WEEK 1: Social media platforms, practices and affordances

Social media

- **Social media:** internet-based sites and services that promote social interactions between participants
- Two-way computer-mediated communication
- Oriented towards the exchange of interpersonal meaning: they are social
- Relational self-representation: relationship between selfies
- Rich and multimodal: drawing on multiple semiotic modes
- On a spectrum between synchronous and asynchronous
- Social media is a fusion of personal and public communication.
- Social media has:
  - **technological affordances (platforms perspective)**
  - **business models & corporate practices (practice perspective)** – people are making these policies, have these business models and try and enact them
  - **Personal & public expression (communication perspective) –** people are making texts

Platform, practices and communication

- Platform (SM technologies)
  - How do platform's affordances constrain/enable practices and communication?
- Practices (What people do with SM)
  - What kinds of social activities are involved in generating memes?
  - What role do memes play in social life?
- Communication (what people mean with SM)
  - What kinds of resources are involved in creating image macros?
  - What kinds of functions do these texts have in a discursive sense?

Affordances of social media platforms

- **Affordance:** all 'action possibilities' latent in the environment
  - Term derives from James Gibson's (1979) theory of perception (animals/people looking at an object and thinking about what we could use it for)
  - Popularised by Donald Norman (1988) in relation to the design of everyday objects
- **Perceived affordance:** an attribute of an object that allows people to know how to use it (social media affordances invoke things that we can do in the real world – e.g. pushing/pulling)
- **Modal affordance:** what it is possible to express with the resources of a communicative mode
  - Not a matter of 'perception' but of the way meanings are made with particular semiotic resources: **social semiotic perspective**
- **Affordances are social and cultural**

- o "Social media platforms and their underlying logic of **'connectivity'** (Van Dijck, 2013) also require a view on affordances that moves beyond the boundaries of the platform and takes the larger environment in which the platform operates into account" (Bucher & Helmond, 2017: 247)
    - o We can't just look at Instagram's technical affordances, we need to look at the whole system
- **Platform sensitive approach to affordances** (Bucher & Helmond, 2017: 247)
    - o "the digital environment does not merely offer something to its users, users' needs and individual likings and behaviours increasingly play a generative role in producing those very offerings in the first place" (p.248)
    - o How is a hammer different to a social media app?

Normatizing speech

- **Excessive sharing of nonsignificant content**
    - o "Yeah, and a friend of mine, she has ten status updates a day […] and then you get a pretty sad image of her, since her life is like eat, go out with the dog, watch TV, sleep, then Facebook, "in a relationship," "not in a relationship," "I hate men.""
- **Profile tuning**
    - o "I think it's a bit ridiculous when you see that some people are kind of living for their status updates. You can see that they have thought carefully about how to get as many comments as possible [laughs]."
- **Over-friending**
    - o "It's interesting that there are some who have 500 friends, of whom they know 50. I have a lot of these kinds of friends: you don't want to ignore them when they send a friend request, so you just accept it and put them in a group that you strictly limit. It's a bit of a problem on Facebook when some people increase their friend count just to get as many as possible."

Web 2.0

- Originated in San Francisco
- Web 2.0 celebrated the adoption of social technologies a precursor to a better, freer society, and framed the collection and sharing of information as the core of evolution
- Focused on peer-to-peer advocacy and government reform
- Californian ideology: a set of widely held beliefs that increasing the adoption of computer technologies brings positive social consequences, theta the technology industry is where the best and brightest thrive, and that a free market is the best way to ensure prosperity for all
- Web 2.0 discourse both shifts and continues the Californian ideology
- Web 2.0 situated itself in allegiance with the countercultural critique of mainstream media, but positioned social technology as the solution, rather than protest or political participation
- Web 2.0 positioned the web users as creators

WEEK 2: the rhetoric of social sharing: telling stories with social media

Key concepts:

- **Sharing:** An ambiguous term: it relates to users distributing personal information to each other, but also implies the spreading of that personal information to third parties
- **Narrative:** chronological ordering of events
  - e.g. your Facebooks timeline is a narrative that lists activities you have done, with complications and climaxes
- **Small stories:** short informal stories that we tell each other to bond with friends
- **Discourse community:** groups that have goals or purposes, and use communication to achieve these goals
  - Discourse is written or spoken communication
  - people talking and sharing values about something, a community aligning around a topic attached to some kind of evaluation
  - When you post photos online you become a discourse community through people who are similar to you
- **Social norms:** informal understandings that govern the behaviour of members of a society
  - Social norms of sharing - what is appropriate to share and in what context?
- **Privacy:** a state in which one is not observed or disturbed by other people – the right to be alone, the right to inviolate personality
  - Connotes opacity, non-transparency and secrecy
  - We have control over privacy to some extent, but we don't have control over Facebook selling its users data to 3rd parties
- **Information control**
  - Who is regulating our stories? Which stories are given prominence and which are backgrounded or suppressed?
- **Connective functions**
  - the ways in which people can connect via social media
  - Facebook's connective functions include: message friends, group chats, suggested friends lists

Stories
- Prior to writing systems, stories were oral
- Now stories are shared on social media
- **Story:** Anything told or recounted; an act of textual production (making meaning by producing a text or image)
- **What is the story about?**
  - Activity structured/non-activity structured
  - How general/specific the story is
- **How are you relating to your audience?**
  - Dimension of status

activity structured

recounting my holiday | explaining evolution

specific — general

describing my dog | classifying crocodiles

non-activity structured

Martin & Rose (2008:13)

equal

siblings close friends | co-workers acquaintances

close — distant

worker/ line manager | junior worker/ senior manager

unequal Martin & Rose (2008:12)