

Chapter 23

Delete, Delete, Hang-Up: On Social Media

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ABSTRACT

Whereas most members of social media are enthusiastically exercising their legal right to express themselves freely, some seem unwilling or incapable of assessing the high risk of disclosing information about their most private thoughts, interests, opinions, work, and health status, particularly in times of psychological distress or personal tragedy. This chapter updates criminal activity associated with frequent use of social media. Some believe that the conceptual elasticity of the term “cyberbullying” has been used to push for a tougher crime agenda, while obscuring tragedy of the suicides in Canadian federal parliamentary debates.

A COALITION OF THE WILLING

Social networks like *Instagram* (Facebook Inc, 2020), *Facebook* (Facebook Inc, 2020), *Twitter* (Twitter, 2020), *Tumblr* (Automattic, 2020), *SnapChat* (SnapChat Inc, 2020), and others (Mann, 2009), are in fact, *global villages* (McLuhan, 1962) or at least, *town squares* (Zuckerberg, 2019), where the young and not so young eagerly share their opinions and personal data. These young and not so young comprise a coalition of the willing.

The *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* is complicit in providing platforms for the willing. Section 2 is a collection of fundamental freedoms - of expression, of religion, of thought, of belief, of peaceful assembly and of association. “Everyone has the freedom of thought, belief, opinion and expression, including freedom of the press and other media of communication” (Charter, 1982, at S2). Similar language appears in a much older document, “Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; to hold opinions without interference, and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers” (UDHR, 1948, at 19).

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So what's the problem? The problem is that many seem unwilling or incapable of assessing the high risk of disclosing information about their most private thoughts, interests, opinions, work and health status on social media, particularly in times of psychological distress or personal tragedy. It's a form of *non compos mentis* and is no argument for breach of confidence, which begs the question, why do they do it? The answer, according to Danah Boyd (2006) is to provide their personal data with 'context, context context':

- To be nice to people that they hardly know (like the folks in their classes)
- To keep face with people that they know but don't care for
- As a way of acknowledging someone they think is interesting
- To look cool because that link has status
- To keep up with someone's posts, bulletins or other such bits
- To circumnavigate the privacy problem that they were forced to use by their parents
- As a substitute for bookmarking or 'favouriting'
- It's easier to say yes than no when they're not sure

When you know the effects of a medium, you can take steps to shape those effects, or restrict them (McLuhan, 1978), because ignoring or forgetting to read critical information in communication media may eventually cause harm, an act of omission that denotes *actus reus* or acting badly without thinking (Mann, 2009). Frequent users of social media invariably ignore or forget to read important feedback and instruction presented in text and other visual displays regardless of their intended function, even when they are explicitly told to do so (Mann, 2015, p.496; Mann, 2009, p.5). The consequence is tacit agreement to release personal data and preferences to third parties that effectively absolves those parties and the Internet Service Provider of any liability stated in the license (Mann, 2009). It's not just social media however, but *any* media with instructional or informational text (Alessi & Trollip, 2001; Edwards, 2005; Huff & Finholt, 1994; Pettersson, 1990; Ragsdale, 1988; Reinking, 1987; Wah, 2008).

Two years after Jonathan Abrams submitted an application to the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office for *Friendster*, "a system, method, and apparatus for connecting users in an online computer system based on their relationships within social networks" (OUT-LAW News, 2006), there was no shortage of social media in which to share personal information and opinions. It soon became clear however, that hands-off legislation, toothless policy statements, unknowing parents, uncaring participants, and unwilling social network intermediaries had helped to cause impersonation, denigration, sexual and aggressive solicitation, and cyberbullying to children and youth who were active users of social media (Mann, 2009). Years later, the situation is still serious - serious because the user-generated content displayed on-screen is still destroying users' lives; serious too, because of the volume of users at risk from posting their content, without intervention by the social network intermediary. The changing social interactions that this technology brought about, has out-paced our values and attitudes, an anthropological condition known as *cultural lag* (Mann, 1993).

"IS YOUR LIFE JUST WORTH ONE PHOTO?"

More than 250 people across the world have died in the pursuit of the perfect selfie since 2011 (Schetzer, 2019). The majority of these "killfies" were caused either by drowning, being hit by a car or train, or

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