Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

Communication and Democracy

ISSN: 2767-1127 (Print) 2767-1135 (Online) Journal homepage: www.tandfonline.com/journals/rfsy21

The role of the social media user: Affordances and social responsibility

Jessica Roberts

To cite this article: Jessica Roberts (18 Apr 2026): The role of the social media user: Affordances and social responsibility, Communication and Democracy, DOI: 10.1080/27671127.2026.2659619

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/27671127.2026.2659619

© 2026 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group.

Published online: 18 Apr 2026.

Submit your article to this journal

Article views: 38

View related articles

View Crossmark data

Full Terms & Conditions of access and use can be found at
https://www.tandfonline.com/action/journalInformation?journalCode=rfsy21

COMMUNICATION AND DEMOCRACY
https://doi.org/10.1080/27671127.2026.2659619

OPEN ACCESS Check for updates

The role of the social media user: Affordances and social responsibility

Jessica Roberts

Faculdade de Ciências Humanas, Universidade Católica Portuguesa, Lisbon, Portugal

ABSTRACT

At a critical moment in history, the Hutchins Commission (1947) was convened to assess the role of the free press in a democratic society, articulating the social responsibility theory of the press. Nearly 80 years later, social media have become a part of everyday life for people around the world. More people than ever can now create, disseminate, analyze, and filter information to reach a broad public, with huge consequences for public information, but little attention to the role users play in shaping information on social media and the responsibility that comes with it. This study examines what the affordances of social media platforms, such as "frictionless" design and endless scroll, communicate to users about their roles and responsibilities, focusing on two of the most popular platforms, Instagram and Facebook. Role theory is used as a framework to understand how users might interpret their roles and responsibilities, as communicated by the platforms' affordances. The social responsibility theory of the press is applied to understand how we might reconsider the responsibilities of social media users in democratic societies, focusing on the role users play in shaping the information others see and how they might be made more aware of that role.

ARTICLE HISTORY
Received 27 May 2025
Accepted 5 April 2026

KEYWORDS
Social media; role theory; user experience; affordances; social responsibility theory

Over the past two decades, initial optimism about the democratizing and empowering effects of social media sites has been replaced by skepticism. Enthusiasm about social movements like the Arab Spring (Smidi & Shahin, 2017), the Umbrella Movement in Hong Kong (Lee et al., 2017), and Black Lives Matter (Mundt et al., 2018) has given way to concerns about "dark participation" (Quandt, 2018), misinformation (Allcott et al., 2019), political polarization and "illiberal forces" (Tucker et al., 2018), and the effects of social media use on the mental health of teenagers (Woods & Scott, 2016), among others. At the heart of this shift is a fundamental question about what it has meant to extend the ability to create, disseminate, analyze, and filter information to a larger portion of the public.

Often the debate about the downsides of social media focuses on the platforms themselves, which undeniably play a role in shaping the content that is presented to

CONTACT Jessica Roberts jessicaroberts@ucp.pt Faculdade de Ciências Humanas, Universidade Católica Portuguesa, Palma de Cima, Lisboa 1649-023, Portugal

© 2026 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group.
This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives License (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/), which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited, and is not altered, transformed, or built upon in any way. The terms on which this article has been published allow the posting of the Accepted Manuscript in a repository by the author(s) or with their consent.

users, through machine learning-based algorithms that determine which content to display or recommend to users (e.g., Vosoughi et al., 2018) and also content moderation. Broader questions about how social media users engage, and what roles and responsibilities they have as users of social media sites need to be explored, not with the goal of placing all responsibility for the tone and content of social media platforms on individuals, but to consider how the platforms shape participation, that is, what they implicitly say to users about their role through what behaviors they invite.

Most social media sites explicitly articulate some guidelines for users, which are addressed, but the focus of this paper is on what the affordances of the platforms implicitly tell users about what is expected of them. Affordances are understood to be a key part of shaping the role expectations of users, through the behaviors they allow, invite, and make readily available. As Gajardo et al. (2025) put it, affordances "invite behaviors and other outcomes, [but] they are not the outcome itself" (p. 3). This study examines the affordances of social media platforms to understand what they communicate to users about their role, including the responsibilities that come with the power to communicate to a large public. Specifically, it examines the affordances of Facebook and Instagram, two of the most-used social media platforms in the United States. Role theory —which argues that role expectations may be communicated by context and socialization, as well as direct consequences of behavior—is applied to understand the messages that affordances might send to users about what is expected of them on social media platforms.

To provide context for understanding how audiences use and respond to different media, the study first traces the history of the audience's role in mass media from early professional journalism to citizen journalists and social media, as well as how media ethics evolved alongside those changes, with a focus on social responsibility theory, to understand the roles and responsibilities communicated to members of the audience. Social responsibility theory is understood to have particular relevance in the context of social media, which empowers users to communicate to a broader public. The affordances of Facebook and Instagram are analyzed through a qualitative walkthrough to consider the role expectations they communicate. Ultimately, the study offers suggestions for how social media sites might change the message to users to imbue them with a sense of the responsibilities and obligations that come with their participation.

Literature review

Role theory and affordances

Role theory is a perspective in social psychology and sociology "concerned with the study of behaviors that are characteristic of persons within contexts and with various processes that presumably produce, explain, or are affected by those behaviors" (Biddle, 2013, p. 4). Generally, roles are associated with a common identity and determined by context. People are made aware of roles and expectations associated with those roles, which persist due to consequences and the social systems within which they are embedded. Biddle (2013) noted that role expectations are not always shared, and pointed to context, consequences, and social systems or socialization as ways that role expectations are communicated.

According to Borden and Tew (2007), "Roles have moral substance because they involve commitments to certain shared goods, such as knowledge. A role may be defined by participation in cooperative activities known as practices, which serve as the immediate context for the exercise of virtues" (p. 302). Often, people are socialized to understand their roles in a given social context. As Lynch (2007) explained, "social roles embody regularities in the cultural environments in which individuals participate" (p. 380).

Roles are often discussed in the context of professions but can also include "preferences with respect to specific acts and personal characteristics or styles; they may deal with what the person should do, what kind of person he should be, what he should think or believe, and how he should relate to others" (Kahn et al., 1964, p. 14). As Lynch (2007) noted, other categories of roles "include statuses (or positions) in formal and informal systems alike—fathers in families, professors in universities, members of a movie audience, or customers in a market" (p. 381). Roles are not completely fixed, and researchers often discuss role conflict that arises from lack of clarity about roles or competing roles. Role theory has been applied in public relations and in journalism to discuss journalistic role performance (Mellado, 2015). In discussing the way technology affects social roles, Lynch (2007) claimed, "The ubiquitous use of this technology stands as evidence that most individuals have little difficulty managing the everchanging role demands promoted by modern circumstances. Rather than problematic processes, role switching and role overlapping are common facets of everyday social life" (p. 380).

As mentioned above, Biddle (2013) argued that context is one way to communicate role expectations, and this study argues that the affordances of the platforms shape the context that tells users what roles to take on. Thus, the affordances of the platforms are examined through the lens of role theory. Affordances theory is increasingly applied in social media research to study the effects of new media (Ronzhyn et al., 2023). The concept of affordances is "generally used to describe what material artifacts such as media technologies allow people to do" (Bucher & Helmond, 2018, p. 235). In other words, affordances refer to the "range of functions and constraints that an object provides for, and places upon, structurally situated subjects" (Gajardo et al., 2025, p. 3), but do not refer to specific outcomes. As Gibson (1982) explained, "affordances do not cause behavior but constrain and control it" (p. 411). Affordances are understood to invite certain behaviors and thus shape the role expectations communicated to users.

Audience roles: From consumers to citizens to users

This section analyzes the changing role of audiences in mass media. Beginning with early professional journalism, which came to position audiences as consumers, mass media situated users in a passive role, in which they primarily consumed content. With the introduction of more participatory media, including citizen journalism and social media, the role of the user evolved, but was influenced by the role of the professional. Each section below also considers the overt discussion of roles (where present), often in the form of ethical codes or articulated norms.

News consumers

Communication media position audiences differently, transmitting an implicit message about their role, based partly on their inherent design. Printed media, such as newspapers, for example, implicitly situate the audience in the role of consuming and receiving information. The communication of a newspaper or magazine is necessarily one-way, with the reader positioned as a receiver of information, and any response from the reader requiring extra effort through other media, such as writing a letter to the editor. Radio and television likewise work as one-way mass communication, in which the role of the audience is largely to receive information.

The development of a professional news industry producing those media further enhanced this dynamic. Carey (1995) has argued that when the U.S. news industry was professionalized in the mid-1900s, the press began to take over the citizens' role in public life, positioning citizens as part of an audience of news consumers, rather than as participants in a public conversation. Citizens were put in the more passive role of consumers, and the press took over the more active responsibility of informing them: "The press no longer facilitated or animated a public conversation, for public conversation had disappeared. It informed a passive and privatized group of citizens who participated in politics through the press" (Carey, 1995, p. 245). The commodification of news meant that the role of citizens became "acquisitive" rather than engaged, and "[u]ltimately this view creates a passive role for the public in the theater of politics. The public is an observer of the press rather than 'participators in the government of our affairs' and the dialogue of democracy" (pp. 249–250). Thus, the professional press sends a message that the citizens' role is to consume the information presented to them by journalists, to be passive rather than active.

In the 20th century, journalists employed at various mass media organizations increasingly asserted an interpretation of the free press protection in the First Amendment that implied a special role for the press in a democracy. Schudson (2001) argued that this stemmed from journalists' need to "assert their collective integrity in the face of their close encounter with the publicity agents' unembarrassed effort to use information (or misinformation) to promote special interests" (pp. 162–163). This coincided with the professionalization of the press, and part of the effort to professionalize grew out of a desire to distinguish journalism from public relations and propaganda.

The social responsibility of the press was articulated by the Commission on Freedom of the Press (1947), which evaluated the role of the press in a democratic society and concluded that journalists had a responsibility to provide citizens with information (and noted that the press was falling short in that regard). This theory of the press put a great deal of responsibility on journalists and further contributed to the positioning of citizens as consumers, whose information needs should be met by the free and responsible press. This perspective was further developed by journalism scholars such as Siebert et al. (1963). Siebert et al.'s (1963) book on the four theories of the press contrasted social responsibility theory with authoritarian, libertarian, and Soviet communist theories of the press. Drawing mostly from the Hutchins Commission Report, social responsibility theory understands freedom of the press to be a responsible freedom, distinguished from the libertarian view by this key element.

The distinction between *citizen* and *consumer* or *client*, was explained by Rosen (1997), who argued that positioning people as citizens meant to treat them as making

a "contribution to public life; potential participants in public affairs; citizens of the whole, with shared interests; a deliberative body*/that is, a public with issues to discuss; choosers, decision makers; learners, with skills to develop; [and] connected to place and responsible for place" (p. 17). This echoed Carey's arguments about the passive role of consumers as opposed to active, participatory citizens. Consumers are seen as being in a much more transactional relationship, one that does not imply the same shared investment in outcomes or responsibilities as citizens.

As a profession of journalism developed, professional societies and individual news organizations established professional values and adopted codes of ethics. Nearly a century after the first journalism school was established, Deuze (2005) identified public service as one of the five primary values of modern journalism. The ethics codes of *The New York Times*, *National Public Radio*, and the Society of Professional Journalists all indicate some commitment to serving the public. Kovach and Rosenstiel (2001) summarized this broadly shared perspective: "The primary purpose of journalism is to provide citizens with the information they need to be free and self-governing" (p. 12). In that view, the role of the citizen (generally in democratic societies) is to consume the news presented to them by journalists and use it in the execution of their duties as members of a voting public. They were not completely passive in the information media, as they could participate by writing letters to the editor, calling in to tip lines or radio shows, or influencing content by the consumer choices they made, but they were not active in the gathering and interpreting of information; journalists were responsible for informing them and they were responsible only for consuming that information and then putting it to use.

From consumers to citizen journalists

At the turn of the 21st century, the growth of easy-to-use, free blogging platforms (Blogspot, Blogger, WordPress, and others), cheaper and more portable cameras, and other tools for recording and sharing content led to a major shift. The increase in amateur participation in the creation and sharing of public information was labeled citizen journalism (Rosen, 2006). Excitement about crowdsourcing, democratization of information, and the removal of potentially flawed gatekeepers fueled optimism about citizen journalism. Books like *We the media* (Gillmor, 2004) and *We're all journalists now* (Gant, 2007) were emblematic of the enthusiasm of many academics and media observers about citizen participation in gathering, analyzing, and sharing news and information. Rosen (2006) called citizen journalists "the people formerly known as the audience," and celebrated the shift from news media that ran "one-way," saying the "horizontal flow, citizen-to-citizen, is as real and consequential as the vertical one" (para. 10). Inviting more participation was thought to be good for information, as the "wisdom of crowds" would result in superior information derived from more diverse viewpoints and knowledge (Surowiecki, 2004). Citizens were encouraged to be—and celebrated for being—active participants in producing and disseminating news and information, rather than just consumers.

Some sites provided a platform for users to share content, while others actively sought citizen contributions. For example, CNN created a portal to accept citizen content on their website called iReport. In other cases, citizens who witnessed an event shared their videos, photos, or personal accounts with professional news

organizations, or on sites like YouTube, where the content was used in professional news reports (see Allan & Thorsen, 2009). Citizen witnesses provided the only or primary footage of events such as the 2005 tsunami in Southeast Asia, the 2007 London Tube bombings, and an alarming number of police shootings of unarmed Black men, such as the killing of Oscar Grant by a BART officer in 2009 (Antony & Thomas, 2010). Blogging platforms and sites for easily sharing photos, such as Flickr, contributed to the sense that anyone with a computer connection could be a journalist by uploading content to the internet (see, e.g., Gant, 2007). Citizens were increasingly able to play an active role in information and news, rather than waiting for journalists to bring them the news.

Professional journalists largely reacted as if citizen journalists were competitors, and unqualified, un-credible ones at that. Critics expressed concern about the skills, the lack of editorial oversight, and the unclear ethical standards or motives of these new contributors (see Dowd, 2009; Lemann, 2006). Journalists generally tried to keep the audience in a more passive role, asserting their own importance to inform citizens. However, the affordances of digital media positioned users as participants, invited (and expected) to send and receive messages to the internet audience, and to create their own content, rather than only consume. Aside from telling citizens that their role was to record and share information about the world around them, however, citizen journalism sites did little else to inform users about their roles.

Roberts and Steiner's (2012) effort to catalogue the way citizen journalism sites approached ethics concluded that "[f]ew citizen journalism sites took ethics seriously, regardless of whether they are organized by mainstream news organizations, individuals with professional journalism, citizen groups, or individual citizens" (p. 92). The authors analyzed 34 citizen journalism sites and found that some sites provided a framework for evaluating content, such as Reddit, which asked users to moderate other users' content and behavior. Most news organizations and content-sharing sites, however, offered "only a legalistic Terms of Use or User Agreement prohibiting activities," including "the kinds of 'obvious' behaviors that are widely condemned" or could result in legal consequences for a user or the hosting site (Roberts & Steiner, 2012, p. 92). Some community-run sites addressed ethics and user responsibilities, but the emphasis was on "prohibited behaviors —which are almost entirely behaviors broad enough that they should be applied to anyone online—rather than affirmative obligations or responsibilities specific to citizen journalists" (p. 92).

While the goal to encourage participation may have been well-intentioned, the strategy of many citizen journalism sites to make journalism seem easy, as if it were something anyone could do, may have contributed to users' sense of low expectations. As Brennen and Brennen (2015) suggested, the ubiquity and proliferation of news and information contribute to the perception that news is an "interchangeable product," de-emphasizing the importance of expert or skilled journalistic work. The hype about citizen journalism did not address questions about the responsibilities of the people who participated, and the implication seemed to be that more participation was good, regardless of whether it was ethical. The message of citizen journalism seemed to be that the power to share information came with no responsibility at all.

From citizen journalism to social media

The first social-networking sites (SNS) were founded in the early 2000s; Facebook launched in 2004 and quickly became the most-used SNS. Facebook and other social media grew quickly in reach and daily use, becoming the dominant means by which many people communicated, got news, and shared information. In 2005, just 5% of U.S. adults were using social media, but by 2018 that number was 72% (Perrin & Anderson, 2019), and in 2025 Facebook claimed more than 3 billion monthly active users, of about 5.5 billion internet users worldwide (Kemp, 2025). Social media platforms have moved to apps on smartphones, and Facebook and Google have come to dominate the online advertising market (Cramer-Flood, 2021). It is worth noting that scholarly definitions of social media and the general public's use of the phrase may differ, and the lines between the different categories of sites may be a bit blurry, but social media are understood here to include SNS as well as sites that allow user-generated content, if not the establishment of networks, such as YouTube.

If the speed, low cost, and low barriers to entry offered by new technologies combined with the integration of cameras in phones brought more contributors to the practice of citizen journalism, social media exploded the number of users who were able to share content online and gave them a place to put it. The practice of sharing, or mass self-communication (Castells, 2007), became commonplace, and social media allowed users to post about their lives, to share what they were doing, and what they thought. Hermida (2016) argued that social media taps into "an innate human desire to connect with others" (p. 29).

Many observers and academics extended the same enthusiasm about participation in the process of information-creation to social media; again the narrative was that social media would empower more users and further democratize information (see, e.g., Shirky, 2008). Excitement about the democratizing potential of massive participation was evident when Twitter was credited with a major role in the Arab Spring and other political revolutions in the latter part of the first decade of the 2000s, although much of that narrative was later contested (Smidi & Shahin, 2017). Successful hashtag campaigns to raise funds for causes (e.g., the ALS Ice Bucket Challenge in 2014), to raise awareness about social issues (e.g., #yesallwomen and #metoo), and to organize social movements (the 2014 Umbrella Movement and Black Lives Matter originating in 2013 and resurging powerfully in 2020) demonstrated the power of social media to spread messages of social change (Mundt et al., 2018). The use of social media to promote social movements (whether resulting in concrete offline social action or not) contributed to the view that social media were a way for users to voice their opinions, and even to create change, although critics expressed concern about "slacktivism," in which posting about social issues took the place of real action (see, e.g., Morozov, 2012).

Social media users' role perceptions and performance

Several scholars have examined the perceptions of social media users regarding their behavior or role on the platforms, although many have focused on content moderation, perhaps because moderation is when users have the most concrete feedback about their behavior. For example, Jhaver and colleagues (Jhaver et al., 2019, 2021, 2023) have conducted several studies on the influence of content moderation policies on user behavior, particularly related to transparency in content moderation and the impact of

witnessing explanations about content moderation decisions on observers. These studies indicate there is some ability to shape user behavior through changes to platform architecture, as well as through witnessing the implementation of moderation rules. Likewise, Seering et al. (2019) studied moderators of online communities to create a model for how rules governing communities evolve.

Duffy and Meisner (2023) interviewed content creators and found that many were frustrated by the opacity of the platforms' governance systems. Other studies have similarly found that users feel frustrated by platforms' content moderation rules and their application, which appears arbitrary and inconsistent to them (e.g., Myers West, 2018). Likewise, users are not informed about how their behavior on the site will affect the information that is presented to other users through the algorithms that judge popularity, trending information, or determine how to order information. Smith (2018) found that a majority of Facebook users did not understand "very well" or at all why posts appear in their news feeds. In fact, this information is not even publicly available, because details of how algorithms select which content to promote are considered trade secrets by social media companies (Pasquale et al., 2015). As DeVito (2017) noted, "we do not have a clear picture of what the algorithm is, much less what values it is embedding into its story selection process" (p. 754).

In terms of their understanding of their role on social media platforms, Roberts' (2025) survey of social media users found that many view it as the responsibility of the platforms or other actors, such as journalists or governments, to ensure that content on social media platforms is accurate, civil, etc. Many users viewed their only responsibility to be reporting violations.

Many platforms, including Facebook and Instagram, have community guidelines or other similarly titled documents that are not required terms of service, but are more akin to values statements. Milosevic (2016) found that, "the older the company, the more likely it is to have other corporate documents such as 'principles' or 'community standards/guidelines/rules,' which elaborate cyberbullying-related provisions and their enforcement" (p. 5173). Maddox and Malson (2020) noted that, much like the content moderation rules, "for many, these [community standards] documents are too vague, and when they are enforced, they are not enacted satisfactorily, effectively, or equally" (p. 1). Of course, as evident from the studies mentioned above, there is little transparency in how the terms are enforced, as Milosevic (2016) noted, "none of the companies in the sample publicized the definitions that its moderators used to assess whether a reported case constituted cyberbullying, abuse, or harassment" (p. 5173). These rules can also be understood within the context of regulatory structures governing online expression, which exempt social media companies from any liability for content posted on their platforms (see, e.g., Wagner, 2013).

Roberts (2019) examined the Terms of Use, User Agreements, Privacy Policies, and other documents provided to users by the six most popular social media sites in the U.S. (Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, Pinterest, Twitter, and Snapchat), and found that no training is required prior to posting content, nor are ethics or user responsibilities addressed. According to Roberts' (2019) analysis:

> The standards on the sites are generally articulated in terms of behaviors to be avoided if a user does not want to be banned from the site or have content removed from the site. Most

> of these behaviors were illegal, such as copyright infringement or defamation. The remaining behaviors were mostly related to protecting other users from harm or harassment or keeping out content that the sites presumably find disturbing or distasteful for other users. (p. 417)

Most Terms of Use and other policy documents are written in language that is legalistic, largely aimed at limiting the criminal liability of the companies rather than imparting to users an understanding of their role as participants on social media, the impact of sharing and commenting on information, responsibilities they have to other users, or ethical obligations. Ethics are not addressed at all. As Roberts (2019) noted, the policies "communicate to users that they are free to engage in whatever behaviors they want, as long as they don't explicitly violate the rights of others, generally in ways that are already subject to legal prosecution offline" (p. 416).

Maddox and Malson (2020) argued that these social media community guidelines are informed by a particular First Amendment jurisprudence, applying a marketplace of ideas approach to social media. Social media sites do not provide users with a discussion of positive responsibilities, of ethics, ethics codes, training about ethics, or educational resources related to ethics, and so users are led to believe that they may say or do whatever they want up until another user is harmed and complains about it. It is the manifestation of what Brown (2019) described as a neoliberal variant of freedom that is understood as "unregulated personal license" (p. 229) and the "absence of coercion" (p. 225).

Users are also not provided with any discussion of the important role that information and public debate play in a democratic system. Indeed, "users are largely regarded as customers, irresponsible—or at least un-responsible—being served by the site, rather than as participants with an obligation to engage in a way that promotes the social good or the needs of a democratic society" (Roberts, 2019, p. 415). The content has suffered: as Lewis and Molyneux (2018) noted, "a decade after social media was seen in some quarters as journalism's savior as well as a vital catalyst for connection and social change broadly, it is being decried as a cesspool of misinformation and fake news" (p. 13). Other research indicates that trolling and similar behaviors on social media are contagious; the results of an experiment by Cheng et al. (2017) suggested that "ordinary people can, under the right circumstances, behave like trolls" (p. 1), emphasizing, therefore, "the importance of different design affordances to manage either type of trolling" (p. 11).

This all points to a perception of social media users as unconstrained, in the tradition of the libertarian theory of the press and communication, or the neoliberal variant of freedom described by Brown (2019), with no responsibility to other users or society in general. While the social responsibility theory of the press argued that the power bestowed by the free use of tools of mass communication implied a concomitant responsibility, once those tools were put in the hands of every person with an internet connection and a device, the associated responsibility seems to have fallen by the wayside. Thus, understanding what roles the platforms afford their users may help identify how to improve the performance of those roles through non-restrictive or coercive means.

Methods

This study is guided by the question: how do the affordances of Facebook and Instagram shape users' role expectations? Facebook and Instagram are two of the most-used social

media sites in the U.S. and worldwide (Gottfried, 2024), with millions of daily posts and visitors. To understand what these sites communicate to users about their role and responsibilities, this study examines their affordances through a qualitative walkthrough. Facebook and Instagram were selected for this analysis because of their wide use and popularity, and because they are emblematic of what social media sites offer. While they are owned by the same parent company (Meta), Instagram was initially launched as a competitor to Facebook and is more focused on visual content.

Role theory suggests that messages about roles are transmitted by context, practices, and consequences; this study is concerned with the affordances, which can be understood as the practices that are allowed, encouraged, or normalized. The assumption is not that roles are overly determined or dictated by the design or affordances of the media, but that the structure of the platforms normalize or make seem natural certain behaviors, ways of engaging, and especially of consuming.

The analysis was conducted as a qualitative walkthrough of each of the platforms, opening each platform and systematically assessing the navigation options, tools, and interfaces. Light et al. (2018) describe qualitative walkthrough as "a way of engaging directly with an app's interface to examine its technological mechanisms and embedded cultural references to understand how it guides users and shapes their experiences" (p. 882). Based on an approach used in software engineering and user experience design, the method involves the researcher registering, logging in to the app, mimicking "everyday use where possible," then logging out, while "attending to technical aspects, such as the placement or number of icons, as well as symbolic elements, like pictures and text" (p. 882). The researcher explores screens, clicks buttons, and views menus.

The qualitative walkthrough essentially examines affordances at multiple levels of scale, "from the app's buttons to its interaction with operating systems, hardware, structures of connectivity (e.g., wifi) and other apps in its extended environment" (Light et al., 2018, p. 886). Light et al. (2018) argue that being mindful of the material influences of apps "allows the researcher to place oneself in the user's position and imagine the range of affordances the user perceives" (p. 886).

For this analysis, Instagram and Facebook were explored on the iPhone app and website on a Chrome browser. Salience, placement on the screen, and intuitive use/functionality were all considered. This analysis of affordances was done in 2025 and thus reflects the platforms as they existed at that time, acknowledging that the platforms occasionally adopt new features or retire existing ones.

Analysis: Affordances of social media

This analysis is divided into the process of creating or registering an account and entering the platform on subsequent visits, everyday use of the platforms, and account management. The description of the user experience highlights the affordances, or actions that are available to users, considering their salience and the user experience. The affordances of Instagram and Facebook are characterized by a lack of friction—a feature of social media that has been discussed for decades (Tomalin, 2023)—especially regarding the main affordances: scrolling the feed, liking content, and, to a lesser degree, posting.

The feed appears first when a user accesses the platforms, and it dominates the screen, leaving only room at the periphery for buttons to navigate away from the main content

feed. The feed is displayed with endless scroll, providing the ability to view all the content in a feed for as long as a user wants until they leave the app, and a secondary affordance to react quickly with a "like" through a heart or thumbs-up. Posting content is nearly as frictionless, requiring only a single step to navigate away from the feed. Meanwhile, making changes to settings or adjustments to an account requires seeking out options in the corner buttons, navigating away from the feed, clicking through multiple screens. That is, the most readily available affordances of the sites are to consume and quickly react to content.

Registration and entry

Creating an account and beginning to post content on Facebook and Instagram are exceedingly easy. To create an account on Instagram, users must provide a phone number or email, password, birthday (for age verification, although there is no mechanism to determine the accuracy of the date provided), name (although again, no mechanism exists to check the accuracy of the name provided), and username. The process is nearly the same on Facebook, although users are not asked to create a username, and they are asked to indicate their gender. In both cases, the registration process can be done in a minute or two, possibly less. It is not necessary to create an Instagram account if a user already has a Facebook account. This assumes, as research indicates is generally the case, that most users do not read any of the terms of use when creating an account (Obar & Oeldorf-Hirsch, 2020).

After creating an account, users are given the option to either immediately begin consuming and sharing content or to first access their personal contacts stored in their phone, to connect to friends and acquaintances who are also using the platform. Once logged in, a user may reenter the platforms easily from the phone by simply clicking on the icon, or on the browser by reopening the sites.

The ease of the registration and entry process, and the lack of training or education prior to beginning to engage on social media sites means that users can begin sharing and consuming content with no preparation for or understanding of the effect of their actions. The ease with which users can create an account and begin consuming and posting content is frictionless. The frictionless user experience enables quick adoption by users of all technical abilities, but it may also contribute to users' sense that participation on social media is "easy" and requires no training or education, and therefore carries no associated responsibility.

Everyday use

The primary point of entry on Facebook and Instagram (whether on a browser or app) is the user's "feed." The feed is made up of text, image, and video content shared by the user's network and content recommended based on algorithmic selection. On Instagram, users may choose to see only content from people they follow, but this requires finding the settings page to change content preferences. The Facebook feed is increasingly populated by recommended or related content, much of which is AI-generated. Both feeds utilize "infinite scroll" (Hari, 2023; Hoekman & Spool, 2009; Holmgren & Coyne, 2017), which allows a user to continuously scroll without ever reaching an endpoint. The

scrolling has an intuitive feel on smartphone touchscreens, a design feature that allows a user to roll through content continuously and easily, but also catch and bounce a bit when the finger or thumb slows or leaves the screen. On a browser, the scrolling must be done with a touchpad or arrows.

There are several reaction options while scrolling: in the Instagram app, a double tap with a finger or thumb will indicate that a user likes a post, while icons allow a user to like, add comments, re-post, or send a post to another user. Facebook similarly provides users options to Like, Comment, Share, or add another emoji response. In the apps, simple swiping or tapping with the thumb make these actions quick and effortless. When any of these actions is completed, the user returns to viewing the feed. Again, this frictionless experience may give users the sense that reacting is effortless, and even meaningless. The reality, of course, is that users' reactions shape the content that is shown to other users: all social media platforms depend on users not only to create content, but also to filter, organize, and prioritize information both directly and indirectly through their interactions with content. However, users are given no explicit or even implicit information about their role in shaping the feeds of other users when they join and begin participating in social media sites.

The navigation tools from the feed are located on the periphery: on Instagram there are five navigation buttons on the bottom of the screen: to navigate to the main feed (where the user begins), to access "reels," to reach the user's inbox, to search, and to access the user's profile. Across the top of the feed is a row of "stories," ephemeral content from accounts the user follows. Users may post by clicking or touching a plus sign on their profile photo in the upper-left corner. This offers the user options to create a post, story, or reel, and defaults to accessing the user's camera, with the next-most accessible option being the user's photos stored in their phone. In the upper-right corner is a heart, which takes a user to notifications, a list of how other users have reacted to their posts and stories.

On Facebook, the entry point is also a feed with an input box at the top of the page that includes a prompt (as of 2025, "What's on your mind, [name]?") to create a post. The navigation options are more extensive and arranged on the edge of the feed, as links on the left-side rail, along the top of the page, and down the right-side rail. The top menu includes a search tool, in the center a link to the home page, Marketplace, Friends, Memories, and Gaming, and in the right corner, tools to navigate to Messenger, Notifications, and the user's profile. The right rail has birthdays and contacts, and the left rail has several options, some overlapping with the top-of-the-page menu. Most of the page is occupied by the prompt box and the feed with infinite scroll.

Aside from scrolling the feed, the prompt box is the next-most salient feature, which leads a user to options to enter text, or add photos, videos, tags, locations, GIFs, and more. However, once a user has begun to scroll the feed on a web browser, they have to return all the way to the top to reach the prompt box again, to post their own content. While acknowledging that there is more to effective posting on social media than simply posting whatever thought or image is at hand, and that learning the style, memes, and vernacular of social media platforms may take time, the function of posting itself is quite simple and intuitive.

The prominence of the feed and its automatic appearance upon initial entry to the platform, as well as the frictionless user experience communicates to users that their role

as a user is simply to consume content and react quickly. Any sense of the impact of this consumption, or responsibility or obligation to others is invisible. The user is situated in much the same role as a passive consumer of traditional mass media.

Account management

Both platforms offer users the ability to select who is able to view their content, whether for individual posts, or their whole account. These settings and options require at least three steps from the main landing page, often requiring navigating long menus. In the case of Instagram, the "Settings and activity menu" has more than 30 options, organized by headings like "How you use Instagram," "Who can see your content," "How others can interact with you," and "What you see." Users may react to specific pieces of content (indicating they are not interested in seeing them, for example) by clicking on drop-down menus in the corner of posts. These reactions require more effort than scrolling or liking (double-tap) and are less prominently placed than the like button. This communicates to the user that these are of secondary concern, perhaps even unnecessary. The default options are to have posts appear to a user's full network, and for all their behavior and information to be used to determine the content they see, as well as what others see. Restricting or modifying these options requires digging deep into the settings and parsing a series of categories: it is not frictionless or intuitive. Due to this, a user may understand that they are not expected to concern themselves with those details.

Discussion

Affordances invite and constrain behavior, shaping what users understand they are expected to do. The affordances of Facebook and Instagram lead users to understand their role is to consume (with no clear endpoint) by scrolling and to quickly react, generally indicating approval. Other invited behaviors include posting their own content, following users, sending messages, and even selling things, although there are differences in how salient each action is on each platform. The most salient action, and the one that is most frictionless, is simply consuming through infinite scroll, putting the user in a passive consumption role more akin to traditional or industrial mass media than participatory media.

Thompson (2025) has asserted that "Social media has turned into television" (para. 5), citing Meta's own court filing, which revealed that 93% of time spent on Instagram and 83% on Facebook involved consuming content from accounts to which the user had no connection (i.e., not a friend, contact, or followed account). Thus, Thompson (2025) argued, "disparate forms of media and entertainment are converging on one thing: the continuous flow of episodic video" (para. 12). However, given the forces that determine the content of that flow on social media, it is clear that, while Facebook and Instagram are increasingly non-participatory media, they still utilize user behavior to create the content stream, while making opaque to the user their role in doing so. The affordances of the platforms and their ease of use contribute to users' sense of irresponsibility while placing them in a position of significant influence.

The reasoning that underlay the social responsibility theory of the press was that the freedom to share information with the public gave the press enormous power in

a democratic system and therefore carried with it a responsibility to use that power to inform citizens. The Commission (1947) called freedom of expression "an accountable freedom," emphasizing that "the moral right of free public expression is not unconditional . . . the claim of the right is based on the duty of a man to the common good and to his thought" (p. 10). That same reasoning could be applied today to all those who are able to create, analyze, and spread information online—all social media users. The freedom to use social media should be considered an accountable freedom that comes with a responsibility to the public or at least other users. It would be incumbent upon social media platforms to make users aware of their role in the information ecosystem on social media, and the responsibilities that come with that role. In order to do so, social media sites could attempt to put social responsibility at the forefront of the user's mind through affordances, during various stages of platform use, from account creation to posting, reacting, and commenting.

A lack of friction is key to the affordances of Facebook and Instagram, from account creation to infinite scrolling of content and posting. This frictionless user experience contributes to a lack of a sense of responsibility on the part of users, as reflected in survey data (Roberts, 2025), leading users to perceive their role as "easy" and requiring little effort, training, or thought. Social media platforms could introduce friction to make users aware of their role and corresponding responsibilities, considering the impact of their behavior on other users and the public good, as contributors to the information needs of citizens in a democracy.

Friction could be introduced to the process of account creation by making Terms of Use and other policy documents more difficult to bypass without reading, or by requiring completion of a short training before posting. Training or educational videos could include explanations of how user behavior determines what information is shared, prioritized, and presented to others. Messages about the role and responsibilities of users could be incorporated in user agreements or terms of use, which ought to be written in plain language and with an emphasis on affirmative behaviors that users are expected to engage in.

The Working Group on Infodemics recommended forcing social networks to "better inform users regarding the origins of messages they receive" and why content has been recommended to them in a news feed (Forum for Information & Democracy, 2020, p. 15). Users play a key role in promoting and spreading information, whether they do so directly—through liking, sharing, and commenting on content—or indirectly, as predictive algorithms gather data on their behavior to determine what content to promote to other users; values included in DeVito's (2017) model of the Facebook news feed included relationships between users, explicitly expressed user interests, prior user engagement, and implicitly expressed user preferences. The role of their own consumption behavior in how content is selected to populate the social media feeds of other users could be explained to them prior to their beginning to post or consume content. Sites could require media literacy and civic training or education prior to creating an account, or at least prior to posting content.

Training or explanatory modules could describe how the platforms' algorithms select information and how user behavior is incorporated in those algorithms. Before sharing information, users could be required to confirm that they have verified the validity of the information and considered its impact on other users. Jahn et al.'s (2023) experiments

found that "a small amount of friction combined with learning increases the average quality of posts significantly" (p. 3).

Professional journalism offers an example for how platforms can communicate explicitly to users about their role. American journalists are not subject to any licensing or certification requirements, but professional journalists learn about ethics codes through professional associations (see, e.g., Society of Professional Journalists, 2014) and the publications that employ them. They are held to ethical standards by their supervisors and peers, as well as their audience. While journalists are not perfect contributors to the information environment, the profession's adherence to codes of ethics means they have an articulated role and values. In a similar way, social media users need not pass a test, but they could be shown a code of ethics and asked to affirm their adherence to that code. At the very least, users could be exposed to ideas about ethics and the responsibilities of those who interact with information online, particularly members of a democratic society.

Requiring training, showing users codes of ethics, or otherwise introducing friction to the user experience on social media platforms might reduce the numbers of users and engagement on the sites, and thus would likely reduce the revenue streams of the companies that own them. Certainly, the potential cost in economic terms is a barrier to adoption by platforms eager to maximize revenue. The Hutchins Commission noted in 1947 that, "The economic logic of private enterprise forces most units of the mass communications industry to seek an ever larger audience" (p. 52), and this remains true today. While adding friction might reduce the number of users, it could also improve the quality of information on the platforms, and thus the experience of users, ultimately helping the sites to remain relevant and therefore profitable. It would also help realize the promise of social media as a democratizing force contributing to a robust and healthy public sphere, a consideration that should be weighed alongside financial interests.

The Hutchins Commission (1947) called upon the press to regulate itself and "accept responsibility for performance in the public interest" (p. 69). Social media companies are not news organizations, but they do play a critical role in public information and public discourse. The argument of this study is that they should accept responsibility for performance in the public interest and make users aware of the specific responsibilities that come with using social media. The changes outlined above would help communicate implicitly and explicitly to users that the role of social media user carries power and therefore responsibility. The challenge lies in the tension between what is profitable and what is in the best interest of an informed citizenry in a democratic society.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

References

Allan, S., & Thorsen, E. (2009). *Citizen journalism: Global perspectives*. Peter Lang.

Allcott, H., Gentzkow, M., & Yu, C. (2019). Trends in the diffusion of misinformation on social media. *Research & Politics*, *6*(2), 1–8. https://doi.org/10.1177/2053168019848554

Antony, M. G., & Thomas, R. J. (2010). 'This is citizen journalism at its finest': YouTube and the public sphere in the Oscar grant shooting incident. *New Media and Society*, *12*(8), 1280–1296. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444810362492

Biddle, B. J. (2013). *Role theory: Expectations, identities, and behaviors*. Academic Press.

Borden, S. L., & Tew, C. (2007). The role of journalist and the performance of journalism: Ethical lessons from "fake" news (seriously). *Journal of Mass Media Ethics*, *22*(4), 300–314. https://doi.org/10.1080/08900520701583586

Brennen, B., & Brennen, J. S. (2015). Taking our pictures. *Journalism Practice*, *9*(4), 520–535. https://doi.org/10.1080/17512786.2015.1030138

Brown, W. (2019). Defending society. In E. Klinenberg, S. Marcus, & C. Zaloom (Eds.), *Antidemocracy in America: Truth, power, and the republic at risk* (pp. 225–232). Columbia University Press.

Bucher, T., & Helmond, A. (2018). The affordances of social media platforms. In J. Burgess, T. Poell, & A. Marwick (Eds.), *The sage handbook of social media* (pp. 233–254). SAGE Publications.

Carey, J. W. (1995). The press, public opinion, and public discourse: On the edge of the postmodern. In E. S. Munson & C. A. Warren (Eds.), *James Carey: A critical reader* (pp. 228–257). University of Minnesota Press.

Castells, M. (2007). Communication, power and counter-power in the network society. *International Journal of Communication*, *1*(1), 238–266. https://ijoc.org/index.php/ijoc/article/view/46/35

Cheng, J., Danescu-Niculescu-Mizil, C., Leskovec, J., & Bernstein, M. (2017). Anyone can become a troll. *American Scientist*, *105*(3), 152–155. https://doi.org/10.1511/2017.126.152

Commission on Freedom of the Press. (1947). *A free and responsible press*. University of Chicago Press.

Cramer-Flood, E. (2021, May 10). Duopoly still rules the global digital ad market, but Alibaba and Amazon are on the prowl. eMarketer. https://www.emarketer.com/content/duopoly-still-rules-global-digital-ad-market-alibaba-amazon-on-prowl

Deuze, M. (2005). What is journalism? Professional identity and ideology of journalists reconsidered. *Journalism*, *6*(4), 442–464. https://doi.org/10.1177/1464884905056815

DeVito, M. A. (2017). From editors to algorithms: A values-based approach to understanding story selection in the Facebook news feed. *Digital Journalism*, *5*(6), 753–773. https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2016.1178592

Dowd, M. (2009, April 21). To tweet or not to tweet. The New York times. http://www.nytimes.com/2009/04/22/opinion/22dowd.html

Duffy, B. E., & Meisner, C. (2023). Platform governance at the margins: Social media creators' experiences with algorithmic (in) visibility. *Media Culture & Society*, *45*(2), 285–304. https://doi.org/10.1177/01634437221111923

Forum for Information & Democracy. (2020). Working group on infodemics policy framework. November 2020. https://informationdemocracy.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/ForumID_Report-on-infodemics_101120.pdf

Gajardo, C., Domingo, D., & Costera Meijer, I. (2025). Examining platforms' affordances: Bridging journalists' and users' practices of online engagement. *Digital Journalism*, 1–20. https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2025.2559370

Gant, S. (2007). *We're all journalists now: The transformation of the press and reshaping of the law in the internet age*. Free Press.

Gibson, J. J. (1982). Notes on affordances. In E. Reed & R. Jones (Eds.), *Reasons for realism. Selected essays of James J. Gibson* (pp. 401–418). Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Gillmor, D. (2004). *We the media: Grassroots journalism by the people, for the people*. O'Reilly Media.

Gottfried, J. (2024, January 31). Americans' social media use. *Pew Research Center*. https://www.pewresearch.org/internet/2024/01/31/americans-social-media-use/

Hari, J. (2023). *Stolen focus: Why you can't pay attention—and how to think deeply again*. Crown.

Hermida, A. (2016). *Tell everyone: Why we share and why it matters*. Anchor Canada.

Hoekman, R., Jr. Jr., & Spool, J. (2009). *Web anatomy: Interaction design frameworks that work*. New Riders.

Holmgren, H. G., & Coyne, S. M. (2017). Can't stop scrolling!: Pathological use of social networking sites in emerging adulthood. *Addiction Research & Theory*, *25*(5), 375–382. https://doi.org/10.1080/16066359.2017.1294164

Jahn, L., Rendsvig, R. K., Flammini, A., Menczer, F., & Hendricks, V. F. (2023). Friction interventions to curb the spread of misinformation on social media. *arXiv:2307.11498*. https://doi.org/10.48550/arXiv.2307.11498

Jhaver, S., Boylston, C., Yang, D., & Bruckman, A. (2021). Evaluating the effectiveness of deplatforming as a moderation strategy on Twitter. *Proceedings of the ACM on Human-Computer Interaction*, *5*(CSCW2), 1–30. https://doi.org/10.1145/3479525

Jhaver, S., Bruckman, A., & Gilbert, E. (2019). Does transparency in moderation really matter? User behavior after content removal explanations on Reddit. *Proceedings of the ACM on Human-Computer Interaction*, *3*(CSCW), 1–27. https://doi.org/10.1145/3359252

Jhaver, S., Rathi, H., & Saha, K. (2023). Bystanders of online moderation: Examining the effects of witnessing post-removal explanations. Proceedings of the 2024 CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems, New York (pp. 1–9). https://doi.org/10.1145/3613904.3642204

Kahn, R. L., Wolfe, D. M., Quinn, R. P., Snoek, J. D., & Rosenthal, R. A. (1964). *Organizational stress: Studies in role conflict and ambiguity*. John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Kemp, S. (2025, February 5). Digital 2025: Global overview report. DataReportal. https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2025-global-overview-report

Kovach, B., & Rosenstiel, T. (2001). *Elements of journalism: What newspeople should know and the public should expect*. Three Rivers Press.

Lee, F. L., Chen, H. T., & Chan, M. (2017). Social media use and university students' participation in a large-scale protest campaign: The case of Hong Kong's Umbrella Movement. *Telematics and Informatics*, *34*(2), 457–469. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tele.2016.08.005

Lemann, N. (2006, August 7). Amateur hour: Journalism without journalists. *The New Yorker*. https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2006/08/07/amateur-hour-4

Lewis, S. C., & Molyneux, L. (2018). A decade of research on social media and journalism: Assumptions, blind spots, and a way forward. *Media and Communication*, *6*(4), 11–23. https://doi.org/10.17645/mac.v6i4.1562

Light, B., Burgess, J., & Duguay, S. (2018). The walkthrough method: An approach to the study of apps. *New Media and Society*, *20*(3), 881–900. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444816675438

Lynch, K. D. (2007). Modeling role enactment: Linking role theory and social cognition. *Journal for the Theory of Social Behavior*, *37*(4), 379–399. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-5914.2007.00349.x

Maddox, J., & Malson, J. (2020). Guidelines without lines, communities without borders: The marketplace of ideas and digital manifest destiny in social media platform policies. *Social Media + Society*, *6*(2), 1–10. https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305120926622

Mellado, C. (2015). Professional roles in news content: Six dimensions of journalistic role performance. *Journalism Studies*, *16*(4), 596–614. https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2014.922276

Milosevic, T. (2016). Social media companies' cyberbullying policies. *International Journal of Communication*, *10*, 5164–5185. https://ijoc.org/index.php/ijoc/article/view/5320

Morozov, E. (2012). *The net delusion: The dark side of internet freedom*. PublicAffairs.

Mundt, M., Ross, K., & Burnett, C. M. (2018). Scaling social movements through social media: The case of Black Lives Matter. *Social Media + Society*, *4*(4). https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305118807911

Myers West, S. (2018). Censored, suspended, shadowbanned: User interpretations of content moderation on social media platforms. *New Media and Society*, *20*(11), 4366–4383. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444818773059

Obar, J. A., & Oeldorf-Hirsch, A. (2020). The biggest lie on the internet: Ignoring the privacy policies and terms of service policies of social networking services. *Information, Communication & Society*, *23*(1), 128–147. https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2018.1486870

Pasquale, F. (2015). *The black box society: The secret algorithms that control money and information*. Harvard University Press.

Perrin, A., & Anderson, M. (2019, April 10). Share of U.S. adults using social media, including Facebook, is mostly unchanged since 2018. Pew Research Center. https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/04/10/share-of-u-s-adults-using-social-media-including-facebook-is-mostly-unchanged-since-2018/

Quandt, T. (2018). Dark participation. *Media and Communication*, *6*(4), 36–48. https://doi.org/10.17645/mac.v6i4.1519

Roberts, J. (2019). The erosion of ethics: From citizen journalism to social media. *Journal of Information, Communication & Ethics in Society*, *17*(4), 409–421. https://doi.org/10.1108/JICES-01-2019-0014

Roberts, J. (2025). Social media users' perceptions of roles and responsibilities. *The Journal of Social Media in Society*, *14*(1), 126–144.

Roberts, J., & Steiner, L. (2012). Ethics of citizen journalism sites. In D. Heider (Ed.), *Digital ethics: Research and practice* (pp. 80–98). Peter Lang.

Ronzhyn, A., Cardenal, A. S., & Batlle Rubio, A. (2023). Defining affordances in social media research: A literature review. *Social Media + Society*, *25*(11), 3165–3188. https://doi.org/10.1177/14614448221135187

Rosen, J. (1997). Public journalism as a democratic art. In J. Rosen, M. Davis, & L. Austin (Eds.), *Public journalism: Theory and practice*/lessons from experience* (pp. 3–24). Kettering Foundation.

Rosen, J. (2006, June 27). The people formerly known as the audience. PressThink. http://archive.pressthink.org/2006/06/27/ppl_frmr.html

Schudson, M. (2001). The objectivity norm in American journalism*. *Journalism*, *2*(2), 149–170. https://doi.org/10.1177/146488490100200201

Seering, J., Wang, T., Yoon, J., & Kaufman, G. (2019). Moderator engagement and community development in the age of algorithms. *New Media and Society*, *21*(7), 1417–1443. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444818821316

Shirky, C. (2008). *Here comes everybody: The power of organizing without organizations*. Penguin.

Siebert, F., Peterson, T., & Schramm, W. (1963). *Four theories of the press: The authoritarian, libertarian, social responsibility, and Soviet communist concepts of what the press should be and do*. University of Illinois Press.

Smidi, A., & Shahin, S. (2017). Social media and social mobilisation in the Middle East: A survey of research on the Arab Spring. *India Quarterly*, *73*(2), 196–209. https://doi.org/10.1177/0974928417700798

Smith, A. (2018, September 5). Many Facebook users don't understand how the site's news feed works. Pew Research Center. https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/09/05/many-facebook-users-dont-understand-how-the-sites-news-feed-works/

Society of Professional Journalists. (2014). Spj code of ethics. https://www.spj.org/ethicscode.asp

Surowiecki, J. (2004). *The wisdom of crowds*. Random House.

Thompson, D. (2025, October 10). Everything is television: A theory of culture and attention. Derek Thompson. https://www.derekthompson.org/p/why-everything-became-television

Tomalin, M. (2023). Rethinking online friction in the information society. *Journal of Information Technology*, *38*(1), 2–15. https://doi.org/10.1177/02683962211067812

Tucker, J. A., Guess, A., Barberá, P., Vaccari, C., Siegel, A., Sanovich, S., Stukal, D., & Nyhan, B. (2018). Social media, political polarization, and political disinformation: A review of the scientific literature. Hewlett Foundation Report. https://hdl.handle.net/2134/37088

Vosoughi, S., Roy, D., & Aral, S. (2018). The spread of true and false news online. *Science*, *359* (6380), 1146–1151. https://doi.org/10.1126/science.aap9559

Wagner, B. (2013). Governing internet expression: How public and private regulation shape expression governance. *Journal of Information Technology & Politics*, *10*(4), 389–403. https://doi.org/10.1080/19331681.2013.799051

Woods, H. C., & Scott, H. (2016). #sleepyteens: Social media use in adolescence is associated with poor sleep quality, anxiety, depression and low self-esteem. *Journal of Adolescence*, *51*, 41–49. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.adolescence.2016.05.008