

Social Media Narrative:

Issues in Contemporary Practice

hosted by The Rutgers Camden Digital Studies Center and Judy Malloy

and the Rutgers Camden DSC Class in Social Media Narrative:

Lineage and Contemporary Practice

Facebook, November 16 - 21, 2016

Transcript: Jim Brown

Jim Brown

November 16

The DSC is thrilled to be hosting this discussion, and I hope some of the members of this group will join Judy's students in asking questions and offering comments. Judy has gathered an impressive group here, and I can't wait to hear what everyone has to say.

My own work has focused on the ethics and rhetoric of software. My first book, *Ethical Programs*, tracked the ethics built into networked software platforms such as Twitter, MediaWiki, and the algorithmic journalists developed by companies like Narrative Science. So, my focus has been primarily on issues of infrastructure rather than narrative per se, though I have been teaching electronic literature and videogames for years as well.

My new project is an attempt to analyze how software platforms enable or perhaps even encourage online harassment. First, a note about harassment and trolling: I'm really primarily focused on harassment and not the trolling that [Mark Marino](#) has already pointed us to in his post. While there are some trolling activities that bleed into the category of harassment, there are plenty of trolls who are more interested in exploring the potentials of online space than they are in harassing or abusing others. (One good source on this is Whitney Phillips' book *This is Why We Can't Have Nice Things*.)

So, my recent research questions are about how social media spaces are designed and how those designs can actually participate in and encourage harassment. The link to social media narrative here is this: What spaces are available to people who want to tell stories collaboratively? How are those spaces shaped and designed? Are they safe? How might they be redesigned and rethought?

I'm interested in hearing from folks in this discussion about how these issues were addressed in some of the early days of social media. I've been reading through Judy's edited collection to get a sense for this, but I'd love to know more. I'm also in the early stages of studying how harassment was discussed in the early days of telephony, which we might consider an interesting pre-internet social networking technology...

Comments



Judy Malloy James J. Brown, Jr. is the Legendary Director of the Digital Studies Center at Rutgers University-Camden, which is graciously hosting this panel. His bio in the Panel Program

is at

<http://www.narrabase.net/socmedianarrative.html#jim>



November 16 at 9:33am



Hi Jim thanks so much for hosting this panel! Your research questions "about how social media spaces are designed and how those designs can actually participate in and encourage harassment" are very important! For those who haven't read it, Stacy Horn's chapter on "EchoNYC" (in Social Media Archeology and Poetics) is particularly interesting as regards building early platforms, since in the early 1990's she built an online community at a time when the Internet was predominantly male -- and, as a woman sysop had to find ways to deal with harassment and bullying. Alan Liu's chapter on "Hacking the Voice of the Shuttle" is also of interest, although it deals more with the hacker destruction of and subsequent rebuilding of a hacker-safer humanities platform.

November 16, 2016 at 4:17pm



Clovis Bergere Hi Jim I don't know if reposting a link counts as a response but I just watched this Ted by Wael Ghonim who helped start the Egyptian Arab spring that raises a lot of the same issues in light of what happened online after the revolution. How can we design digital platform that promote civility rather than harassment.

http://www.ted.com/.../wael_ghonim_let_s.../transcript...



Transcript of "Let's design social media that drives real change"

TED Talk Subtitles and Transcript: Wael Ghonim helped touch off the Arab Spring in his home of Egypt ... by setting up a simple Facebook page. As he reveals, once the revolution spilled onto the streets, it turned from hopeful to messy, then ugly and heartbreaking. And social media followed suit. Wh...

November 16 at 7:12pm



Jim Brown Thanks for this, **Clovis**. I hadn't seen it.

November 17 at 7:57am



Aly Steered Straight Thank you for joining! I deal with online harassment in a different way with my own job. I talk to students at schools about bullying and cyber bullying. I find that students these days struggle a lot more with harassment than I did growing up. When I was in school, when the day was over there was a reprieve. You went home and did not have to deal with anybody if you did not want to. Nowadays, with social media, harassment and bullying can continue 24/7. Students today do not get a break. Harassment is one of the downsides of some social media platforms and I was wondering if you had any ideas on how to begin to end it?

November 17 at 11:49pm



Jim Brown **Aly Steered Straight**: In the course of this recent research project, I actually looked at the etymology of harassment. It shed light on the exact problem you've noted here. "To wear out, tire out, or exhaust with fatigue, care, trouble, etc." or "To scrape or rub." (OED). Harassment is about this constant pestering...and online harassment allows this to be amplified. That said, my interest is in examining harassment as it crosses the line between "online" and "offline." The term cyberbullying is, for me, misleading. Online harassment reaches into the offline world, causing physical trauma. Some harassment even involves "offline" activity (doxxing, SWATting, etc.). I really have no idea how to end it, but I do think we can study it in more productive ways so that we can design better environments. That design is about software, but it's also about community standards. Have you seen Imzy? It's a platform that is being designed from the ground up to curb harassment.

November 18 at 3:17pm



Aly Steered Straight I hadn't even heard of it, but I just went and checked it out. I agree with you that better environments could be designed

November 20 at 1:25pm



Deena Larsen I do not know if we can have this conversation without getting into what is going on in social media right now, with the false news stories, the false memes, the hatred, and the rhetoric. Right now, I am watching many of my friends explain that they are unfriending people because of political beliefs. I am not sure we can have civil dialogues--and I think that the

networks and search functions narrow our spheres to the point where we literally can not see the other points of view.

November 19 at 8:57pm



Jim Brown Deena: I completely agree - the election and its fallout are crucial to this discussion. Lately, I've noticed people on Twitter arguing that Trump is using tried-and-true methods for gaining attention, diverting attention, attacking, etc. What we're seeing now is a mainstreaming of what's been happening in many online communities for quite some time. One could argue that Gamergate was just a test bed for the broader political forces we're now seeing. In addition, this idea that we "literally can not see the other points of view" is really important. It means that we're not just talking about filter bubbles or spheres of agreement. Perhaps we're seeing environments designed to keep people from engaging or seeing counterarguments. Instead of seeing this as a choice to associate with likeminded people, could we see this as a design choice on the part of software companies? Or maybe this is too straight ahead...maybe it's the collateral damage of designing environments around advertising revenue?

November 20 at 4:06pm



Deena Larsen Jim Brown--I do see almost an active design to keep people from engaging other points of view. I wish it were just collateral damage from the plan of showing us our own reflections and friends and not others. But when the bubble making is so pervasive, when does it stop?

November 20 at 5:37pm



Bree Gibbs Hi. **Jim Brown.** I was wondering if you provide any information or resources centers to victims of harassment?

November 21 at 12:24pm



Jim Brown The Crash Override Network is doing great work helping people. They recognize that each situation requires specific needs, but they also know the tactics used in a range of situations: <http://www.crashoverridenetwork.com/>

Need help

Send us an email with
need assistance with
working with you

services are confi

Crash Override Network // Online Abuse Helpline And Advocacy...

Email our helpline at help [at] [crashoverridenetwork.com](mailto:help@crashoverridenetwork.com) with details about your situation and our agents will work to assist you.

crashoverridenetwork.com

November 21 at 1:59pm



Bree Gibbs This is awesome. I never heard of the Crash Override Network. Thank you for sharing. I am going to take a look now.

November 21 at 2:17pm



Judy Malloy At a policy level, as well as for civil liberties violations on the Internet, I'd suggest bookmarking the Electronic Frontier Foundation (EFF) website

<https://www.eff.org/>

November 21 at 5:38pm



Samantha Procida Hello, Professor Brown! I wanted to know if you believe trolling can ever be used in a positive way? I've seen it being used as a form of online protest (I'm also not sure how effective it is) and I'd just like your opinion on that.

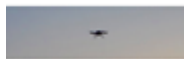
November 21 at 2:59pm



Jim Brown

Jim Brown Hi, Sam! I definitely think there's a political value in trolling, since it's often focused on pointing out the absurdity of an online conversation/online community. In addition, a troll's primary skill is to draw attention, and in the contemporary media environment learning how to get attention is an important political tactic (no need to even mention the president-elect here). However, it is important to draw a line between trolling and harassment. Some trolling is harassment, but not all trolling is harassment. Ken M is maybe the best troll of all time, but he's not seeking to harm anyone. So, I'd say there's a way to "troll for good," but I'd never say there's a way to "harass for good": <http://gizmodo.com/ken-m-is-the-most-epic-troll-on-the...>

ing mission to ship fuel to Alai



Ken M Is The Most Epic Troll On The Internet

Ken M has lurked since 2011, masterfully trolling comment sections across digital media. As his legend grows, let's look at Ken M's greatest hits and find out who is behind the comments.

gizmodo.com | By Kaila Hale-Stern

· November 21 at 4:11pm



Deena Larsen Ok, but the difference here is humor. Light, fun humor and Ken M. pokes fun at himself as well. Harassment has an underpinning of hatred and is usually not funny. Or if it is funny, it is the kind of sick humor where you yourself do not want to be spotted.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dTQYEKlvN2M>



[How Not To Be Seen - Monty Python's Flying...](#)

Subscribe to the Official Monty Python Channel here - <http://smarturl.it/SubscribeToPython> This filmed sketch purports to be a British government film (No. 4...
youtube.com

November 21 at 6:29pm



Samantha Procida **Jim Brown** I have heard of Ken M and his wacky comments on articles! Thank you for your reply!



Judy Malloy As in this Social Media Narrative: Issues in Contemporary Practice panel, we click on Monty Python's "How Not To Be Seen" and ponder its applicability to trolling, another issue of contemporary social media arises: clickbait. Is it possible to not keep clicking when we finish "How Not To Be Seen" and reach a click to the classic Monty Python skit on joke warfare?

Much of interest has been discussed here, But, it's also important to return to the question that Jim brings up as regards the design of social media spaces.

He asks: "What spaces are available to people who want to tell stories collaboratively? How are those spaces shaped and designed? Are they safe? How might they be redesigned and rethought?"

Judith Donath's *The Social Machine, Designs for Living Online*, (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2014) is of interest in this respect. Many examples of early non-profit SNSs are given in *Social Media Archeology and Poetics* (MIT Press, 2016). And once a year or so, the idea of rebuilding Arts Wire -- which was a safe place for creative work -- emerges. But for many reasons this does not occur. We don't have enough answers to Jim's question.

Given that this panel was designed to occur between November 16-21, perhaps his question is a good starting point with which to begin again - some time, some place.

November 23 at 2:48pm



Deena Larsen I meant the how not to be seen as the perfect example of killing humor, which Ken M. does. But it also is an answer--to not be trolled, do not be seen. or--be seen and be blown up...

November 24 at 12:13am