



PAUL LEVINSON

NEW NEW MEDIA



PENGUIN

ACADEMICS

Digg

IF WIKIPEDIA WAS CONCEIVED AS AN ONLINE ENCYCLOPEDIA, also used nonetheless as an online newspaper, Digg was conceived by Kevin Rose, Owen Byrne, Ron Gorodetzky and Jay Adelson in December 2004 as an index for all news published on the Web, and it serves as an instantly updating digest of news, or an online newspaper of newspapers. Along with Reddit, Buzzflash and at least half a dozen other online news-listing services, the articles that appear on Digg are published elsewhere online and selected—in the case of Digg, “Dugg”—by readers to appear on its front pages. Digg is the biggest and best known and was number 32 in the top 100 American online sites as listed by Alexa on June 25, 2008.

Digg’s ranking had dropped to 294 in December 2008 and 272 in February 2009—a significant decline from the previous June, likely due to a reduction in interest after the presidential election, but still impressive (my paullevinson.blogspot.com blog, the blog address of Infinite Regress, was 492,000 on Alexa in February 2009 in comparison). As CNET News reported in May 2008, “with the 2008 presidential election on the way, Digg has caught on among another very vocal set of news junkies: the political crowd. It’s helped boost the site’s numbers for sure: Digg now boasts 230 million page views per month, 26 million unique visitors, and 15,000 stories submitted per day” (McCarthy, 2008).

Registering as a user of Digg is a bit more exacting than on Wikipedia: an email account is required. Once registered, a user can post anything with a URL—any blog post, online newspaper article, photograph, video—on Digg. All users can Digg or Bury as many posts as they like. The names of those actions mean just what they sound like: A Digg is an approval, a Bury a dislike of a posted link.

When a post or submission receives an undisclosed number of Diggings, and no minimum number of Buries (Digg keeps this Digg/Bury algorithm secret), the submission becomes “Popular,” or is put on the front page of Digg.

Users can also comment on a submission, and the number of comments also works on behalf of a submission becoming “Popular.” Comments can be supportive

or critical of a submission and can be made by users who Digg, Bury or do neither for a submission. Abusive comments can be reported. And as is the case with Wikipedia, disruptive commenters on Digg are disciplined not by Digg users (which would be the equivalent of reader/editors on Wikipedia) but by the Digg administration, which can ban a user as an ultimate sanction.

Thus, in contrast to The New York Times’ “all the news that’s fit to print,” Digg publishes—i.e., makes “Popular,” or puts on its front page—all the submissions that its users endorse via Diggings, comments, and not many Burys. The Times’ motto, of course, was never true in the first place, as pointed out in Chapter 2.

But neither does Digg’s method always function in complete accordance with its ideal. As is the case with all people or nonexpert-directed new new media, Digg is subject to abuse or “gaming”—or users teaming up to get stories to the front page, rather than Digging what they genuinely see as worthy.

This is an abuse as old as democracy itself: The more that any process, government or news publication is open to the will of the people, the more vulnerable it is to small groups of people using the democratic levers to make the process work in their favor. In government, we call this process “lobbying.” On Digg and in new new media, it is called “gaming.” In this chapter, we examine some of Digg’s democratizing techniques, how they have been utilized by “gamers,” and what impact both the democratizing and the gaming may have had on the world at large.

Shouting, Paying for Diggings (and Buries)

In principle, stories are supposed to be Dugg or Buried on Digg according to the assessments of each individual reader. In practice, Diggings and Buries are often amassed via deliberate campaigns of readers. As is the case with the “meat puppet” problem on Wikipedia (sock puppetry is always unethical), a question always remains as to the validity of such sought-after Diggings and Buries: Would the Digger (or Burier) on his or her own have been moved to Digg or Bury the story? Is the mere fact that the Digg or Bury occurred after the reader received a solicitation enough to invalidate the Digg or Bury?

Digg, itself—which has an administration more active in the daily operation of its system than Wikipedia’s and is therefore more top-down, or old media, than Wikipedia—is not consistent in its response to solicited Diggings and Buries. A powerful feature on Digg from 2007–2009 allowed users to “Shout” to up to as many as 200 “Friends.” Such Shouts could encourage Diggings or Buries. (Encouraging Diggings was a little easier, since the default Shout was “sharing.” To elicit Buries, the shouter had to attach a brief note urging a Bury.) Digg retired the Shout feature in May 2009, and encouraged Diggers to continue shouting about Digg stories on Twitter and Facebook, via buttons provided on Digg’s pages (Milian, 2009).

Of concern to the Digg administration, then, was not Digg’s own “Shouting” feature or informal sharing and promotion of Digg stories on Twitter and Facebook, but deliberate campaigns on and off the system to Digg or Bury stories, including

operations purported to deliver X number of Digg for a given story for \$1 or more per Digg (Newitz, 2007). A blogger might be tempted to use such a service, not only to obtain more readers, but for the advertising revenue that a monetized blog with a larger number of readers could generate.

And the numbers are considerable. Of the ten stories written by me and posted on my blogs that went "Popular" on Digg in 2007–2008, the least number of additional readers attracted to my blog was 15,000, and the most was 50,000. But in terms of my book sales and advertising income received from that number of visitors, having "Popular" articles on Digg was not only not enough to retire on, but it would not even have been enough to pay for the purchase of Digg (assuming a minimum number of 150 Digg at \$1 each to get the article to the front page, though most articles take at least 200 to 300 Digg to be promoted to the front).

But Digg is by no means averse to promotion of Digg stories off the Digg Web site. It provides a variety of "buttons" and widgets that bloggers can put directly on their sites, with the result that readers can Digg a story directly from the blog. Some blogs, such as The Huffington Post and Blogcritics.com, have widgets indicating which of their stories are surging on Digg at any moment.

These are the ethical bottom lines, then, for promoting stories on Digg: Stories promoted on Web sites on which the stories appear and stories promoted (and trashed) to and by "Friends" on Digg are fine. Stories promoted and trashed by groups outside of Digg, especially if an exchange of money is involved, are not. And, of course, sock puppets set up to Digg or Bury stories is a practice that, as on Wikipedia, is also not allowed on Digg but, as is the case on Wikipedia, no doubt can, and do, take place until uncovered (see Saleem, 2006 and Saleem, "Ruining the Digg Experience," 2007, for analysis and cautions about gaming Digg).

Or, as Digg advises in its posted "Terms of Use" (2009): Digg is not to be used "with the intention of artificially inflating or altering the 'digg count,' blog count, comments, or any other Digg service, including by way of creating separate user accounts for the purpose of artificially altering Digg's services; giving or receiving money or other remuneration in exchange for votes; or participating in any other organized effort that in any way artificially alters the results of Digg's services."

What Digg is aiming for, therefore, in addition to individual preferences for stories, is a sense of genuine or nonartificial community. But what is genuine about an online "friend"?

"Friends" in New New Media

Digg is the first place we have fully encountered "Friends" thus far in this book. But online "Friends" are the core of MySpace and Facebook and play a major role in Second Life. "Friends" are the essence of "social media," a significant subset of new new media.

And the essence of online "Friends"—their first and foremost principle—is that they have little in common with real-life friends, or friends offline, in the real world. To be friends with someone offline, to be even a casual acquaintance, means you know many things about them, including what they look and sound like. Offline impersonations are, of course, possible, but they happen much less frequently than online. Indeed, by far the best of way of authenticating an online Friend's identity is to know that person offline—we might say that online Friends are bona fide to the degree that they are offline friends.

But is the online Friend a totally inapt and deceptive usage, a metaphor with nothing in common with its offline referent? No. Successful, widely used metaphors usually share at least some significant characteristic with their referents, and, in this case, online Friends do have something crucially in common with offline friends: both have a similarity or community of interests.

In the case of Digg "Friends," the common interest is presumably a taste for the same kinds of stories. As a first step toward such "friendship," any user can become a "Fan" of another user on Digg, signifying that the Fan enjoys or for whatever reason wants to follow or easily find or know more about the user's submitted stories, Digg, comments or any of the user's activities on Digg. If this user reciprocates and becomes a Fan of the Fan, then the two are "Friends" (this allowed the two to send Shouts to one another).

This two-step approach to online "friendship" is also a feature of Twitter, where users can elect to "follow" the posted notes of other users and in turn can be followed. In other systems, including MySpace and Facebook, a request for "friendship" bestows no privileges, until it is accepted, in which case the two parties become "Friends."

In most new new media systems, including Digg, users can put relevant links to their blogs, photos and other information in their profiles, and they can decide whether to make such information available to everyone or just to "Friends." But no one can ever be sure that photographs on a profile, for example, are actually photographs of the name on the profile or if the person described in the profile is even real—unless, again, the person in the profile is already known to the user visiting the profile.

Such issues of authenticity get to one of the fundamental questions about new new media—what impact do they have in the real world? At one end of the spectrum, we can have users under pseudonyms writing and otherwise participating online in ways that no one offline knows or cares about. At the other end, online activity can have profound consequences in the real world. We will consider the personal impact of online relationships, including its dangers, in subsequent chapters about MySpace, Facebook, and "The Dark Side of New New Media."

In the next section, we examine the impact of Digg and its online activities on the real world activity of politics.

Ron Paul vs. Barack Obama on Digg

Stories about Ron Paul, a contender in the Republican presidential primaries in 2007–2008, were enormously popular on Digg. CNET News reported in August 2007 that he “enjoys about 160,000 mentions on Digg.com, more than the next four most popular candidates combined” (McCullagh, 2007) but also advised that “Paul’s poll numbers award him less than 2 percent of the vote among Republican candidates.” And, in fact, Ron Paul obtained less than 5 percent of the votes in Republican primaries in most states. Stories about Barack Obama were also highly popular on Digg, though, in the primaries, not as successful as Ron Paul’s. Why did Obama succeed in real, offline politics, while Ron Paul did not?

The easy explanation that Ron Paul’s success on Digg was inflated, manipulated or otherwise gamed, while Obama’s was not, is probably not correct, because, although we have no reliable, proven knowledge about what either of the candidates’ supporters did to promote their candidate on Digg, there is no reason to think that Ron Paul’s supporters did anything more or different from Obama’s.

Ron Paul’s high profile on Digg did attract much more general attention than Obama’s, because Paul was so low in offline polls and primary votes. First heralded and decried by various observers as a “fringe politician” taking “over the Web” (Spiegel, 2007), Ron Paul’s success on Digg soon came under more serious analysis by social media practitioners such as Muhammad Saleem, who wrote in July 2007 that “A few months ago, I was surprised by the candidate’s [Ron Paul’s] popularity on the various socially driven sites and thought to myself that was simply the result of an online democracy in action. A couple of days ago, however, this image was shattered...” The cause of the shattering was an “expose by Ron Sansone” (2007), another social media analyst, whose investigation convinced Saleem that Paul’s “apparent popularity was simply a result of mass manipulation” on Digg, or encouragement of Ron Paul supporters on various Web sites to join Digg and vote up Ron Paul stories. Saleem later noted (November 2007) that “Ron Paul submissions can now get over 100 diggs in an hour” and that Shouting had exacerbated this problem.

Ron Paul’s supporters responded throughout 2007 that more stories about their candidate should have made the front page of Digg, and did not because they were hit by an anti-Ron Paul “bury brigade” (Jones, 2007). Mainstream online media such as Wired.com had been reporting about possible “bury brigades,” or organized efforts to vote down a variety of articles posted on Digg (not just about Ron Paul), for several months (Cohen, 2007), and, ironically insofar as Ron Paul, Saleem had offered screenshot “proof” of bury brigades at work, several months earlier (February 2007), concluding that although Buries are “supposed to be used to remove superfluous or irrelevant content from Digg, the mechanism is often abused to remove useful and insightful content by malicious users for self-serving and vindictive reasons.”

Obama was recognized early on and throughout the primaries as the other Internet candidate (Stirland, 2007; VanDenPlas, 2007) and in the general election as the Internet candidate, period (see Chapter 12, “New New Media and the Election of 2008,”

for details and analysis). One observer at the end of August 2008 noticed multiple stories about Obama on Digg “having over 2 thousand votes on them and hundreds of comments” (Gladkova, 2008), or easily being at the top of the front page. An article in Business Week from the same time reported that “Obama’s people may ask you to Digg an article that is favorable to Obama or critical of his opponent” (Hoffman, 2008). But, interestingly, such reports stopped short of claiming that Obama’s supporters had outrightly gamed the system. Scott VanDenPlas’s report from a year earlier sums up the enduring perception about the successes of Ron Paul and Barack Obama on Digg: “Paul’s surge seems to be more manufactured, based on rigging the democratic systems of the web to return results favorable to the supported candidate. Obama’s support has more of an organic feel with power in numbers” (VanDenPlas, 2007).

But what is the difference between being asked “to Digg an article that is favorable to Obama” (Hoffman, 2008) and “manipulation” of Digg (Sansone, 2007, about Ron Paul)? As an alternative to the “Ron Paul gamed the system and Obama did not” explanation of why Ron Paul’s excellent showing on Digg bore such meager results in the primaries while Obama’s excellent showing on Digg correlated with his getting the Democratic nomination and going on to win the election, let me offer a hypothesis that has to do not with the ethics and sincerity of pro-Paul and pro-Obama Diggers, but their ages.

Users must be 13 years of age to register on Digg, and registration is needed to submit articles, Digg or Bury, comment, etc. The registration process, however, does not insist on any proof of age, so it is a safe assumption that children under the age of 13 are submitting stories, Digging and so forth on Digg. But even if the 13-year-old requirement were 100 percent honored, that would leave five years of people—ages 13 to 17—who could Digg stories but not vote in primary or general elections.

That discrepancy is probably the best place to start looking for why a political candidate could do splendidly on Digg—have stories about him or her dominate the Digg front pages—but fail, and by large margins, in actual elections. Socialmediatrader.com reported that, in a snapshot analysis of Diggs on January 11, 2008, Ron Paul had the greatest number of Diggs in popular or front-page stories—close to 3,000, some 50 percent more than the candidate with the second biggest number, Hillary Clinton with close to 2,000. The other candidates were just hundreds of Diggs below Hillary Clinton. Rudy Giuliani was third, Mike Gravel fourth, Dennis Kucinich fifth, Mike Huckabee sixth—all ahead of Barack Obama, who had only the seventh greatest number of Diggs, a little under 1,500, on front-page stories about him, on this day. John McCain was in eighth place, with about a hundred fewer Diggs than Obama. This was eight days after the January 3 Iowa caucuses, in which Obama came in first for the Democrats and Hillary third, while Ron Paul came in fourth or about midway in the field of Republicans. In the January 8 primary in New Hampshire, Clinton came in first for the Democrats, McCain first for the Republicans and Ron Paul fifth. Clearly, the January 11 Digg activity was already way out of synch with what was happening in caucuses and primary voting booths, most especially concerning Ron Paul.

Was this because Ron Paul's supporters were already gaming Digg, while Barack Obama's supporters were not, at least not at that point in the primaries? That may have been a contributing factor, but let's look at the discrepancy between Diggs and the results in the primaries from another angle. Obama's campaign clearly worked the "grassroots" well enough to win in Iowa and come in second in New Hampshire. Ron Paul's campaign did poorly in both states. This means that Obama's campaign galvanized a far greater number of people who caucused or voted, age 18 or above, than did Ron Paul's campaign. Let's assume that a similar percentage of those Obama and Paul voters—anywhere from 0 to 100 percent—found their way to Digg, or were already on Digg at the time of the primaries. An alternate explanation to Paul's supporters gaming or manipulating Digg is that, in addition to the 18 or older supporters, Ron Paul also had a large number of supporters on Digg ages 13 through 17, or even younger, and that theirs were the Diggs that lifted Ron Paul's articles so high up on the front page.

But how was it that Barack Obama, the widely acknowledged "youth" candidate, as we saw in Chapter 3 about YouTube (see Wertheimer, 2008; Baird, 2008), did not attract large numbers of 13- to 17-year-old supporters of his own to Digg? The answer, I would suggest, is that Obama's campaign wisely focused on people aged 18 to 30, who could go out and caucus or vote. Ron Paul's campaign had no equivalent grassroots operation and did the best it could with extensive Internet promotion, which reaches people below the age of 18 as easily as people above that voting age. Obama's Internet campaign, in other words, built on the foundation of a powerful in-person campaign directed at potential voters and partnered with it. Ron Paul's campaign started with the Internet and never got beyond it.

No scientific statistics exist for the age of Digg users. But a poll reported in September 2006 shows 5 percent of Digg users are between the ages of 13 and 16, 22 percent ages 17–20, 28 percent ages 21–24, 20 percent ages 25–28, etc. (Ironie Pentameter, 2006), which certainly indicates a tilt toward younger users and a significant percentage (more than 5, less than 27 percent) of Diggers under 18. A more recent impression, widely shared (at least insofar as mental age), "is that the average age of Digg users is about 15" (MacBeach, 2008).

I thus think there is sufficient reason to think that, as an alternative to the "gaming" effect, or at least a more significant factor, the below voting-age of Ron Paul's supporters on Digg resulted in his success on Digg and failure at the polls. Obama's campaign concentrated from the outset on young voting-age people, who helped propel him to first- and second-place finishes in the primaries and eventually to a position on Digg almost as powerful as Ron Paul's and, ultimately, to a revolutionary victory in the general election. Ron Paul, in contrast, never succeeded off of Digg and the Internet. He was defeated in the primaries not by the failure of gaming on Digg to translate into votes but because Digg demographics had little correlation to the demographics and views of American voters.

Ron Paul and the Older Media

The possible gaming by Ron Paul's supporters, and their likely young age, figured in a similar story off of Digg, in the older medium of television and its coverage of the primary campaigns and debates.

ABC neglected to mention on at least one occasion that Ron Paul came in first in its post-debate poll. It removed comments from Ron Paul supporters on its online board and then proceeded to shut it down. And ABC also showed a lone Ron Paul supporter before the Iowa caucus, in contrast to big crowds for Mitt Romney, when in fact Ron Paul had big crowds of supporters, too (see Levinson, "Rating the News Networks," 2007, for a summary of these and other network shortcomings in their coverage of Ron Paul, with links). CNBC removed a post-debate poll that Ron Paul won (Wastler, 2007; see also Levinson, "Open Letter to CNBC," 2007). Sean Hannity denigrated Ron Paul's first-place finish in another post-debate poll on Fox, as due to repeat dialing by a small number of supporters, in contrast to Alan Colmes, who insisted on reporting Ron Paul's first-place result without spin (Hannity & Colmes, 2007; see also Levinson, "Hannity & Colmes Split," 2007).

Obama was generally spared such dismissive treatment by the old media, but MSNBC's professional pollster Chuck Todd discounted Obama's success in a post-debate poll on that cable network as due to his supporters dialing repeatedly on cellphones in responding to the poll (Levinson, "Now Obama's Poll Results Are Denigrated," 2007).

Hannity may have had cellphones in mind, too, and he and Todd may have been right that cellphones were the medium that propelled Paul and Obama to victories in the phone polls—but not because of repeat dialing or the same small number of supporters casting numerous phone votes. A 15-year-old, after all, who cannot vote in a primary, could respond via cellphone to a post-debate poll as easily as a 25-year-old. And although I would not put it past supporters of any candidate to cast repeated votes in a post-debate poll, apparently that was not possible with the Fox texting poll on October 22, 2007—I tried to vote twice, as a test to see what would happen, and my second vote was not counted. Of course, I could have cast additional votes on different phones or texted my friends to vote for my candidate on their phones. But the explanation for Ron Paul's success in post-debate phone polls may well be much the same as for his success on Digg: some gaming and manipulation, no doubt, but the younger-than-voting-age of the callers also was likely a significant factor. Since Obama did as well in the primaries as in post-debate polls, his success in the phone polls requires no further explanation, though it is likely that under-voting-age people cast phone votes for him as well.

Restricting phone polling to people 18 or over is no more appealing or easy to accomplish than allowing only people 18 or older on Digg or any place else on the Web. The discrepancy between Ron Paul's success in the phone polls and his performance in the primaries thus is probably best chalked up to unavoidable noise in the phone poll system.

The networks, however, would have done better to offer such an analysis, rather than remove polls that showed Ron Paul winning and disparage his supporters without proof.

Reddit, Fark, Buzzflash and Digg Alternatives

Digg is not the only user-generated headline news service on the Web. Some of the niches of new new media are filled with solitary giants, such as Wikipedia in encyclopedic reference and Twitter in microblogging, which dominate to the point of being the only real games in the global town. On the other hand, MySpace and Facebook, which we will examine in the next two chapters, have carved up the world of social media into two, titanic, competing spheres, much like the two superpowers in the Cold War. YouTube is somewhere in between in this continuum, closer to Wikipedia and Twitter in dominating the video field but with competition from such sites as the Daily Motion, Blip.tv and Metacafe, as well as cable networks such as MSNBC and CNN, which increasingly put up videos from their shows on their own sites, and sites such as Hulu and tv.com, which post episodes from television. If we place Wikipedia and Twitter on the extreme left of a continuum, representing no competition, and MySpace and Facebook on the extreme right, representing competition between two giants, then YouTube could be placed on the left, about 10 percent to the right of Wikipedia and Twitter. Digg might be placed somewhere in the middle, about equidistant from Wikipedia and Twitter on the left, and MySpace and Facebook on the right.

Reddit is the most Digg-like of the Digg alternatives. Readers submit stories just as on Digg and vote them up or down. Readers also make comments, which can be voted up or down. Stories that receive the requisite net number of “up” votes make the front page. As of December 2008, Reddit was second to Digg as the most popular new new media news site—though Reddit’s Alexa ranking was 5,122, way below Digg’s 294.

Fark represents the least new new media of reader-driven online news listings. Although any reader can submit an article with a link, Fark’s editors choose which articles make its front pages. Very few are selected. As of February 2009, only three of my hundreds of submissions made the Fark front page: a blog post I wrote about Dennis Kucinich wanting the voting age lowered to 16 (I think it should be lowered to 14), a video clip from my appearance on the History Channel a few years ago in which I talked about the history of science fiction, and a review of an episode of “Life on Mars”, which I titled “Life on Mars’ Meets Itself on TV.” A large part of what drives Fark’s selections is humor, in particular, clever headlines—I’m sure part of the reason my “Life on Mars’ Meets Itself on TV” review was chosen was because it was published on my Infinite Regress blog (two video cameras pointing at each other is one way of producing a visual infinite regress).

Articles that do not make the Fark front page—Fark says “less than 5 percent” (2009), and in my experience that’s been less than 1 percent—are made available to the “Total Fark” community, which can extensively comment on these articles. But

the only people who can see such articles and comments are members of Total Fark, and this membership is available only via paid subscription. So, in sum, Fark does draw on stories submitted by readers and in that sense is a new new medium, but its editorial selection (rather than reader selection) and its charging for Total Fark membership (rather than being free) is decidedly old media in approach.

Buzzflash differs in several important ways, the most significant of which is that Buzzflash is directed to a “progressive” political audience. Although it can and does publish links to items that may be antiprogressive—or, at the very least, critical of Barack Obama, for example, from both the left and the right—these are usually attacked in the commentary and not “flashed” to the front page. Buzzflash can thus be considered the new new media equivalent of The New Republic, The Nation and other progressive news and commentary magazines.

Buzzflash also differs from Digg in providing two ways to get to the front page. One works much like Digg, with users “flashing” stories they like and commenting upon them. Stories with the requisite number of flashes—usually 25 in 24 hours, in contrast to Digg, which requires at the very least hundreds (Reddit is in the middle)—ascend to the front page. But Buzzflash editors can also select a story for another front page—BuzzFlash.com, in contrast to BuzzFlash.net—and in this way the Buzzflash operation seeks to get the best of both old and new new media worlds.

Given that the very purpose of Digg, Reddit and the other headline-ranking services is to vote news stories up or down, it is not surprising that they often post stories about themselves and each other and proceed to rank them, as well, in a fiercely partisan way.

A story on the front page of Reddit on December 25, 2008—in the top 20, in fact, with 3,378 up votes and 1,170 down votes for a net of 2,258 “points,” as well as 843 comments—was titled “So Who Else Here Left Digg for Reddit?” (ILeftDiggforReddit, 2008). The gist of the comments was that Digg was terrible and Reddit was wonderful, and Reddit had either already buried or soon would bury Digg.

The first comment read, “First digg. Then both. Then reddit. Nothing against diggers, it’s the bots, having to have to randomly add so many friends to get your content on the front page.” The second comment read, “The first rule of Reddit is to tell other intelligent people about Reddit. The second rule of Reddit is to tell stupid people about digg.” And so on.

But Reddit’s far worse Alexa ranking of 5,122, in comparison to Digg’s 294, mentioned above, told a different story—a helpful reminder, though we should not need one, that democratically selected news media provide no presumptions of truth. Indeed, StumbleUpon, another Digg-like system, has an Alexa ranking of 811—much better than Reddit’s—but StumbleUpon features many community applications and is as much like MySpace as it is like Digg. (See Bennett, 2009, for more on these and other alternate Digg systems.)

We turn now to two social media whose rankings in Alexa are beyond dispute, except insofar as one could be a point or two higher or lower than the rankings indicated. But both are in the top 10: MySpace at 7 and Facebook at 5.

MySpace

ALL MEDIA, NEW AND OLD, ARE INTRINSICALLY SOCIAL. EVEN ancient hieroglyphics required at least two people to work—one to write, one to read—as does all communication. A word spoken or written to oneself, unheard or unseen by anyone, may be just as real as the proverbial tree falling in a forest with no one around, but it is not communication.

New new media all heighten the crucial social aspect of communication. Wikipedia and Digg would be unworkable without groups of editors and Diggers, and a blog with no comments would technically still be a blog but much more like an online magazine or newspaper than a blog. We could say that a blog without comments is more like a new medium than a new new medium. Old media such as printed newspapers, of course, publish letters to the editor, but these enjoy a much smaller role in the daily life of a newspaper than do comments in a blog.

Some new new media, however, go beyond relying on social networks for their operation. Unlike Wikipedia, which requires groups of people to write and edit, there is a species of new new media with the very purpose of creating and developing social networks. Such media may and do offer blogging and YouTube-like storage and dissemination of videos, but their primary purpose is neither to inform nor entertain but to enable people to connect for whatever purpose.

Enter the new new media realm of social media, dominated by MySpace and Facebook.

The Irresistible Appeal of “Friends”

MySpace was launched in August 2003 by Brad Greenspan (then CEO of e-Universe) and Tom Anderson, Chris DeWolfe and Josh Berman, also with e-Universe. MySpace built upon the social dynamics of America OnLine, CompuServe, message boards,

forums and computer conferencing (see Levinson, 1985 and 1997; Ryan, 2008; Vedro, 2007, for details), but Greenspan saw the key new new media value, as did Friendster (2002), of not charging for accounts. Rupert Murdoch's News Corp. purchased MySpace for \$580 million in July 2005, and it currently is one of the two behemoths of online social media (along with Facebook) with more than 300 million accounts. Some number of these are different accounts used by the same people, but the number still dwarfs the populations of most countries in the world and may or may not trump Facebook, which as of February 2009 claims some 170 million “active” users (and which we will examine in the next chapter).

MySpace's tagline—the equivalent of The New York Times' “all the news that's fit to print” or Fox News' “fair and balanced”—is “a place for friends.” Is that slogan any more truthful? Is it as accurate a description of MySpace as “broadcast yourself” is for YouTube, which, as we saw in Chapter 3, is accurate indeed? As we also saw earlier, The New York Times' classic blurb, on its front page since 1897, disguises the fact that what gets into its pages is not all the news that's fit to print but all the news that the editors at The New York Times deem fit to print. Fox's 1998 slogan is more subjective and thus less easy to refute—what, exactly, does “fair” mean—but no one except Fox would characterize its lineup of anchors and commentators as “balanced” between left and right, or even Democratic versus Republican points of view.

And what of “Friends” on MySpace? As we saw with “Friends” on Digg (Chapter 5), a purely online friend has only one significant thing in common with offline, in-person friends—a sharing of one or more keen interests. Otherwise, I recall the response I received shortly after I joined MySpace in 2005 and invited someone with tastes in science fiction very similar to mine to be Friends. “Uh, are we, like, going to hang out,” he replied, sarcastically. I apologized, and I said I regretted that the invitation to be a “Friend” implied a connection that went far beyond a coincidence of interest in science fiction.

The problem of not really being a friend to your “Friends” on MySpace or any online system goes far deeper than whether I, in my real identity of Paul Levinson, can be online Friends with you, in your real identity. What would you do if you got a “Friend request” from Socrates, Aristotle, or “Sawyer” or “Kate” (characters on the TV series “Lost”)? One advantage of such a request is that you would presumably immediately know you were not receiving a Friend request from the real Socrates. But what if you received a request from someone with a historical or fictitious name you did not recognize?

“Sierra Waters” is a lead character in my published works “The Plot to Save Socrates” (2006) and “Unburning Alexandria” (2008). I established accounts under her name on MySpace and Facebook in 2008. It was crystal clear to anyone who looked at the profile pages for Sierra that she was a character in my novels. Nonetheless, I received more than one email from men on MySpace—or accounts with male names—asking “Sierra” for sexual favors.

“Cyberbullying” on MySpace

The capacity of any user to take on a completely false identity—false not only in name but also in gender and age—opens up all kinds of possibilities for abusive and dangerous behaviors. As we will see in Chapter 11, “The Dark Side of New New Media,” no medium—old or new—is immune to abusive, dangerous and criminal uses, and in that chapter we will examine some of the misuses and abuses that arise from false identities and other aspects of new new media, some seemingly innocuous, others actually very useful to users not intent on crime. But the Lori Drew “cyberbullying” case is so intrinsically an example of what can go very wrong on MySpace—how a social medium can be used to kill or can result in a “Friend’s” death—that we will consider that perversion of a social medium right here.

To begin with, the Lori Drew case was not a straightforward instance of cyberstalking, in which someone, usually with a false name and picture, befriends someone else on MySpace—usually a vulnerable, young teenage girl—with the goal of arranging a meeting with this new friend, in person, for whatever nefarious purpose. The remedy for this sort of cyberstalking is to never meet a person face to face whom you know only online, unless it is in a very public, safe place.

Nor was this a typical case of cyberbullying, in which one or more people harass an individual for the purpose of embarrassing, ridiculing, or humiliating the victim (see Chapter 11).

The Lori Drew cyberbullying instance was something different, although it occurred because of the same inability of anyone to know who their online Friends really are, unless they already know them offline.

The background of the case is as follows: According to Lori Drew, a 49-year-old mother, her 13-year-old neighbor, Megan Meier, was spreading nasty rumors about Drew’s daughter. Lori Drew exacted revenge. She created the false MySpace identity of “Josh Evans” on MySpace and there befriended Megan Meier. “Josh” pretended to fall in love with Megan. And when the 13-year-old was convinced of “his” love, Josh/Lori had email sent to Megan which said “the world would be a better place without you.” Megan, who suffered from depression, hung herself (Masterson, 2008).

Local prosecutors were unable to get an indictment against Drew in Missouri, where she and Megan Meier lived. But federal prosecutors were able to indict her in Los Angeles (headquarters of News Corp/Fox, which owns MySpace) on three counts of illegally accessing computers (misdemeanors) and one felony count of conspiracy under the Computer Fraud and Abuse Act. The jury found her guilty of the first three, lesser charges.

As Kim Zenter pointed out in *Wired.com* (November 26, 2008), the prosecution was based on a “novel” equation of the use of MySpace to harass (in violation of its “terms-of-service” agreement) and “hacking” as prohibited under the federal law. Although MySpace supported the prosecution, numerous legal experts and civil libertarians objected (Zenter, May 15, 2008), and although I almost always agree with them (see my “Flouting of the First Amendment,” 2005), in this case I did not. I think

the verdict, even for just the misdemeanors, created an important precedent. Using false identifies for fun, role-playing and nondeceptive commercial activity is fine. But using a false identity to abuse someone—especially an adult abusing a child—would be harassment not protected under the First Amendment. (A federal judge in July 2009 announced his intention of overturning the verdict, but I still think the conviction was warranted; see Zavis, 2009.)

In terms of new new media: These systems empower us in all ways, including a parent’s very wrong acting out of understandable anger at anyone, including someone else’s child, who is causing any grief to her child. Therefore, we as a society need to create whatever obstacles we can to prevent, stop and punish any acting on this anger through the easy, powerful avenues of new new or whatever media.

In some ways the most disturbing part of what happened to Megan Meier is that she did not fall prey to “traditional” cyberstalking—she did not die because she foolishly met an online friend in person at some private place. Indeed, she did nothing wrong or foolish at all—other than falling in love with a “boy” on MySpace.

What can we do to protect our children from this kind of potentially deadly abuse?

Other than keeping them offline completely or forbidding them to be “Friends” with anyone they do not already know—neither of which is likely to succeed in practice—the only remedy is to hold adults accountable, as the jury did with Lori Drew.

But children can also be abusive to other children on MySpace and elsewhere online, and, in the end, there is no law or enforcement that can completely protect us from our worst instincts, expressed in new new media, old media or anyplace else.

New New Media Provide Medicine for Cyberbullying

Within a few days after I posted a blog on MySpace about Megan’s awful story (Levinson, 2008), I received a message from a publicist, alerting me to a song that had just been written and released, “Shot with a Bulletless Gun” by the Truth on Earth band. The song begins, “I try to explain what it feels like when you’re shot in the back of your mind with a bulletless gun by a kid that you don’t even hardly know...” (written by band members Serena, Kiley and Tess).

The band put up a Web page, <http://truthonearthband.com/bg>, which, in addition to an MP3 of the song and its lyrics, has a link to where you can “Read Facts about Cyber Bullying.” The band consists of three teenaged sisters. Their musical influences include “Crosby, Stills and Nash, Creedence Clearwater, Lynyrd Skynyrd, Jethro Tull, Eric Clapton and Santana”; their social influences include Martin Luther King, Jr., and Mahatma Gandhi.

Truth on Earth says its “main goal is to raise consciousness to a level where, over time, everyone can become part of the solutions instead of just living the experience of the problems.”

I would say the band is an example of new new media providing a remedy for its own worst ills—in this case, cyberbullying. It's not a cure but a medicine that might help keep this abuse of new new media in check by alerting people to its dangers. (See "MySpace Music," below, and Chapter 10 of this book for more on the Truth on Earth band and podcasting.)

MySpace as One-Stop Social Media Cafeteria

With most new new media systems, the question of the purpose of the system—what the new new medium does—is easily answered. Wikipedia is an encyclopedia, Digg is a headline news service, YouTube shows videos and Blogspot (obviously) hosts blogs. We could say that the purpose of MySpace is to bring people together—hence its designation as a social medium—but it also serves a different purpose, profoundly different from all other new new media, with the partial exception of the other big social medium, Facebook.

That different purpose is not just one aspect or function—in fact, it is the smorgasbord multiplicity of MySpace, which gives its members a single place or platform from which to engage in a wide variety of new new media activities. These include private messages, bulletins or group messaging to all of one's MySpace Friends, blogging, posting of photographs, videos and music, IM'ing and groups devoted to common interests.

The postings of photographs, videos, music, and text of various sorts appear on the MySpace member's "Profile" page, which serves as a cyber calling card or one-stop advertisement on behalf of the user's vanity, social status, or online and offline professional pursuits. In the following sections, we examine MySpace Profiles as promoters of music and poetry.

MySpace Music and New New Media

MySpace's "music pages" are especially revolutionary. The traditional path to becoming a successful recording artist was to come to the attention of a record company's "A & R" people—"Artist and Repertoire"—which could happen at a live performance or by sending your "demos" (demonstration recordings) to the record company. The concert was usually the preferred method, because it gave the record company a way of gauging the public's interest in the potential recording artist.

The "music pages" on MySpace, initiated in 2005, offered a different approach: Set up an account on MySpace, on a special kind of page, which showcased MP3s of your music. Invite people on and off MySpace to come over and listen—for free. Build up your Friends list. And when the time was right, let a record company know about all the excitement your music page was generating.

This can now be seen as a classic new new media approach: The musician, the potential recording artist or group, need no longer rely on an agent to get into a club and on the club to book the musician for a performance, just so a record company can see what impact the artist has on the audience. The recording artist, instead, can create a club or place for performance right on MySpace and thereby eliminate several levels of middlemen or experts.

Indeed, in September 2006, this elimination of experts went even further, when MySpace teamed with "SNOCAP," an online jukebox offering free samples of your music, with a purchase option for the full recording, at the price you set (Arrington, 2006).

MySpace music pages accommodate a wide array of genres. The following recording artists all have active MySpace music pages as of December 2008. I have also played their music on my podcast, *Light On Light Through*, and this has given me the opportunity to get to know a little more about these artists than one might find just by reading their publicity. MySpace has figured prominently in our professional relationships.

I first heard the music of North Carolinian Ebony Moore when she contacted me in November 2006—not on MySpace—and asked me to listen to her music. I had just started my *Light On Light Through* podcast and thought Ebony's "Make It Count" would make a great song to play on an episode. I played it on my November 25, 2006, "Every Eye's a Camera, Every Ear's a Mike" episode (which has received more than 1,100 listens as of December 2008) and encouraged Ebony to get a MySpace music page to help promote her music. She set up a MySpace page on November 28, 2006. As of December 2008, her page has had more than 110,000 views. Ebony characterizes her music as "alternative/Christian" (I would say it is also a mix of pop and soul).

James Harris lives in Birmingham, England, and sounds a lot like Paul McCartney in the early Beatles or Gerry Marsden of Gerry and the Pacemakers' "Ferry Cross the Mersey" fame (the 1964 hit record is considered part of the "British invasion" of music in the United States—the group was managed by Brian Epstein, the Beatles' manager, and, like the Beatles, came from Liverpool). James's first and still current account on MySpace—he currently has at least six, to accommodate different mixes of his music—was established on November 26, 2006, coincidentally just two days before Ebony Moore created her MySpace page. I did not know James or his music until he later befriended me on MySpace, in January 2007. As soon as I heard his "Tonya McCreary," I knew I wanted to play it on *Light On Light Through*, and I included it in my February 11, 2007, episode, "How to Research Ancient History for Science Fiction" (which has received more than 4,100 listens as of December 2008). I subsequently played James's "Walking On Air" on my April 15, 2007, episode, "Four Imus Fallacies," in which I provided reasons that "Imus in the Morning," fired for racist comments on radio and television, did not belong back on the air. (As was the case with Ebony Moore's "Make It Count" and James Harris's "Tonya McCreary," the subject of the podcast had nothing to do with the lyrical theme of the song.) The "Imus Fallacies" podcast has received more than 1,200 listens as of December 2008. James recorded a "cover" version of my 1969

song "Looking for Sunsets (In the Early Morning)" (from my 1972 album "Twice Upon a Rhyme") in the fall of 2007. It appears on his "James Harris, II" page on MySpace, established September 10, 2007, and which has more than 5,500 views as of December 2008. James's main MySpace page has more than 105,000 views.

We already encountered the Truth on Earth band as an example of the Internet's self-generated medicine or antibodies for the dangers of cyberbullying. Serena, Kiley and Tess—the three sisters who comprise the band—address many other pressing, compelling problems that afflict our world, offline as well as online, including homeless people, child abuse and even the deception of mass media in their "Media Relationship" song. As mentioned previously, the band says its musical ancestors range from Crosby, Stills and Nash to Santana, but I would add, because of the topical cutting edge and relevance of their lyrics, that the band also writes and sings in the protest music tradition of Dylan, Phil Ochs, and Peter, Paul and Mary—and in the more current genre of Steve Earle and Holly Near. In Chapter 10, "Podcasting," I describe and discuss in step-by-step fashion how I produced Episode 55 of *Light On Light Through* about "Cyberbullying and a Remedy" in December 2008, which featured "Shot with a Bulletless Gun" by Truth on Earth and a 20-minute interview with the three sisters conducted via Skype (phone call over the Internet). Unlike the "variety show" approaches of the podcasts with Ebony Moore's and James Harris's songs—in which, as indicated above, the music was not related to the subjects of the podcasts—the music and the general topic of the "Cyberbully" Truth on Earth episode of *Light On Light Through* were pieces of a same theme.

Truth on Earth's MySpace page was established on April 17, 2008—some nine months before the group's publicist contacted me—and had 5,100 views as of December 2008. The band participates in just about every new new medium considered in this book, with pages and accounts on YouTube (two videos as of December 2008), Twitter, Facebook (a "Fan" page), a blog on Blogspot and several social media not discussed here, including "I Like." Their music is for sale on Amazon and iTunes—70 percent of the money they make goes to social causes. (Ebony Moore's is also available for sale on those two and many other online venues; some of James's music is on iTunes.)

Ebony Moore, James Harris and the Truth on Earth band have not, as of February 2009, broken into the mainstream. But MySpace's music pages can claim credit for several artists that made the leap from new new to old media, and, indeed, you may already know.

Kate Nash, a native of Dublin, Ireland, started her MySpace page on February 18, 2006. She then "found a manager for herself before proceeding to look for producers for her music" (Wikipedia, 2009). Her first single, produced in Iceland, had a limited 1,000-copy release in 2006. Meanwhile, her MySpace fan base grew. Her page as of February 2009 has more than 12 million views. Her songs have been listened to more than 20 million times. She has more than 200,000 "Fans" (musicians on MySpace can have "Fans" as well as "Friends"). And her "Made of Bricks" album went "platinum" (sold one million copies) and hit No. 1 in the United Kingdom in 2007.

Londoner Lily Allen "created an account on MySpace and began posting demos in November 2005" (Wikipedia, 2009). She attracted fans and mainstream press interest, notably a piece in the U.K.'s *Guardian* (Sawyer, 2006). Her single "Smile" was No. 1 in the United Kingdom a few months later, and her album "Alright, Still" has sold more than 3.3 million copies. She had 450,000 MySpace Friends as of February 2009.

Sean Kingston, born Kisean Anderson in Miami, Florida, raised in Kingston, Jamaica, used MySpace to ignite his musical career in a slightly different way. "I hit him up eight times a day. Kept hittin' him up eight times a day for, like, four weeks. And it worked," Kingston (2007) explained. The "him" was Jonathan J. R. Rottem, a record producer with a MySpace account, and Kingston "hit him up" with messages from his own MySpace account, started July 7, 2007. Kingston has had No. 1 songs in the U.S., Canada and Australia (Wikipedia, 2009).

The MySpace stories of Ebony Moore, James Harris and Truth on Earth—artists still struggling to break through—are far more common than those of Kate Nash, Lily Allen and Sean Kingston. More than eight million music pages competed for attention on MySpace as of January 2008 (Techradar, 2008). But the fact that Nash, Allen, Kingston and a relative handful of other singers and musicians have succeeded due to their MySpace pages is what makes all the difference and shows the mettle and potential of new new media in breaking out of the top-down old media confines of the music business. (See also Chapter 3 for YouTube music success stories.)

MySpace Poetry

I titled this section "MySpace Poetry," not as a lyrical way of describing a relationship or some kind of writing one might find on MySpace, but to call attention to a use of MySpace blogs by a self-selected group of poets (all truly new new media producers are self-selected).

Lance Strate is a colleague at Fordham University—in fact, as Chair of the Department of Communication and Media Studies in 1998, Lance first brought me to teach at Fordham. We are friends as well as colleagues—both graduates of New York University's Media Ecology Ph.D. program, where we both studied under Neil Postman at different times—and, in those capacities, we talked frequently about new new media and their impact. Indeed, as I mentioned in the Preface to this book, it was during a discussion I was having with Lance in the fall of 2007 when I was Chair, about the unsuitability of the name "new media" for one of our major tracks of study, that I realized the name "new new media" would be much better to describe blogging, YouTube, Wikipedia, MySpace, Facebook and Twitter.

Lance had joined MySpace just a few months earlier, after a year or so of casual discussion with me about the value of MySpace for promoting scholarly groups. (Lance was then also president of the Media Ecology Association, a group he and I and several others founded in 1998.) One early evening in July 2007—Lance and I were

teaching graduate classes that summer—Lance walked into my office and said something along the lines of “I finally did it.” He was referring to a blog he had just started, on July 4, 2007, on MySpace. Unlike another blog Lance had earlier started on Blogspot (also under my coaxing), Lance told me that this blog on MySpace was likely to consist of his poetry.

Lance had never published any poetry before. In the field of poetry, he is an epitome of the nonprofessional new new media producer. As of December 2008, Lance had published 150 poems on his MySpace blog. They had received more than 13,000 comments and more than 66,500 views from hundreds of Friends, most of whom also have poetry blogs on MySpace. Some, such as Larry Kuechlin, also have published “chap books” of their poetry—real books made of paper, which can be purchased on Amazon.

In January 2009, Lance and several of his colleague MySpace poets took another kind of step from MySpace to real space, or from the realm of new new media to the world of old media or the world at large. They announced the creation of “NeoPoiesis Press...an independent publisher whose main goal is to print and promote outstanding poets, writers, and artists whose work reflects the creative drive and spirit of the new electronic media environment” (NeoPoiesis, 2009). The NeoPoiesis page has a beautiful picture of soft long grass growing up through typewriter keys—the union of new viral media (grass spreads on its own) and old ways of producing words (the typewriter)—and lists as its partners (MySpace profile names noted in parentheses): “Erin Badough (Ciannait), David Conroy (david), Si Philbrook (Si), Amanda Pierce (Amanda), Lance Strate (Lance Strate) and Dale Winslow (Blackbird).” Lance told me that Blackbird made the picture, and he came up with the name NeoPoiesis. The dual listing of MySpace and real-life names is indicative, like the picture, of the mixing of new and old media, which typifies an increasing number of new new media activities.

The general pattern is this: (1) New new media arise as alternatives to new and old media, as blogging did to newspapers printed and online, YouTube did to television, Wikipedia did to printed encyclopedias, etc. (2) New new media create groups, businesses and products that go back to the old media, offline world and achieve success there, as Tucker Max did when he put his blog posts into a best-selling book (2006), YouTube did with its videos increasingly shown on broadcast and cable television, and perhaps NeoPoiesis Press will do for its books of poetry, writing and art.

MySpace “Bones”: Cooperation Between Old Media Narratives and New New Media

The love/hate relationship between old and new new media that we first noticed in Chapter 2 about blogging frequently flares in social media. MySpace and Facebook are justifiably targeted by broadcast and print media as havens for predators—though

what group of hundreds of millions of people would not have some number of psychos and criminals in their midsts—and Facebook was mentioned as an unhealthy escape from the real world on “The Sarah Connor Chronicles” (see Chapter 2). These would be examples of the hate or dislike side of the equation.

On the love or appreciation side, we have another example in the case of “The Glowing Bones in the Old Stone House,” or Episode 20 in the second season of “Bones” on Fox TV in the spring of 2007. The murder victim, a chef, had a MySpace page with videos of her restaurant, and this figures in the investigation. In the special commentary on the DVD that was later released, Stephen Nathan (writer), Caleb Deschanel (father of the lead actress, Emily Deschanel, and director of this episode) and Emily explain that the producers uploaded the restaurant videos to MySpace five weeks before the episode, as a way of generating interest in the episode. This was a savvy move—what better way of creating buzz than putting elements of a fictional television story on a real social medium and in turn presenting that social medium as part of the story.

The avatar social medium of Second Life, which we will visit in Chapter 9, played an even more integral part in an old medium television story, when CBS’s fictional “CSI-NY” agents entered Second Life to pursue someone who killed a Second Life denizen, in real life, in a case of cyberstalking—that is, the flesh-and-blood person who in this fictional television story was animating the Second Life avatar. Viewers were “encouraged to join Second Life and investigate the case by following a link on the CBS Web site,” as Duncan Riley explains in “CSI: NY Comes To Second Life Wednesday” (2007).

MySpace and Facebook have also been enlisted by broadcast media, such as Fox and CNN, which have set up pages on both systems for their reporters as a way of hearing from the public, or at least the growing percentage of the public that spends time online. Don Lemon, a CNN reporter and weekend anchor, has accounts on both social media as well as Twitter, and regularly works responses from online “Friends” and “Followers” into his weekend news coverage.

Facebook is an especially useful place to do this, because it has developed an edge over MySpace as a vehicle for social causes.

Facebook

THE NEWS BROKE ON SEPTEMBER 29, 2008: BRITAIN'S MI6—ITS Secret Service, of James Bond fame—was using Facebook as a recruitment tool (Havenstein, 2008). Ads on Facebook stated the following, “A career in world events? Help influence world events, protect the UK. Operational officer. Roles: collecting and analyzing global intelligence.”

Facebook is a logical place for such ads. It not only has more than 170 million active users—likely now more than MySpace (which does not publicly distinguish between active and inactive users) and definitely much faster growing (Nakashima, 2009)—but has roots in the college community that still shape and nurture its pages. What better place than just out of college to recruit the next real James Bond or Emma Peel?

What is the difference between Facebook and MySpace? A Friend on both systems—a purely online friend, whom I have not met in person—recently asked me which system I preferred. He said he found it “strangely displeasing” to have active accounts on both systems—answer messages, post status reports, etc.—and was thinking of leaving either MySpace or Facebook.

I told him that this was a tough question—that, a while ago, I had had the same irritation in tending to my comments, messages and Friends on both systems, but that I had now become comfortable with both and enjoyed the pursuit of both systems because they provided different services for me.

MySpace vs. Facebook: Subjective Differences

Some of these differences arise from what I call the “first love syndrome,” found not only in what we most like in online systems but in movies, television shows and novels. The principle is that we most love what we first experience. People who

read the “Lord of the Rings” trilogy before seeing the movies may well have enjoyed the movies but thought the novels were better, giving the definitive treatment of the epic. On the other hand, people who first saw the movies thought the novels were good but sometimes meandered. Some people who saw the movies did not even finish the novels. I have taken no formal survey, but conversations with many people over the years about which they preferred, book or movie, movie or television show of the same story, convince me that what people most prefer is what they first encountered and loved.

My Facebook account goes back to 2004. In those days, only people with .edu email addresses could get accounts on Facebook, and most of the people on Facebook were students at colleges and universities. My son was an early Facebook enthusiast; he was a student at Harvard, where Facebook was launched by Mark Zuckerberg, also a student, on February 4, 2004. I was able to join because, as a Fordham University professor, I had an .edu email address. But I rarely used my Facebook account. This was because other than my son, whom I was easily in touch with via phone and email, and my students, whom I also was in touch with via email and, if they currently were my students, in the classroom, there was no one else I was interested in communicating with on Facebook in 2004.

This brings to light a second, important subjective principle in the evaluation of online systems and communities: Whatever their objective differences and advantages, their ultimate value is the good they do for each individual user's needs. If you have 100 people you want to be in touch with in a given online community, you obviously will find that community better, or of greater value, than would I, if I had interest in only a few people in that community.

I joined MySpace in May 2005, on the recommendation of one of my students at Fordham. She had heard me lecture about how to get publicity for authors and suggested that MySpace might be a good place for me to promote my books.

But I could find no one that I knew other than her when I first logged on and did not return to MySpace until February 2006, when my science fiction novel “The Plot to Save Socrates” was published. I immediately began searching for people whose interests included “science fiction” or, better, “time travel.” Within a few days, I had about 20 Friends—all people of whom I had no knowledge whatsoever in the offline, real world. Some of these people continue to be my Friends on MySpace to this day—I now have some 6,000. They comment on my MySpace blogs and my profile page, send me messages and invitations to their blogs, and wish me Happy Halloween and Thanksgiving. About 40 or 50 have purchased my books over the years, but that is no longer the main reason I value their online “friendship.” Rather, I feel as if we are part of a community—one that comments on political issues, on television shows and movies we have seen—a community even though, with just a handful of exceptions, we have never met.

MySpace vs. Facebook: Objective Differences

When my MySpace Friend wrote to me—on MySpace—asking whether I preferred MySpace or Facebook, I realized that there was an objective difference, at least for me, between the two systems: Facebook has a much higher ratio of real-life friends than does MySpace.

Facebook's origins as a way for college students to "meet" each other—see what they look like, what their interests are—without having to physically meet has shaped the growth of its online communities. At first, the communities consisted of students who could easily meet in person if they wanted, because they were attending the same college. Whether the students already knew each other before meeting on Facebook, or met in person after meeting on Facebook, the result was the same: an online community directly grounded in the real world. Subsequently, as Facebook grew to be a competitor of MySpace, with 170 million active users, this real-world grounding continued even as it went far beyond students.

Currently on Facebook, I am "friends" with both of my children, all nine of my nephews and nieces, and about five other members of my extended family. I am also "friends" with at least 150 former and current students, 30 professors at Fordham and other universities that I know in person, and at least 20 other people I do real business with, as an author, guest on radio shows, etc. Add to that at least another 100 authors and podcasters whom I know moderately to very well offline—several are good friends—and at least a dozen or more old friends from various times of my life. All of these friends known in real life or offline activities and relationships account for about a quarter of my current 2,000 Friends on Facebook.

In contrast, I know at most perhaps 100 of the 6,000 Friends I have on MySpace.

MySpace has another objective difference from Facebook: MySpace allows users to decorate their profile pages with all the colors, images and sounds available through HTML (much like an independent blog page), in contrast to Facebook, which permits only plain text and links on its profile pages. But the most significant feature on both social systems is not the Profile page but the Friend.

Facebook Friends as a Knowledge-Base Resource

Facebook and MySpace both have "status bars," which, as in the case of Twitter (see next chapter) are usually used to tell the online world what you are thinking, doing or feeling. They can also be used to ask questions when you can't otherwise find the answers on the Web. The nature of the Friendship base on Facebook—in my

case, as a professor, a fair number of former and current students—is especially conducive to this sort of knowledge acquisition.

Here's an example:

In the week of November 17, 2008, Keith Olbermann and Rachel Maddow were unaccountably absent from their MSNBC "Countdown" and "Rachel Maddow" shows. No explanation at all was given for Olbermann's absence; David Shuster simply said he was filling in for Olbermann. Maddow started each of her shows with an announcement that her replacements—Arianna Huffington (founder of The Huffington Post) the first night, Allison Stewart the second night—would be taking her place that night. The substitutes said at the end of each of Rachel Maddow's shows that she would be back "soon."

Not only was there was no announcement on MSNBC, but I couldn't find much about this on the Web, other than someone else (Arnold, 2008) who also was wondering what had happened to the two. I'd assumed they were on some sort of vacations, but...

I posted a question in my "Status" on Facebook, and, sure enough, Mike Plugh, one of my most brilliant and knowledgeable former students, came back with an answer (see Levinson, "Where Have Olbermann and Maddow Disappeared To?", 2008):

Vacation. They ran straight through the election without a break and I think Rachel is on the Air America Cruise with some lucky listeners. Olbermann may be in his basement hitting rewind and play on the Ben Affleck impression at "SNL."

Mike not only answered my question with style, he also provided an important lesson in the value of new new media as sources of information. When old media fail to keep us posted, and old-fashioned searches for information on the Web fail to give us answers, the new new media and its principle of readers becoming writers and providers of information sometimes can give us the answers we seek. In this sense, Facebook and MySpace go one step further than Wikipedia, by turning the whole new new media world into one big encyclopedia, in which any one of your online Friends can write the answer to your question.

Facebook Friends as Real-Time Knowledge Resources

I am on Facebook right now, November 21, 2008, as I write this. James Winston, a Facebook Friend whom I have never met in person, asked me if he could ask me a question or two for a paper he is writing. James is a graduate student in Communication and Media Studies at Northern Illinois University.

His question was about "information overload"—did I think the Web was contributing to it, and did I think higher education was doing a good job in teaching students how to cope with it?

I replied that I do not think “overload” is the problem we face; the challenge is how to cope with “information underload,” or not enough information to get the most out of new new media to successfully navigate the Web. Humans are, after all, inherently multitasking organisms. I referred him to William James’ “blooming, buzzing confusion” of the world and our capacity to make sense of it (see Chapter 1 of the present volume). Updated to today’s world and media, we could say that all we need is the right navigational information—that is why we do not feel too overwhelmed when we walk into a library or a bookstore, which have vastly more books than we could possibly read. We have learned, since we were children, how to navigate libraries and bookstores (see Levinson, 1997, pp. 134-135, and Levinson, “Interview by Mark Molaro,” 2007, for more on information “overload” as “underload”).

As for higher education, I told James I think it does a good enough job giving students some information about new new media, but the best way of learning how to use these media is to actually use them (as per John Dewey, 1925, and as we also considered in Chapter 1).

In the process of answering James, I realized that what we were doing—his asking me these questions, my answering him, on Facebook—was an excellent example of new new media as not just an interactive knowledge base but a live, real-time knowledge resource. I told him I might put this conversation in this book; he said that would be great. All of that happened just seconds before I started writing this section.

I also told James I would see that he received a complimentary copy of this book. By the time you are reading this, James will likely have already received his copy. He may be reading this section right now.

James asked me one additional question: Did I think the advantages and content of the Web were more useful to younger people—Generation Y? I told him I thought the Internet, as what I call the “medium of media” (“Digital McLuhan,” 1999), had information relevant to people of all ages.

James thanked me—for answering his questions and for the “shout-out” in this book—and asked if he could ask me additional questions in the future. I said sure.

And the conversation ended. My knowledge as a resource for James was that easy. He was in Illinois, I in New York, but we could have been on opposite ends of the Earth. And the conversation could have taken place with equal ease between James and any other professor, or any other student and me, or any two people, professors, students or otherwise. The world of new new media has made knowledge easier to obtain than at any time in history.

But what if I had given James mistaken information, whether because of ignorance or malice? Had James any reason to think that, he could easily have checked my other writings available on the Web. As we saw in Chapter 4 about Wikipedia, new new media provide not only resources of knowledge but resources to check and correct any knowledge that needs revision.

Facebook Groups as Social and Political Forces

MySpace and Facebook both have “groups”—or communities of users who share and discuss links, texts, photos and videos of similar interest. Indeed, groups and similar online activities such as forums and message boards are a fundamental component of online life that goes back to the 1980s (see Levinson, 1997). But Facebook has developed the group to a fine social art and a piercing political force.

The Facebook group “Barack Obama (One Million Strong for Barack)” continued to grow even after the election on November 4, 2008, and as of May 2009 had more than a million members. Groups can be formed in a minute or two on Facebook (just as on MySpace). You come up with a topic, write a brief description, perhaps a paragraph or two about current developments, upload a picture and start inviting your Friends.

The “One Million Strong” group was created under the “Common Interests – Politics” category. Its description reads, “This is the Largest Obama Facebook Group. We started before the Campaign was official and because of all your help as volunteers, donors, and supporters.” And this was added after the election: “YES WE DID...”

But Facebook is not just an American social medium, and its groups serve as vehicles of social action in countries all over the world. As Eric Shawn reported on Fox News (December 1, 2008), twelve million people “took to the streets” in 190 cities around the world in February 2008 to protest Colombia’s terrorist group FARC, all in response to Oscar Morales’s organization of the event in the Facebook group “One Million Voices Against FARC.” Jared Cohen of the U.S. State Department explained to Shawn that, on Facebook, “you can be an activist from your bedroom.”

To appreciate just how easy it is to create a Facebook group, and on whatever more narrow or arcane subject—in contrast to “One Million Strong for Obama” and “One Million Voices Against FARC,” which, as the titles suggest, are directed toward mass appeal—consider the following:

I returned home late Friday of the Thanksgiving 2008 weekend, the third day of the terrorist crisis in Mumbai, India, and was looking for the latest news coverage on my favorite all-news television station, MSNBC. What I got instead was MSNBC’s “doc bloc”—in this case, canned footage from several years ago, called “Caught on Camera.”

I posted several blogs about this problem, such as “MSNBC Runs Canned Doc Bloc as Mumbai Burns” on Infinite Regress (Levinson, 2008), and discovered, via comments posted and email, that many other people felt the same way. We all wanted MSNBC to provide 24/7 news coverage; our day and age and world require no less. (See Chapter 11 for a discussion of how new new media Facebook and Twitter, in contrast to old medium MSNBC, provided crucially important initial coverage of the Mumbai terrorist attack and its consequences.)

MSNBC had started in the 1990s as a partnership of the best of the Internet and television, or a marriage of old (NBC) and new (Microsoft) media. I decided to see if I could harness the social power of new new media—in this case, Facebook—to influence programming on television. On December 1, 2008, I created a Facebook

group called "Stop the Doc Bloc" on MSNBC, provided a description much like the above—"I returned home late Friday..."—and concluded:

Let's see if we here on Facebook, perhaps just by joining this group, can get MSNBC to do what's best for its viewers and itself—stop the doc bloc—give us news! Tell your news junkie friends about this FB group!

I invited close to 1,500 of my then 1,600 Friends on Facebook. Users are only allowed to be in a maximum of 300 groups, which was the reason the other 100 could not receive invitations. I downloaded a public domain image of a red stop sign, used the free GIMP program (which works much like Photoshop) to write the words "DOC BLOC" under the word "STOP" on the sign, and uploaded the image to the group. Within two hours, the group had more than 50 members. Twenty-four hours later, the group had 150 members—at least 15 of whom were not on my initial invitation list. This is viral marketing in action—in this case, for a shared cause. Whenever someone on Facebook joins a group, a "notification" about that is published on the joiner's page and sent out to all of his or her Friends. If they find the group of interest, they can join, and the cycle is re-initiated.

As of May 2009, "Stop the Doc Bloc" had expanded only to a little more than 300 members, and MSNBC had not changed its weekend programming one bit. Not every group succeeds—though who knows what will happen with the group in the future (it generates a few new comments or "wall posts" each month) and what impact that might have on MSNBC programming. But the power of Facebook groups is nonetheless undeniable, so much so that the oldest media and their proponents also use Facebook groups to further their causes. Mark Hunter pointed out the irony, in his Social Media podcast (2009), of the "Don't Let Newspapers Die" cause on Facebook (a "cause" is a special kind of group), with the motto "Save a Journalist, Buy a Newspaper." Ironical, yes, to employ one of the very new new media—though it's not clear how many people get their news from Facebook—that is putting the object of your cause out of business to help promote your cause. On the other hand, it cannot hurt, and the formation of this cause-group certainly reflects an understanding, on the part of newspaper advocates, of the power of new new media. As of May 2009, "Don't Let Newspapers Die" had a little more than 80,000 members—probably not enough to stop the decline of newspapers, but they are in no immediate danger of completely dying, in any case (see Chapter 2, which discusses the continuing need in the blogosphere for old-media investigative reporting).

Facebook as Myriad Local Political Pubs

Not every group and discussion on Facebook needs to be devoted to a major cause or candidate. The ease of creating groups and discussion topics within groups means that, in addition to the huge, rally-like groups on Facebook, there

also are numerous smaller groups and discussions, which, when political, feel more like the colonial pub.

What did that offline, colonial pub, feel like? In the back room of the spirited pub at the Village Pourhouse at 64 Third Avenue in the East Village of New York City, I spoke on the evening of August 28, 2007, to the NYC Ron Paul Meet-Up group about the mass media's mistreatment and miscoverage of Ron Paul in his campaign for the Republican nomination for president. I outlined the historical precedents and philosophic contexts of the mass media's behavior (see "Ron Paul and the Older Media" in Chapter 5) and what might be done about it. There were about 30 people in attendance. Over clinking glasses and happy, boisterous voices by the bar, we spoke of John Milton, Thomas Jefferson, our Founding Fathers and the ideals they set for this country (see Levinson, "YouTube Video of My Aug 28 Talk," 2007, for more).

Commenting the day after the video was posted, an observer noted on my blog, "Many a founding father of the original revolution spent hours in the local pub plotting action and debating policy. I can think of no nobler site to discuss Ron Paul and the media. Hopefully those listening were partaking (to make the bar owner happy). They should have had a small table so you could occasionally hoist the mug and wet your whistle... insensitive clods. Very nice backdrop."

One advantage of a virtual local pub on Facebook is that you don't need to rely on your hosts to wet your whistle—indeed, your whistle might not need more wetting at all, since you would be writing rather than speaking. And the meeting could take place over days, weeks, months, years, asynchronously.

The Libertarian Party group on Facebook has some 12,000 members. I joined it and started a discussion topic based on my "I'm a Progressive Libertarian" blog post (Levinson, 2008). In its original posting on my Infinite Regress blog, the 650-word essay generated 30 comments in six months, half of which were by me. Within a day after starting the topic on Facebook, I counted 60 comments, less than 10 of which were mine. As was the case with my Village Pourhouse talk, the majority of these Facebook discussants were college students. But unlike the Village Pourhouse, the Facebook participants came from universities across the country. And, more important, the conversation can continue for as long as the participants wish, and new participants can enter the conversation at any time. As in all things new new media, the political pub online makes distance and time irrelevant.

Would our Founding Fathers have been more effective, would our nation be better, if they had participated in a Facebook group rather than a local venue? That question, of course, can never be answered, short of going back in a time machine and changing history. But it will be interesting to observe what emerges in a politics nurtured and furthered on Facebook and other new new media.

Meeting Online Friends in the Real World

The twofold initial logic of Facebook—either finding out more about classmates you already knew or keeping an eye out on the physical campus for someone you did not already know but whose face you had seen on Facebook—contained an assumption, an expectation, that people might be interested in jumping from online to in-person friendships and relationships. In a campus community, safety was not a major concern. You could meet someone you first got to see or know on Facebook by going to a cafeteria or other public place with a real-life friend or two. That kind of environment was and is very different from the kinds of in-person meetings that have come to be associated with MySpace, in which two people, not part of any physical campus community, get to “know” each other online and then meet in the real world. Such meetings, as we saw in the previous chapter and will examine in more detail in Chapter 11, “The Dark Side of New New Media,” are fraught with serious dangers.

But the expansion of Facebook far beyond the campus has made it more like MySpace and its inducements, whether dangerous or beneficial, for real-life meetings of online Friends. As with MySpace, the easy way to meet safely with anyone you have not met in person before is to meet in a public place or, if appropriate, in a professional environment. A restaurant would be a good example of such a public place, and a business office would be a good example of a professional environment that someone might visit for a job interview generated by an online exchange.

Leaving aside the safety considerations (but see Chapter 11), what do we know about how online relationships fare when transferred to the in-person world, when transformed from digital code to flesh and blood? As I detailed back in 1996 when I was writing “The Soft Edge: A Natural History and Future of the Information Revolution” (1997), there is a long history going back to the mid-1980s of people meeting online and falling in love (eHarmony would be a current example of a social medium devoted to initiating real-world romantic relationships) and people meeting online and progressing to successful in-person business relationships.

I have been a party, numerous times, to two kinds of business or professional in-person relationships that began online.

From 1985–1995, my wife, Tina Vozick, and I created and administered Connected Education, the first online program to offer courses for graduate credit and a complete MA in Media Studies, entirely online. Thousands of students from more than 40 states in the U.S. and 20 countries around the world registered in our courses for credit granted by the New School for Social Research, Polytechnic University, the Bath College of Higher Education (in England) and other colleges and universities (see Levinson, 1997, for details). I knew fewer than 5 percent of our students in person prior to their Connect Ed registration. I met under another 5 percent of our online students—people I had never met before in person—at conferences I attended in various cities in the U.S. and abroad during the program, or when online students came to New York City for whatever reason.

I noticed something the first time I met someone in person whom I had previously known only online, which has held true for just about every other such meeting I have had with an online student, friend or associate: After an initial jolt lasting a few minutes at most, the online persona was clearly recognizable in the person sitting across from me at a table. Indeed, in those days—from 1985 to the early 2000s—most of the online communication was in text, with no images or photographs of the people with whom you were conversing online. So meeting someone in person whom you had gotten to know online was doubly strange: You were seeing a face for the person whose written words you had come to know, as well as getting a voice and in-person personality for those words. The potential was there for concluding that this person at the table or in the room with you was very different from the person you knew online. And, yet, the result was just the opposite.

The other professional situation in which I met a fair number of people in person whom I had first come to know online—as many as 50 percent of this particular online community—arose in the early and mid-1990s, when authors and publishers of science fiction began conversing on a variety of online systems such as CompuServe and GEnie (Levinson, 1997). I had just started publishing science fiction at that time, and in 1998 I became president of the Science Fiction Writers of America. In that capacity, as well as before and after (I served from 1998–2001), I met hundreds of authors and dozens of publishers and editors in person—at conventions and smaller meetings—whom I already knew from our online exchanges. As was the case with my students, in all cases the in-person face, voice and personality were completely in accordance with what I already knew of these authors and publishers from their words online.

Reconnecting with Old Friends Online

At the opposite end of the spectrum of meeting online friends in person is the experience of reconnecting online with in-person friends and acquaintances you have not been in touch with for years. This has been happening with me for more than 10 years, mostly when old friends, classmates and former students see me on television and then contact me via email. On New Year's Day, 2000, I appeared as a panelist on Fox News' “The New Millennium: Science, Fiction, Fantasy” special. Shortly after, I received emails from Felix Poelz, a high school classmate whom I had not seen since 1963, and Peter Rosenthal, guitarist on my 1972 “Twice Upon a Rhyme” album (Peter and I had been out of touch since the mid-1970s). In the 1980s and 1990s, I received email from a handful of former students. These were early indications of the power of cyberspace, prior to 21st century social media, to vanquish the time and distance that separates us from old friends and acquaintances.

The pace picked up a bit on MySpace when I became an active member in early 2006. But Facebook, likely because of its origins as a university community, has

bumped up such online reunions to a new level. Of my 2,000 Friends on Facebook, at least 100 are former students and friends I had not heard from in years. I get about one to two Friend requests per week from old acquaintances. You can easily find on Facebook many members who went to your high school and college, sorted by their graduation year. Felix's name was not among the 1963 graduates of Christopher Columbus High School (he was not a Facebook member), but of the more than 100 people listed, there were a few who were familiar.

If the dangers of meeting online "Friends" in person, when you do not already know them in person, is counted as one of the drawbacks and potential abuses of new new social media, then getting back in touch with an old, long-out-of-touch acquaintance must be considered one of its great, soul-nurturing benefits. If we agree with Carl Sagan (1978) that we are the stuff of the cosmos examining itself, then the reunification of old, in-person acquaintances via social media is the cosmos sewing itself back together.

Protection for the "Hidden Dimension": Cleaning Up Your Online Pages

The "hidden dimension" of all new new media self-productions is their endurance on the Web long after we have written or created them. I borrow the phrase from Edward T. Hall, who coined it long before the Internet, as the title of his 1966 book, about the significance of interpersonal distance and space in human relations, which we usually take for granted, even though they can powerfully shape the course and outcome of a conversation. We similarly often pay no particular attention to the longevity of our blog posts, YouTube videos, and MySpace and Facebook pages, which can be and are read by people long after we have posted the words and images and can therefore have an effect not intended or foreseen by us at the time of the initial posting.

Although I did not start blogging until 2006, words that I wrote more than a decade earlier come up in Google searches today. Fortunately for me, everything that I have written or created online—including my MySpace and Facebook pages—has been for professional not primarily personal purposes. Thus, comments by me on GENie (the General Electric Network for Information Exchange) in the early 1990s, usually about some aspect of science fiction (see Levinson, 1997), are no more likely to be embarrassing to me now than my first published article in 1976 ("Hot and Cool Redefined for Interactive Media" in *The Media Ecology Review*) or, for that matter, my 1972 album "Twice Upon a Rhyme" (which was re-issued on CD in 2008 by the Big Pink record company in Korea). I am, immodestly, proud of all of that.

But most members of MySpace and Facebook see their pages as personal not professional. And the danger that must be well known now to every student with a Facebook account arises: You post photos on your Facebook page, photos taken at a

party when you were drunk out of your mind or similarly indisposed. A year or two later, you apply for a job somewhere, and your would-be boss takes a look at those photos and decides not to be your boss—the drunk photos cost you that job.

In an ideal world, a potential boss would not care how you behaved at a party two years—or even two days—earlier. All that would count is how you performed in the workplace. (I made this point to Bill O'Reilly as a guest on "The O'Reilly Factor" on Fox News in 2004, when I defended the right of a local news anchor to take her clothes off in a wet T-shirt contest when on vacation; see Levinson, 2004). Or, no one other than your personal acquaintances would be able to see your photos. Facebook does provide options for allowing less than complete access to everything on your account. But re-postings by even well-meaning Friends and the easy copyability of everything online from music to videos to photos makes that second protection not very valuable, and human nature will usually get in the way of the first.

So the best remedy you can apply for embarrassing photos and other new new media creations is: do not post them in the first place. And, if you do, remember to remove them as soon as you are no longer happy with them in public view. Drunk posting need not equal drunk retention. But always remember that the viral dissemination of anything and everything online means that what you erase from your Facebook page may endure on someone else's page, Web site or personal computer. If you have to clean up a page, in other words, chances are at least some of the cleanup may be in vain.

Photos of Breastfeeding Banned on Facebook

MySpace and Facebook, for their parts, have also tried to clean up their photographic acts, or the images posted by users to their pages. But that proved more difficult than at first expected, as well.

At the end of 2008, Facebook embarked on a campaign to cleanse its pages of all pornographic photographs. Not that they were permitted in the first place, but no central system can possibly police the uploading of every single photo. The "objectionable" photographic content included women's naked breasts (MySpace has a similar policy). But, as Lisa M. Krieger detailed in the *San Jose Mercury News* (2008), this policy resulted in the removal from members' Facebook pages of those photographs of mothers nursing babies which were assessed as "obscene, pornographic or sexually explicit." This, in turn, resulted in online and real-world protests against Facebook, as well as a profusion of groups and causes on Facebook, for and against photos of breastfeeding on Facebook (do a search in Facebook groups, or Facebook causes, to find them).

Ironically, breastfeeding in public is allowed in 40 states. (One wonders why not in all 50. Babies should be deprived of nursing when they get hungry in public? Why? Because some prudish onlooker would rather not see that? Would not a more effective expedient be to just look the other way?) Facebook told Krieger, in

its defense, that most photos of breastfeeding were not and would not be removed—only those in which the areola (darker skin around the nipple) is visible.

The moral of this story for students of new new media is that, however much we may consider the new new medium an extension of ourselves, our lives, our desires (as per McLuhan's view of all media as human "extensions," 1964), new new media are not—at least not entirely. However much we may feel that a new new media system is ours, because of the extraordinary powers of production and self-projection the new new medium provides us, the new new medium is not ours completely. In the case of Facebook, the new new medium is also and significantly Facebook's, as Wikipedia is Wikipedia's, Digg is Digg's, and so forth for every new new medium considered in this book, and any others you might name. In this profound, underlying, unalterable sense, there is no difference between old, new, and new new media. This does not mean the equally profound differences between new new and older media that we have identified and considered in this book are not real, are not profound. They are, indeed. But they are not the complete story of new new media.

And, as we have seen in this book, different new new media play out the story—the conflict between the old authoritarian and the new democratic—in their own distinct ways. Wikipedia is far less "old school" in terms of what may be removed from its pages than is Facebook and MySpace. Nonetheless, Wikipedia can still remove a phrase, an article, a photo, which you or I may write or upload, if a sufficient group of other reader/editors deem it unsuitable. Wikipedia, in other words, has to some extent replaced authoritarian, expert-driven control with democratic, group control, but it has by no means eliminated or even reduced the control over individual expression.

The new new medium that offers the most opportunity for untrammelled individual expression is Twitter.

Twitter

WOULD YOU LIKE EVERYONE IN THE WORLD TO KNOW WHAT movie you just saw or are going to see, what you really think of your teacher or boss or president, what you just ate for lunch or intend to eat, whether it's raining or the police are charging where you happen to be—any and all of those things, and more, whatever you might want the world to know—just a second or so after you had the thought or experience and got the impulse to broadcast it to the world? Twitter makes it easy for you to do all of that.

You can disseminate whatever information you please, to whatever portion of the world you like, as long as the people in that portion have accounts on Twitter. That would be 32 million people in the world at large as of May 2009, with Twitter growing faster than any other social medium (Schonfeld, 2009), and the first tweet from outer space on May 12, 2009 (Van Grove, 2009).

Further, you can do that from your cellphone, BlackBerry, or any other mobile device at hand that can access the Internet.

Concerned about your privacy? Like all online systems, you can do this under a pseudonym or assumed identity. You can even adopt the name of a television star or character (see Chapter 2 for "Mad Men" characters on Twitter). Or you can be a member of Congress (see Donnelly, 2009), or a well-known public figure such as Karl Rove (Carpenter, 2009), and tweet under your real name. Rick Sanchez and Don Lemon of CNN; David Shuster, Nora O'Donnell and Tamron Hall of MSNBC; and "Meet the Press" anchor David Gregory actively use Twitter (as of February 2009) and work twitters they receive into their television news shows, in another example of old and new new media cooperation.

Welcome to the burgeoning world of "microblogging," or the publication and dissemination online of a line or two about yourself, or anything you might like to say, personally or politically, anytime you please. Twitter is the new kid on the media block, started as a project by Odeo podcasting people Jack Dorsey, Noah Glass, Biz Stone and Evan Williams in March 2006. But it has been growing so fast, not only in high-profile

users but mainstream media coverage—Twitter only had a total of about six million users as of February 2009, not that many at all in comparison to Facebook and MySpace—that an article in the February 8, 2009, issue of *New York Magazine* (Leitch, 2009) advised, “If you’re the last person in the world to not know what Twitter is, here’s a simple explanation ...” By June 15, 2009, Twitter was, to nobody’s surprise, the cover story of *Time* magazine (Johnson, 2009).

But as both articles go on to explain and as we will detail below, there is much that is complex and profound about tweeting.

The Epitome of Immediacy

Instant publication—whether of text, images, sounds or videos—is one of the hallmarks of new new media. But as we have seen in our survey of new new media in this book, some new new media excel more than others in given hallmarks.

Text is usually easier to produce than sound and audio-visual recording, as we noted in Chapter 2 about blogging. A paragraph will likely take longer to write than taking a picture on your camera phone, but the text will likely be written or copied to a Web site a little faster. A line or so of text—140 characters is the limit on Twitter—moves the fastest of all.

If you’re an author agonizing over every word, this very short form could take a long time to write. I was once asked to write a 200-character blurb—not 200 words, but 200 characters—about one of my novels for the Science Fiction Book Club, and this took about 15 minutes for me to write. But that was because I wanted every word, and therefore every letter or character, to count—every word to attract potential readers to my novel (the novel was “Borrowed Tides,” published in 2001). If all I was writing about was how much I just enjoyed the slice of pizza I had just bought on Fordham Road, I could have dashed off that line in a few seconds.

All thoughts originate in the mind—or, if you want to be less metaphysical, in the brain. One kind of synapse or neurological pathway delivers the thought to our vocal apparatus when we speak. Another kind of synapse gets the thought to our fingers, with which we write or type. Presumably these two synapses or pathways to personal communication are the same length—the thought travels at the same speed to tongue or finger.

Prior to the advent of electronic media, immediacy of thought conveyed to the tongue only reached as far as anyone within hearing distance. Immediacy of thought conveyed to the finger was even more limited: It ended with the finger, since in order for anyone else to read what had been written, the parchment, papyrus or paper had to be passed from hand to hand. Although this nonelectronic “digital” transmission—digital as in finger to finger—could happen quickly, it was slower than the speed of sound. Thus, speech had the edge over writing in immediacy. (See Levinson, “Digital McLuhan,” 1999, for handwriting as a form of “digital,” or finger, communication.)

Electricity travels at the speed of light, which means that any message committed to electronic delivery—whether voice or written word—can be sent anywhere in

the world instantly. Electricity travels at 186,000 miles per second, and the world is about 24,000 miles around the equator. But this did not mean that such messages would be received—heard or read—by any human being instantly. Equipment at the receiving end, whether turning on a television or walking to a ringing telephone, added seconds at the very least to the ultimate reception of information transmitted at the speed of light.

Twitter’s revolution is that, more than any other old, new, or new new medium, it makes the sending and receiving of its brief messages nearly as instant as their conception and writing. Twitter’s one-liners can be created, sent and received with the flick of a finger. Writing has thus become as easy and effortless to communicate over vast distance as speech has always been to people within earshot.

Further, the messages conveyed via Twitter are readable by anyone who wishes to “follow” your “twitters” or “tweets” on the system—that is the default—or they can be sent to specific groups or just one person. This means that Twitter is not only the most immediate written medium in history, but it’s also the most integrated combination of interpersonal and mass communication in history.

Interpersonal + Mass Communication = Twitter

The above title is about 45 characters, so it could have easily been sent over Twitter. And it would have been sent in ways that combine these two great branches of communication.

One of the basic lessons of communication is that it comes in two kinds. Interpersonal communication consists of one person sending a message to another person, in which the second person can easily switch from being a receiver to a sender. Examples would be in-person face-to-face communication, written correspondence, IM’ing on computers, and talking and texting on the phone. Mass communication consists of one person or source sending a message to many people at the same time, with these many receivers not having the capacity to become senders. Examples would be carvings on walls, books, newspapers, motion pictures, radio, television and blogs that allow no comments. Interpersonal is thus pinpoint and two-way, whereas mass communication is broad (hence the word “broadcast,” from the widespread or broad casting of seeds in planting) and one-way.

Sometimes people mistakenly say that interpersonal is nontechnological in contrast to mass media, which must be high-tech or at least use industrial technology such as a printing press. But the telephone is an example of interpersonal communication that is technological, and a poster on a wall or writing on a blackboard is an almost no-tech, or very low-tech, kind of mass communication.

Apropos of blackboards, the classroom is one of few communication settings that can and does easily switch between mass and interpersonal communication. When I lecture in a class, the students are receivers of mass communication, or my message to many people. But as soon as a student asks a question and I answer, she and I are communicating interpersonally—while for the rest of the class, who continue

as listeners, the communication is still mass communication. When I finish answering the first student's question and call on another student, the first student moves back into the mass communication audience, as the second student and I now engage in interpersonal communication.

Twitter takes the classroom to a global level. Although it is not without precedent in media—chat rooms and private IM's also swing between mass and interpersonal communication—Twitter is a chat room, classroom, or gathering that goes on 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. And although the messages on Twitter can certainly be educational, it is the communication structure of the classroom, not its content, that is catapulted into a worldwide conversation on Twitter.

Twitter expands the classroom communication structure in a different way, making group-to-individual communication as easy as individual-to-group (teacher-to-class). Groups of all sizes and purposes send out tweets—old media giants such as Fox News and CNN which offer live tickers of news stories, political campaigns for president and all manner of positions, and groups devoted to a particular cause or social purpose, such as TwitterMoms, which helped mobilize opposition to Facebook's ban on photos of breastfeeding, discussed in the previous chapter. One-hundred-and-forty character messages on such subjects, with links to bigger content on the Web, reach Twitterers on the same cellphones, BlackBerrys, iPhones and laptops on which they see tweets such as "Just left my dentist's office."

Tweets also allow effortless broadcasting of professional and personal information, such as this text from Karl Rove, on February 14, 2009, "Back in Washington. Working on the book this weekend. Tune in to Fox News tomorrow AM. I'll be on Chris Wallace's 100 Day Special." Indeed, links to all of my blog posts and podcasts show up on my Twitter account and are seen by my 1,600 (as of May 2009) "Followers," as are tweets about my TV and radio appearances.

The automatic sending to Twitter (via applications or "apps") of links to anything and everything on the Web—blog posts, videos, news stories, the full gamut of new and new new media—and the instantly subsequent, automatic relay of these tweets to Facebook and "meta" new new systems such as FriendFeed ("meta" because their content consists of links from Twitter, Facebook, YouTube and other new new media activity) constitute a self-perpetuating, not entirely planned, expanding network that has much in common with living organisms and evolutionary systems (see Levinson, 1979 and 1997 for more on the organic evolution of media).

Twitter as Smart T-Shirt or Jewelry

But when Twitter functions as a statement of feeling—"I'm bored" or "I'm feeling good"—Twitter is working as a kind of virtual apparel or jewelry, something we "wear" or send out to the world, like a dark hat or a bright necklace, to indicate our emotional disposition.

When messages on Twitter get more specific, such as "I just voted for Obama," they move from jewelry to campaign pins or T-shirts with messages. Back in 1970, when the personal computer revolution was more than a decade away, Gary Gumpert wrote about "the rise of mini-comm." He was talking about how people could "broadcast" their own personal messages, or messages tailored to their views and feelings, via words printed on their T-shirts, sweatshirts and other clothing. As in all of its improvements in the printed realm, personal and political messages in the digital age—via updates on new new media such as Twitter—do the "mini-comm" one big step better, by allowing any words to be "printed" or published worldwide instantly, re-tweeted or RT'd by receivers to their Followers, and then revised or changed a split second later, with a new "tweet," if the writer so desires.

Messages on T-shirts, of course, can be commercial—promoting a given product—as well as political or personal. Twitter messages have similar diversity and can range far beyond reports of emotional states, political candidates and public demonstrations. Furthermore, since such messages are all received on media already connected to the Web, Twitter messages are well suited for creating buzz about items and activities that live on the Web, with handy URLs or links.

URLs are a frequent component of Twitter messages sent by Fox, CNN and The New York Times with links to breaking stories on their pages. In that function, Twitter becomes a type of wire service, like AP or Reuters. "Followers" receive these messages but do not usually reply. In those communications, Twitter is working as a mass rather than an interpersonal medium, though receivers of those messages can certainly communicate among themselves via Twitter. (Like Digg, Twitter allows one-way Followers, in which A gets all of B's tweets but B does not get tweets from A, and mutual Followers in which A and B each see all of each other's tweets.)

On the other hand, when Twitter works as a form of one-to-one interpersonal communication, it operates not only as a kind of jewelry but a neo-telegraph. Or as I told Ken Hudson in our November 2007 interview in *Second Life*, "the telegraph was much like microblogging."

Bloggers can also have links to their blog posts sent out over Twitter, either on a post-by-post basis or automatically, as mentioned previously, via free services such as TwitterFeed. In the second half of 2008, approximately 5 percent of all readers of my *Infinite Regress* blog arrived via links to my pages sent out automatically on Twitter. To return to the jewelry and T-shirt analogy, then, Twitter messages range from store-bought (news from CNN) to hand-made (a link to a blog post by any individual). As is the case with all new new media, older media are not obliterated but subsumed and promoted on Twitter.

Speaking of blog promotion and its possibilities for monetization via advertising, there are even advertising services such as *adjix.com* that allow Twitterers to embed commercial links in their tweets and earn income from clicks in a way similar to Google AdSense. Twitter is not only an engine of microblogging but also a microcosm of the new new media world, in which blogging, advertising,

dissemination of photos and videos, campaigns for Diggs, and seeking and maintenance of online “friendship” take place on a moment-by-moment basis.

Pownce and other Twitter-Likes

Pownce, developed by the Digg design team, was Twitter’s only, and much smaller, competitor in 2007 and 2008, before it closed shop in December 2008. Its main advantage in comparison to Twitter was that files—images, music and video—could be sent along with the messages, in contrast to Twitter, which just sends links. The Pownce receiver thus was saved the step of clicking on the link and could immediately enjoy the music or video. But apparently this advantage was not enough to give Pownce a viable niche in the microblogging market, and Twitter remains the solitary titan in microblogging, as Wikipedia does for online encyclopedias—but unlike Facebook and MySpace, which continue to have joint custody of the huge social media “Friendship” arena.

Facebook and MySpace in fact compete in user self-advertising with Twitter, via their “status” boxes at the top of every user’s profile, where users can indicate how they are feeling, what they are doing, etc., just as on Twitter. Facebook’s “poke”—in which the receiver gets a text saying the sender “poked” you, signifying “hello” or some other kind of interest—can be considered a primitive precursor of a private tweet (or DM—“Direct Message”—which can be used for any purposes and is seen only by the Twitter receiver).

As in all aspects of the new new media universe, there is increasing convergence of systems. As more features of Facebook and MySpace become deliverable via email, and more people receive email on cellphones, iPhones, BlackBerrys and other mobile devices via which they receive twitters, the difference between a tweet and a status update on Facebook or MySpace becomes less and less. Facebook and MySpace are already offering “mobile” applications, which deliver status updates, Friend requests and other features to cellphones (see Chapter 13, “Hardware,” for more about mobile devices and new new media).

At the same time, Twitter “boxes” can easily be embedded on blogs and profile pages. These boxes deliver a stream of twitters and can be tailored to receive them from anyone on Twitter you please. MySpace permits embedding of such boxes and Facebook has a slightly different application that displays tweets.

Twitter Dangers: The Congressman Who Tweeted Too Much

The dangers of telling the world what you are doing via tweets should be obvious, if what you are doing is provocative and you are in a vulnerable, publicly accessible place.

You might think the above applies to chatterbox—or, better, tweeterbox—kids, and it does. But consider the series of tweets sent by Rep. Peter Hoekstra (R-Michigan), on February 6, 2009: “Just landed in Baghdad...” And, later, “Moved into green zone by helicopter Iraqi flag now over palace. Headed to new US embassy Appears calmer less chaotic than previous here” (Donnelly, 2009). Hoekstra, a member of the House Intelligence Committee, had fallen prey to a dangerous illusion that has accompanied online communication since the 1980s and exacerbates, among other problems, “flaming,” or the posting of nasty messages that are seen not only by their intended recipient (the initial “flame”) but others in the online community you may not have intended. The illusion comes from mistaking the screen in front of you—whether a computer on your desk in the 1980s or a BlackBerry in your hand today—as a personal device upon which you can record your thoughts, private, angry, whatever, for delivery only to the person or people you had in mind. After all, the device in the 1980s was called a “personal computer.” Twitters can be even more misleading because you may think that your tweets are seen by only your Followers. Tweets are indeed seen by your Followers but also can be seen by everyone else on Twitter, unless you chose to “protect” your Profile and make your tweets available only to your approved Followers and not the Twitter world at large.

In Hoekstra’s enthusiasm for the new new medium, then, he had neglected to check out all of its features and control mechanisms. This was an understandable, albeit potentially deadly, error. Adults become children—usually in the best sense of the word—when we encounter and adopt a new mode of communication, especially one such as Twitter, which with a few keystrokes can open new vistas for our personal and professional lives. It may also be worth noting that the average age of Twitter users, according to an unscientific, sample survey conducted via Twitter in February 2009, is 37 (Weist, 2009; see also the scientific sample survey by Heil & Piskorski, 2009, and its findings of 90 percent of all tweets by the 10 percent most active users, “an average man is almost twice more likely to follow another man than a woman,” and other demographics of interest). New new media in general, and Twitter as its cutting edge in particular, may not be just for kids anymore.

Far worse dangers of new new media, however, come not from their misuse but their savvy employment by people bent on bad deeds. In Chapter 11, “The Dark Side of New New Media,” we will consider the use of Twitter by terrorists.

And Twitter has also been a powerful enabler of democratic expression.

Twitter vs. the Mullahs in Iran

People took to the streets in protest about what they saw as fraudulent conducting of the Presidential election in Iran in June 2009. This is an old story in dictatorial regimes—people protesting in public squares—and often has unhappy results for democracy, as was the case in Tiananmen Square in China in 1989. But people and democracy had new tools at their disposal in 2009.

The Supreme Leader of Iran, who supported the re-election of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, moved with like-minded mullahs to ban reporting of the growing objections to the election, the call for a new one, and the fact that protesters were being beaten and killed. The news blackout worked for direct, eyewitness reporting by traditional, centralized media, such as broadcast facilities, and for professional journalists, who were easy enough to expel or otherwise prevent from directly reporting on events. But YouTube, Facebook, and, most prominently, Twitter, were not as easy to stop or even control in Iran.

Internet and cellphone service were intermittently restricted and partially shut down in Iran. But cutting off all tweets and uploads of videos to YouTube would have required all Internet and cellphone service to be severed in Iran, which the authorities were wary of doing, since that would have had ill effects for Iranian business and other essential exchanges of information. The result left protesters and citizen reporters with pipelines for their tweets and videos, which people outside of Iran could also use to send tweets back into Iran via "proxies" which appeared legitimate to the authorities.

At the same time, of course, Iranian authorities could and apparently did use Twitter to send out misleading information. When I was asked on an interview on KNX Radio out of Los Angeles on June 16, 2009, how anyone could know if tweets coming out of Iran were true or disinformation, I replied that the aggregate of Twitterers, just like the many reader/editors on Wikipedia, provided some checks and balances on the accuracy of the information (Levinson, 2009, "New New Media vs. the Mullahs"). And, indeed, tweets suspected of being planted by the government were identified and denounced (see Grossman, 2009).

As of this writing in June 2009, the outcome of the protests in Iran, and the success of Twitter and other new new media in enabling those protests, is not clear. But it is worth noting that a new medium of the late 1970s, the audio cassette, was instrumental in the Iranian revolution of 1979 (Zunes, 2009), cellphones helped organize the successful Second People Power Revolution in the Philippines in 2001 (see Rheingold, 2003; Popkin, 2009), and the U.S. State Department thought Twitter was so crucial in the early days of the 2009 protest that it asked Twitter to delay a scheduled shutdown for maintenance until a time when most of Iran was likely asleep (Grossman, 2009).

Here is a timeline of some of the major clashes of new media with dictatorial governments in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries:

- 1942–43: The White Rose uses photocopying to tell the truth to Germans about the Nazi government. Fails to dislodge the Nazis.
- 1979: Audio cassettes of Ayatollah Khomeini distributed in Iran. Succeeds in fomenting successful revolution against Shah.
- 1980s: Samizdat video in the Soviet Union criticizes Soviet government. May have helped pave the way for Gorbachev's perestroika and glasnost, and end of Soviet rule.
- 1989: Email gets word out to the world about Tiananmen Square protests. Fails to dislodge Chinese government.

- 2001: Cellphones help mobilize peaceful opposition to President Estrada in Philippines. The Second People Power Revolution succeeds.
- 2009: Twitter and YouTube get word out to the world about Iranian opposition to reported election outcome. Result: not yet clear as of this writing.

McLuhan as Microblogger

The short form of Twitter is not only a politically efficient and personally cool necessity; it had already been developed, long before Twitter, into a well-known literary form. Marshall McLuhan died on the last day of 1980—not only years before there was microblogging and blogging but a few years before email and more than a decade before easily accessible Web pages. But he was twittering or microblogging in one of his most important books, "The Gutenberg Galaxy" (1962), with chapter titles or "glosses" such as "Schizophrenia may be a necessary consequence of literacy" and "The new electronic interdependence recreates the world in the image of a global village." There were 107 such "twitters" in that book.

I first recognized the digital affinity of McLuhan's writing two decades prior to Twitter. In 1986, I wrote a piece for the IEEE Transactions of Professional Communications titled "Marshall McLuhan and Computer Conferencing," in which I suggested that the pithy, aphoristic bursts that characterized his writing—his great works from the 1960s consisted of chapters often not more than a page or two in length—were actually a form of Web writing ("computer conferencing"), or what we today call blogs, decades before the Web and online communication had emerged.

Fast-forward 21 years ... I was browsing through the Twitter public page, a few months after I had joined in the summer of 2007, and was struck that the tweets bore a strong resemblance to the titles of those short chapters in McLuhan's books. If the contents of his chapters were blogs, a page or two of thoughts, with no necessary connection between one chapter and the next, no fixed order, then the titles of those chapters were twitters, an arresting phrase or two, at most. McLuhan's chapter "glosses," in other words, were twitters before their time (Levinson, October 2007). Of course, titles such as "Nobody ever made a grammatical error in a non-literate society" in "The Gutenberg Galaxy" were far better than most of the tweets on Twitter. So McLuhan's titles not only presaged Twitter, they also presaged the best that Twitter could be. (Indeed, there are several Twitter accounts under McLuhan's name which tweet his aphorisms.)

But how did the real Marshall McLuhan see the digital age? It was not that he had access to some sort of crystal ball that provided glimpses of the future. McLuhan owned no fantastical speculum across time. It was rather that, for some reason, McLuhan's mind worked in a way that our digital age, and new new media in particular, have captured and projected on our screens and lives. This in turn suggests that such a short form of writing was always part of our human capability, but our culture and education served to limit or rule out. McLuhan was able to

break through those expectations, which are now becoming the norm in texting, IM'ing, status reporting and tweeting.

This also points to a more general historical dynamic between old and new new media. We always desired to write as well as read our reference sources and to select as well as receive our news. But our cultural heritage, our education and training, taught us to be spoon-fed. Yet, just as with the short form of writing, we never lost those human productive urges, and they have been retrieved with Twitter, Wikipedia, Digg and the new new media we have been examining in this book.

Retrieval of earlier communication forms by new technologies is also an important part of McLuhan's media schema and was most developed in his "tetrad" or four-part model of what he referred to as media "effects." Every new medium "amplifies" aspects of our communication (radio, for example, amplifies sound across distance), "obsolesces" a currently widespread form (radio took the place of some reading), "retrieves" an earlier form (radio brought back the spoken word), and eventually reverses into something else (radio becomes audio-visual television). "Digital McLuhan" (Levinson, 1999) provides more details and examples of tetrads, but, regarding Twitter, we could say it amplifies the short written phrase, obsolesces long blogs and phone calls, retrieves poetic phrases and McLuhan's writing, and reverses into ... well, that's yet to be seen.

McLuhan's work thus clearly can be very helpful not only in understanding media (the title of his 1964 master work) but in understanding new new media. Another one of his notions is "total immersion"—to use a medium is to become fully engulfed in it, whatever we may otherwise think we are doing (see McLuhan & Fiore, 1967). Mobile media, to the contrary, work against this immersion. If we're looking at Wikipedia or YouTube or writing a blog from a mobile device, we are usually more in touch with the outside world, and with people around us, than if we are engaging those media from a desktop computer.

But one new new medium—in fact, the final specific system we will consider in this book—goes to great lengths to give us the illusion of total immersion. We turn in the next chapter to Second Life.

Second Life

IT WAS COLD AND RAINING IN NEW YORK CITY, EARLY ON A SUNDAY evening in December 2007. I did a reading from my novel "The Plot to Save Socrates", to an international audience—people from Romania and other places overseas, as well as the U.S.—and not a raindrop hit me as I traveled to the reading. That's because I did not do it in this world but in Second Life.

In Second Life, avatars not only read aloud from their books to audiences of avatars, but they also do lots of other things we ordinarily do in our flesh-and-blood lives. Avatars get their hair styled, buy clothes and land, dance, make love, do all manner of business and run shops. I had just opened a "virtual" bookstore, the "Soft Edge Book Shop" on Book Island in Second Life. My rent was paid in "Linden dollars," which were purchased by real U.S. dollars and came to about \$5 per month. My store was stocked with covers of all of my books—some 15 of them—which visitors could click upon and see reviews of the books, as well as links through which they could read more about the books and buy them on Amazon. I did my reading to a crowd of about 40 avatars, standing right in front of the bookstore, as my avatar sat in a rocking chair on the porch of the store.

I have since closed my shop—I could no longer afford the time to tend it—but if it were still open, it would no doubt have a cover of this very book, "New New Media," on one of its walls. (See Kremer, 2008, for a summary of authors who have given readings, established two-dimensional offices and bookstores and conducted other professional writerly activities in Second Life.)

Everything in life has precedents, and Second Life is no different. People have been chatting online now for decades—back before anyone even talked about new media, let alone new new media—ever since the French Minitel system in the 1980s (Levinson, 1997). Texting is still essential to communication in Second Life, as blogging is to most new new media (even videos on YouTube have written titles and descriptions), but Second Life in 2007 added voice chat capabilities. You can find an avatar to dance with and select a script—you can