutual benefit. Like the human-computer relationship, there was a parasitic element. This experience revealed the capacity to use digital platforms in ways that exploit whoever is on the other end. Like a chain of commodification, I leeched off my brother's experiences, and his data was leeched as he moved around the city. Moreover, this highlights how these interactions were ripe for extraction, but not solely because of the platform we used.

Figure 3

In Transit

Video chatting maintains that you are reliant on another person to answer your call. There is a materialistic element when your attention rests on your own face situated in the corner of the screen. Additionally, I felt a lack of privacy. When my brother was on the train, he was without headphones, meaning that my voice was echoing throughout his car. Disrupting the swift ride home for the other passengers made me feel like an unwanted guest—a parasite. All communication is challenged by noise but being in a position where you are aware of the noise you are making is an uncomfortable experience. Communicating through this platform emphasized the publicness of our conversation and made me recognize the demands I was making at the other end of the call. Moreover, I felt some socially accepted norms were colliding by being both online and in a public space; my interactions were being shaped by the platform I was using and the platform of the train I was on.

Throughout this experiment, a theme of civic efficiency presented itself. Gordon and Walter (2016) define efficiency as being cost-effective, quick, and able to be distributed on the market (p. 241). When technology is only concerned with this type of efficiency, however, it limits users' capacity to play within the rules and experience something new (Gordon & Walter, 2016, p. 242). I would argue my digital experience closely aligns with Gordon and Walter's concept of meaningful inefficiencies. Meaningful inefficiencies accommodate the possibility for

"messiness, disruption, and playing with rules and boundaries" (Gordon & Walter, 2016, p. 242). I would argue against the notion that video chatting on Facebook is efficient due to its requirement that one must create an account and expand their online network. I was not a passive user; I challenged the concept of efficiency and defied the normative uses of this digital technology. The purpose of video chatting is to connect face-to-face with someone you are not physically close to. It is unusual— and unexpected— to use this form of communication to see and be in new places. Moreover, due to technological problems such as blurry imagery and faulty connections, viewing different places is not made easy. My experience, however, was not concerned with creating an "efficient" and stable tour of the city. The element of play posits that the means are more valuable than the ends (Gordon & Walter, 2016, p. 251). Furthermore, video chatting is not fully efficient due to its limitations. Firstly, one must learn how to use the infrastructure and labour to make it work. In Figure 4, titled "Buffering," this labour is evident. When connections falter, or sound cuts out during a video call, users recognize they must hang up and call again to reinstate the connection. While I laboured to make each call successful, the work was of less importance than the action and capacity to play within each video call. Gordon and Walter (2016) argue users act predictably when they internalize mechanisms of control (p. 248). I would counter that the process and involvement within my video calls challenge this notion of governmentality.

Figure 4

Buffering

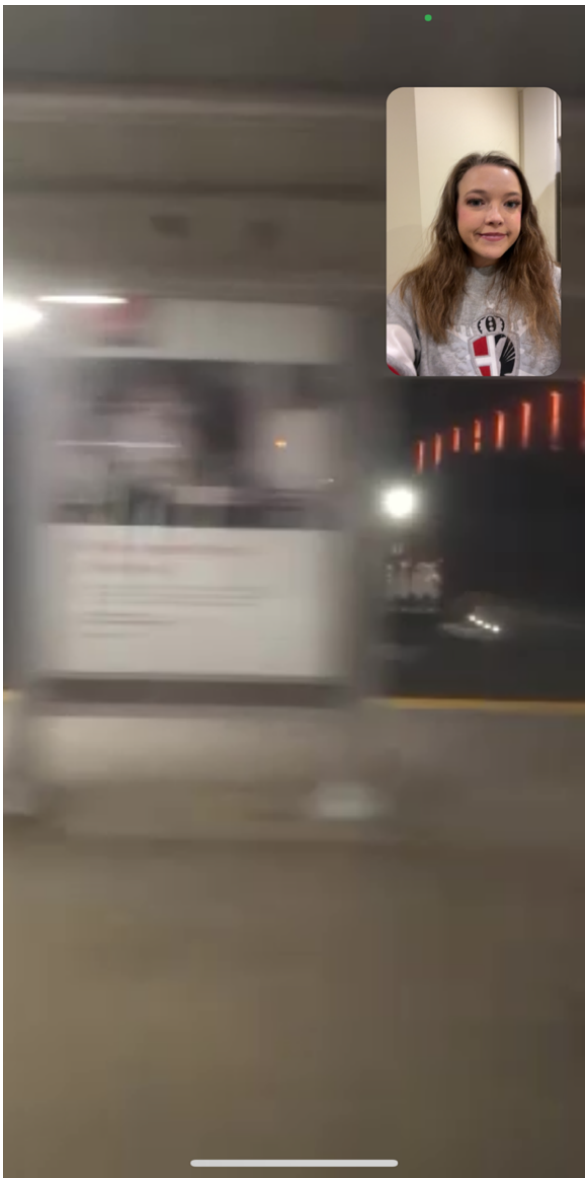
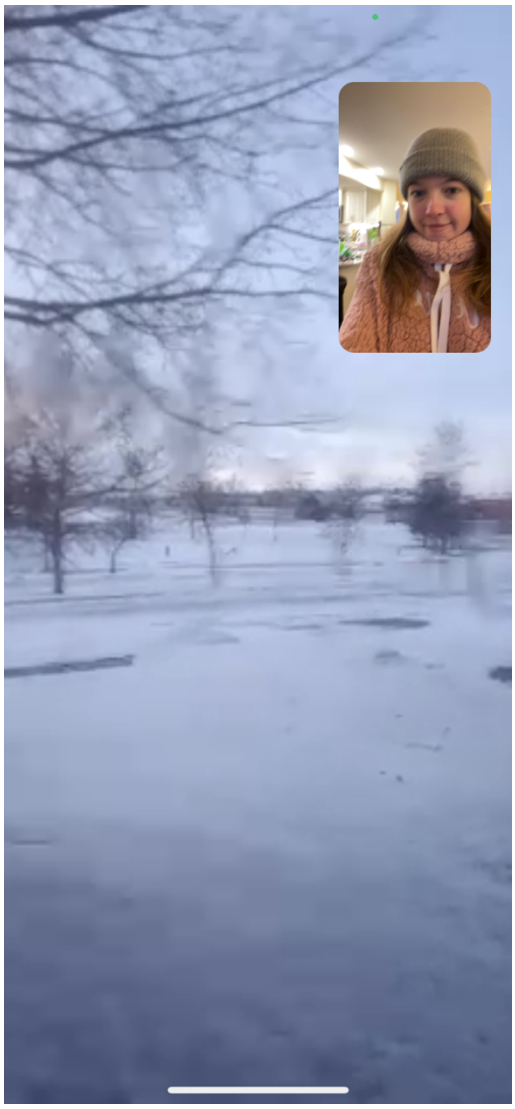


Figure 5

I am Everywhere



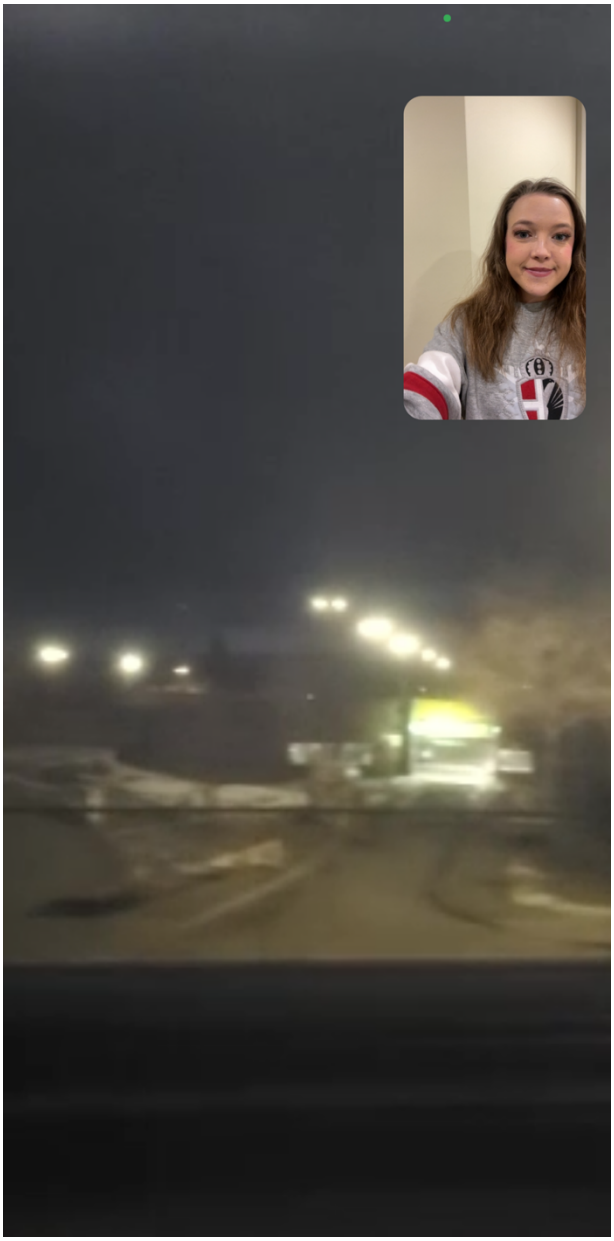
I found an element of playfulness throughout this experience. Similar to the ways in which self-mediation blurs some communicative processes, I, too, felt an in-betweenness of process and production. Video chatting brought me to many places. I was there on that sidewalk, and I was inside my house. I was online, and I was unavailable. I was with my brother, and I was by myself. This playfulness connects to Gordon and Walter's concept of meaningful inefficiencies. The alternative use of this platform highlighted the uncertainties and unexpectedness of the process.

Couldry and Mejias (2018) concur that data colonialism is the capitalization of raw life with no limits (p. 336). They argue that social media platforms encourage users to share their inner thoughts, proving that there are no limits to the commodification of life as raw data (p. 341). It is not only a matter of labour relations but social relations that are ripe for extraction (Couldry & Mejias, 2018, p. 343). I testify that my experience resisted data colonialism in some capacity. I subverted GPS tracking by staying home. Despite claiming I was in a new place, my phone's GPS did not track these locations. It did, however, track that I was home, and it recorded the history of each call. I used the affordances of video chatting to supply me with the data I needed. In this way, I participated in the commodification of life as data. I transformed human life into an abstract form and exploited the data from the video call. This, however, was not something that seemed bothersome. I would claim users are not overly concerned with their data being colonized when communicating with a friend over a video call, as the focus is on connecting and conversing in the same way they would during an in-person conversation. This experience was developed with the understanding that video chatting ensures users are sharing

their data, not losing it. Yet the interactions between me and the person on the other end of the call were only of value to me if I was gaining something from it. The goal of each call was to obtain a screenshot to prove that I was in some place new. When every interaction is exploited, it takes away our ability to choose what is captured. When our choices are stripped from us, so is our humanity and autonomous identity. This relates to the concept of human erasure and what Couldry and Mejias (2018) identify as gamification (p. 344).

Figure 6

Poor connection, rich experience



When you are present in a video call, you become raw data, yet these data projections are only partial to who you are (p. 344). The main problem with this data is that its collection is determined by fostering an imbalance of power. In this experience, it was not solely the platform that held power in the human-computer relationship. Similar to how data colonialism is concerned with extracting data for the benefit of a few, I, too, was extracting data for my own benefit. The screenshots I took demonstrate this power imbalance. When one video chats, they can take the information on the other end of the call and make it their own. Moreover, the screenshots are more effective as a reminder of the experience than being quantified by an algorithm. While I resisted some forms of surveillance and data collection, it was at the expense of exploiting and capitalizing on the life at the other end of the line. The only way to terminate this process is to stop producing

data by hanging up the phone and putting it to sleep.

I found myself using this app in ways it has taught me. I would pause my speech and patiently wait when the connection faltered. I would hang up and call when the screen froze. I have learned how to use this platform, and I laboured to make it work. Yet this labour felt easy and expected. Using this feature to experience being in different places rather than using it conventionally (having a conversation with another person) made me feel more aware of the time I was spending online. Each time I initiated a video call, I was eager to see what would appear in front of me. In some ways, I felt as though I was colonizing the data on the other end of the call. I did not just witness these everyday experiences; I made them my own. I subverted my own data from being tracked in these places by staying home, but it was at the expense of capitalizing on another's life. In this way, the person on the other end of the phone did matter after all—they were forgotten; they were. I was still breaking the boundaries of video chatting affordances, but I was using a platform that promotes social interactions that are ripe for extraction.

While I largely used the video chat feature for my own self-interest, the unexpected and impractical uses illustrate how I was not acting in a predictable way and challenged the notion of participating efficiently. The element of playfulness is a prominent component in meaningful inefficiencies and is evident in Figure 8 of my digital experience, titled "Live streaming." It is impractical to watch a movie via video chat. The quality is poor, and the presence of a phone in a theatre is both distracting and prohibited. This example highlights how it disrupted the efficiency of this online system—and was also disruptive to those physically present in the theatre. It was a rather humorous moment in the experiment, along with Figure 7, titled "Food tracking," where I was privy to viewing leftover pizza but, obviously, was unable to consume it. This entire digital experience was messy in the ways it blurred some communicative processes and toyed with unintentional uses and intentional misuses of this digital platform. It was within this playfulness that I was better able to explore, experiment, and resist (Gordon & Walter, 2016, p. 258).

Figure 7

Food tracking

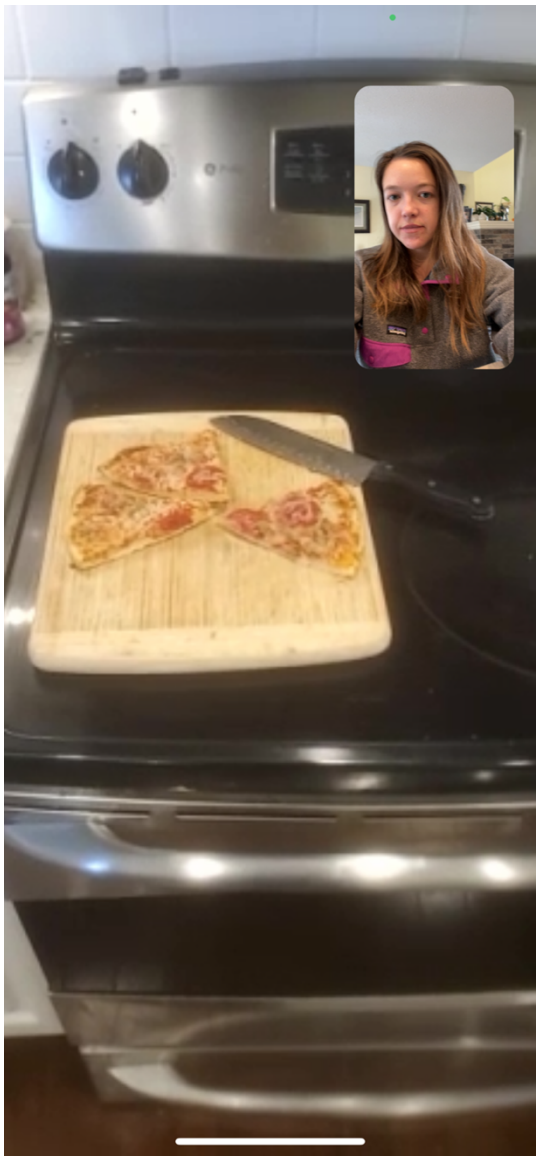
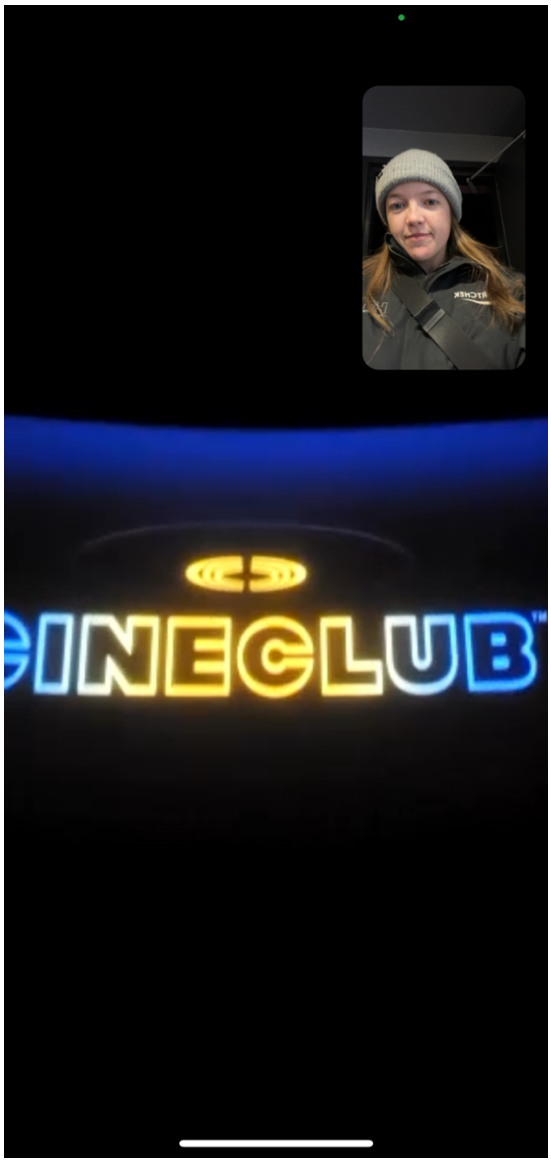


Figure 8

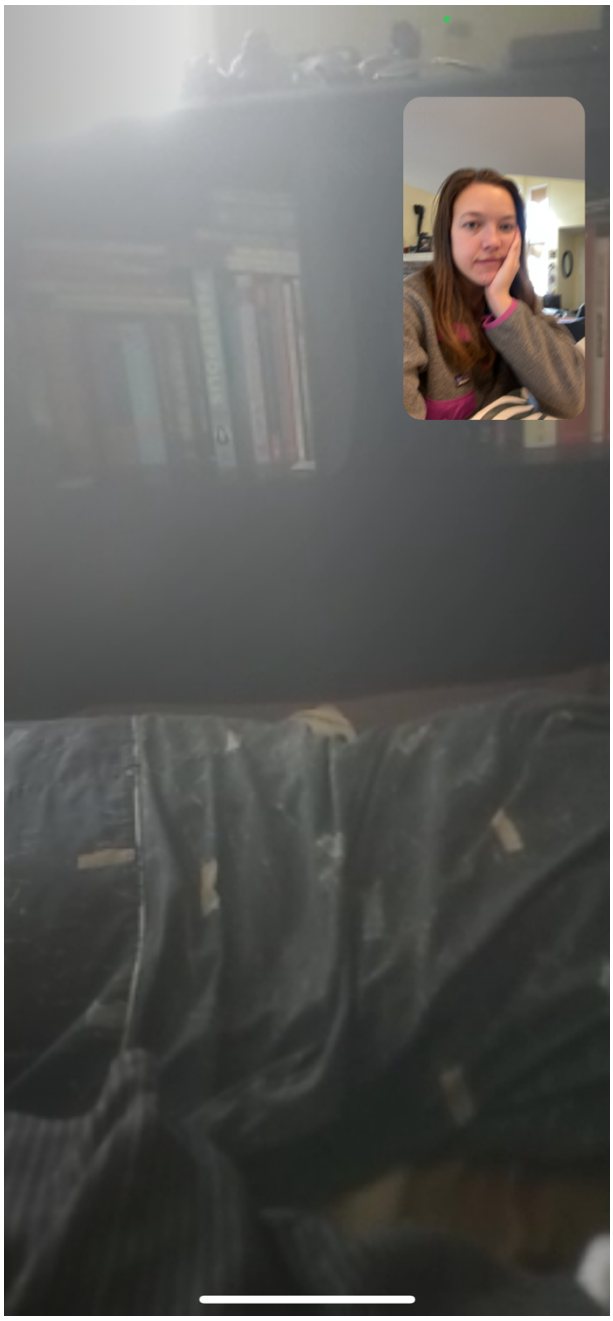
Live streaming



While in many ways, I used this technology in ways that addressed its needs and functions; I also video chatted in unexpected ways. I used this feature to "travel" around the city, to "be" in two places at once, and to deliberately misuse the affordances of video chatting. My phone may have collected information, such as the person I was communicating with and the length of time we video chatted for, but it fails to collect the experience I had. It fails to collect the "in-betweenness" of where I was.

Figure 9

Put your phone to sleep



In some ways, I resisted data colonialism; my phone's algorithm did not pick up the various places I went; I was unable to be tracked. While my own data was not being exploited, I felt that I was labouring to function within this technology. Additionally, I directed my brother on the other end of the call, putting him to work to make this experience possible. The affordances of video chatting imply that you can communicate across barriers and far distances, but you still must know the person on the other end; you must have their contact information. With Facebook's Messenger app, you still need to be "friends" in order to video chat. Moreover, I had to use a platform that offered me access to these raw moments. I did not know exactly where I would go when I started each call, but this experience demonstrates how I adapted to and challenged the platform. I was an active user. My experience was meaningfully inefficient, the affordances were purposefully misused, and my interactions were intentionally unimportant. n conclusion, my digital experience utilized Facebook's Messenger app to video chat in ways not intended by the platform. Using this platform, however, required that I abide by most of its technological rules for it to function: I needed a Facebook account and an online network of 'friends.' There

was an element of hybridity within this experience, both in the ways that I simultaneously produced and received information, and with regards to the blurring of the digital and physical space. Cultivating my online self was of less importance than the experience itself. I was not completely free of data colonization, but I was able to resist some of its forms despite this resistance requiring that I exploit real-life moments from the other end of the call; I directed my brother around and captured what he viewed for my benefit. This illustrates the parasitic element of this experience. Without having a Facebook account or the digital infrastructure, I would not have been able to participate. Using video chatting to explore the city is unexpected and unusual. In many ways, it revealed the impracticalities of the video chat feature. These impracticalities, however, heightened the experience of playfulness and demonstrated the ability to disrupt the norms of this system.

While it is arguably inefficient to use the video chat function to "travel" around the city, it was effective in creating a unique and joyful experience. Analyzing this experience through the technologies of the self reveals some limitations, most notably in the analysis of disclosure, which emphasizes how the experience is limited in its capacity to mobilize a message to assert an online identity. Additionally, the notion of resistance is a reoccurring theme, but to truly resist one's data from being exploited, one would have to create an experience that was both offline and unrecorded. This adds a limitation to the analysis of resistance. The theories discussed contribute to this analysis by articulating the ease with which we use these devices in their intended ways but also highlight how we are active users and can use them in unintended ways that make room for play and increase the ability to self-reflect on digital processes and experiences. This experience was insightful as it demonstrates how power dynamics are not only restricted to the human-computer relationship. Moreover, it affirms how digital platforms can be intentionally used in ways not intended by their creators, where the sole purpose of such uses is to be humorous and reflect. It is within this increased opportunity for reflection that we can become more in touch with our real and digital selves.

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The Media-Verse: Mainstream Media's Discourse on Meta's Metaverse

Madison Daniels

Abstract

This project focuses on mainstream media's discourse on Facebook, recently known as Meta's newly launched virtually inter-connected world called Metaverse. The contention of this study is that mainstream media serves as a forum that contributes to the public imagination of technology. Furthermore, Facebook faces various kinds of public scrutiny, including lawsuits by ex-content flaggers over mental health damages from over-exposure to harmful content. The company's handling of private information has also been heavily criticized by regulators, mainstream media outlets, and users, forcing Facebook to change some of its practices and offer explanations before the U.S. Congress and the general public. The resulting media coverage of these dilemmas and damaging effects show how essential it is for the public to understand how journalism critically scrutinizes a new technology as it develops. This could help prevent harm to users and public life. Thus, this project focuses on mainstream media's discursive construction of Meta's Metaverse due to the media's salient role in shaping public perceptions of technology. The objective of this study is to critically analyze the media discourse that is giving shape to this metaverse in the public imagination. The study is theoretically grounded in Foucault's understanding of discourse as producing knowledge and power. This study gathers and analyzes mainstream media publications reporting on the Metaverse from 2021 to 2022. The analysis focuses on questions such as: How is mainstream media discussing this metaverse? What are the known limitations, and benefits of the platform as discussed by publications? In all, this study found that the journalistic discourse was overwhelmingly critical of this virtual world, and presented this metaverse as a dystopia while paradoxically reaffirming support for Meta's Metaverse.

Keywords

Journalistic discourse, Meta's Metaverse, new media dystopia, discursive formation, Foucault

This submission is a creative webpage. To view the site Click Here. The site will prompt for a passcode.

Passcode: Media-verse

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