IST XXX: Special Topics: Digital platforms

Digital Platforms – a journey from naive to Informed; platform histories to personal ecosystems

Week   Discussion Topics + Readings / Assignments
1. **Week One –**
   a. Day 1: Syllabus Day
      i. Class Discussion – What is a digital platform?
      ii. How many digital platforms can you name?
         1. White board activity // Padlet Activity
      iii. How many digital platforms do you use?
         1. (what do you use them for?) // Personal Documentation – list all your platforms
   b. Day 2: Sensemaking: The Network Effect / Demand Side Economies of Scale
      i. Reading: Van Alstyne, M. and Parker, G. 2017. "Platform Business: From Resources to Relationships." *Platform Business*. Vol. 9. No.1, 2017 https://doi.org/10.1515/gfkmir-2017-0004
      ii. Class Discussion – How do economies of scale help us define a platform?
      iii. How might economies of scale not fully capture the nature of digital platforms?

Short Assignment 1 – 1 page (no more than 500 words) free write on how you would define a digital platform. (This is meant to seed thinking for Small Project 1 discussion on Platform Histories).

2. **Week Two –**
   a. Day 1 – Sensemaking: The Politics of Platforms
      i. Readings:
      Gillespie, T. 2010. "The politics of 'platforms,'" New Media & Society. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444809342738
      ii. How do we make sense of Platforms?
      iii. What are their politics (From Gillespie)?
         1. Post-Colonial Computing – Flow from one single zip code
         2. Counterpoint: Chinese Tech/Platforms e.g. TikTok
      iv. What is their business model?
         1. business metrics, technology capability, competitive landscape, social good

Short Assignment 1 due

   b. Day 2 – Platform Histories
      Reading: Wasserman, "African Histories of the Internet" *Internet History,* 2017 https://doi.org/10.1080/24701475.2017.1308198
      Berners-Lee, T., Cailliau, R., Groff, J., and Pollerman B. 1992. "World-Wide Web: The Information Universe." *Electronic Networking*. Vol. 2, No. 1. https://www.legalanthology.ch/t/berners-lee-et-al_world-wide-web_1992.pdf

      i. How did these platforms come to be? / Digital platform development (where does it begin?)
      i. Bell Telephone, ARPANET, Russian/European Internet Failures, Wired Internet/Unwired Internet

ii. From the reading: how does the development of the internet in South Africa differ from how it developed in the US or Europe? How might this shape people's perceptions of the internet versus platforms. Would Facebook emerge from the African Internet?

Small Project 1 - Introduce Assignment: **Platform Histories** – First assignment will be to examine one of a list of 'dead' platforms to consider what happened to them, their purpose, their business model, and where aspects of them are sense these days? In groups of 3 or 4, select one of the following platforms and put together a 5-10-minute presentation on it.

Some questions to answer:
- What are your platforms aspects of platformness?
- Why did it go away? (if it went away)
- Why did it lose engagement? (if it didn't go away)
- What was its business model? (how did it get users? how was it funded? how did it propose to make money?)

Potentially: Brief lecture from library staff on web-based internet search and how to use the Wayback Machine; internet archive.

LiveJournal	Minitel	Tumblr
Flickr	Orkut	Geocities
Docomo	Sarahah	Friendster
Sportsline	Second Life	Fanfiction.net

3. **Week Three –**
    a. Day 1: Platform Histories 2:
        i. Reading: O'Reilly, Tim, What is Web 2.0: Design Patterns and Business Models for the Next Generation of Software. Communications & Strategies, No. 1, p. 17, First Quarter 2007, Available at SSRN: https://ssrn.com/abstract=1008839
        ii. Review: How did the Internet come into being? How does place impact this development?
        iii. Design ++ Affordances
        iv. Early Platforms and their perceptions - Web 1.0
            1. As communication: email
            2. As utopia/freedom/community: e.g. VNS Matrix / Cyberfeminism: https://vnsmatrix.net/projects/the-cyberfeminist-manifesto-for-the-21st-century |The Well (early UNIX)
            3. EFF Foundation Documents
            4. Life on the Screen++Second Life; D&D
            5. As community: Message Boards, Mailing Lists, ListServs, Usenet
        v. Web 2.0
            1. How did these perceptions change?
            2. How does the platform business model change?

    b. Day 2: Platform Histories Presentation
        i. Group presentation time for students – participation expectation around engagement – students should be actively engaging in other's presentations by

asking questions and providing feedback.

Small Project 1 Due

4. **Week Four –**
   a. Day 1 – Introducing Social Network Sites as Platforms
      i. *Reading***:** Boyd, D. M., & Ellison, N. B. (2007). Social network sites: Definition, history, and scholarship. *Journal of computer-mediated communication*, *13*(1), 210-230.
      ii. **Review:** What is the difference between Web 1.0 and Web 2.0 platforms? What are some platforms that have spanned both definitions? How have they changed? What makes them resilient?
      iii. What are Social Network Sites, according to boyd and Ellison?
      iv. What are their functions?
      v. What do they do differently from Web 1.0 platforms?

Short Assignment 2 - 1 page (no more than 500 words) free write on how you would explain the phrase "moderation defines a platform" in relationship to digital platforms.

   b. Day 2 - "Moderation defines a platform"
      i. Reading: Gillespie, T. 2018. "All Platforms Moderate" from: *Custodians of the Internet: plaforms, content moderation and the hidden decisions that shape social media.* New Haven, CT: Yale University Press. Pp 1-23.
      Sarah A. Gilbert. 2020. "I run the world's largest historical outreach project and it's on a cesspool of a website." Moderating a Public Scholarship Site on Reddit: A Case Study of r/AskHistorians. Proc. ACM Hum.-Comput. Interact. 4, CSCW1, Article 019 (May 2020), 27 pages. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1145/3392822

      vi. **Review:** What are Social Network Sites?
      vii. What is the goal of content moderation?
         • Broad Processes for Group/Platform
         • What is Civility? It's culturally constructed
         • Potentially teaching concepts from: Libby Hemphill article: https://arxiv.org/pdf/1802.08612.pdf
      viii. Moderation defines a platform
         • Usenet paradigm
         • Scalability and management of content moderation -- W*here is the problem with the small body of people doing the moderation work – as it has been done traditionally – how some platforms are using community moderation – Reddit's community moderation*
         • Reddit Mods (See Brian Dosono's work on AAPI content moderation on reddit as emotional labor, Massanari's piece on Reddit and the Fappening)
         • Too big to scale – with growth comes sacrifice
         • Big sports sites – e.g. ESPN taking down comments.

Short Assignment 2 Due

5. **Week Five –**
   a. Day 1 – The Hidden Labor of Platform Moderation
      i. *Reading:* https://www.newyorker.com/news/q-and-a/the-underworld-of-online-content-moderation
         https://www.wired.com/2014/10/content-moderation/
      ii. *Viewing:* https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/xw5x7d/watch-instafamous-an-incisive-film-about-the-link-between-celebrity-and-click-farmers [Link Embedded] – 6 Minutes + article

      iii. **Review:** What do we mean when we say 'moderation defines a platform?'
      iv. Potentially view in class the click farmers piece
      v. Discussion in class about human costs of content moderation
      vi. Who wins and who loses? Cultural discussion
      vii. Business discussion; Cost vs. "Safety"

   b. Day 2 – Content Moderation Conclusion/Deplatforming
      i. Reading: https://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/10/opinion/sunday/youtube-politics-radical.html
         https://www.wired.com/story/youtube-algorithm-silence-conspiracy-theories/
      ii. Introduce Small Project 2 – Debate – organize teams and select platforms.
      iii. Automated Content Moderation and Content curation. Potential pros and cons [for human moderators] in terms of personal and mental wellbeing; yet also potential radicalization.
      iv. How conspiracy grows on platforms – YouTube's videos *look* normal, but spread misinformation; finding conspiracy through metadata is a matter of *listening* rather than seeing. For visual mediums, this can be complicated.
      v. In-class discussion: So you've found a conspiracy hosted on your platform, what do you do? How do you direct your moderation teams?

Small Project 2 – March Madness Style Debate. 16 teams (no more than 3 or 4 people per team) develop a debate to consider an up-and-coming platform to determine which platform will be in the best position in five years using everything we've previously discussed. Platforms:

Uber	Lyft	Airbnb	Pinterest
GoFundMe	Reddit	Podium	Twitch
Etsy	Strava	Instacart	Box
Zillow	Sidekick	Reef (technologies)	Patreon

To ensure fair grading, each piece should come with a written reflection.

6. **Week Six –**
   a. Day 1 – Deplatforming and Cross-Platform Behavior
      i. Reading: https://www.nytimes.com/2019/02/19/technology/youtube-conspiracy-stars.html
         Shruti Phadke and Tanushree Mitra. 2020. Many Faced Hate: A Cross Platform Study of Content Framing and Information Sharing by Online Hate Groups. In

Proceedings of the 2020 CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems (CHI '20). Association for Computing Machinery, New York, NY, USA, 1–13. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1145/3313831.3376456

    ii. **Review:** What are some of the pros/cons of AI-driven content curation and content moderation?

    iii. Small Project 2: Model debate for Small Project Two using Facebook and Twitter.

    iv. How conspiracies spread online (from previous session) and *how* they spread. How can platforms like YouTube combat this?

        1. Demonetizing – potentially also hurts marginalized creators if done using AI:

            a. https://www.theverge.com/2018/6/4/17424472/youtube-lgbt-demonetization-ads-algorithm

            b. https://arstechnica.com/tech-policy/2020/06/lawsuit-by-black-youtubers-against-youtube-faces-uphill-battle/

        2. Deplatforming – Potentially causes these folks to leave for another site platform, like say going from YouTube to Reddit, from Twitter to Gab.

Short assignment 3 – Building from Short Assignment 2, consider your definition of "moderation defines a platform" based on what you've learned in class over the past week, write 1 page (no more than 500 words) on one potential flaw in your own definition.

    b. Day 2 –

      i. Reading: Tusikov, N. 2019. Defunding Hate: PayPal's regulation of Hate Groups. *Surveillance & Society.* Vol 17. No 1/2 (2019). https://doi.org/10.24908/ss.v17i1/2.12908
Matsakis, L. 2018. The Logan Paul Video Should be a Reckoning for YouTube. *Wired. https://www.wired.com/story/logan-paul-video-youtube-reckoning/*

      ii. **Review:** Deplatforming/Demonetizing.

      iii. Thinking of Tusikov's article, what does it mean that *PayPal* is the company being asked to legislate free speech?

      iv. Deplatforming extremism – PayPal/Stripe/Square won't fund, so people are pushed to the edges of the internet and onto more fringe platforms

      v. Radicalization within these increasingly niche spaces

Short assignment 3 due

7. **Week Seven – Debate**
    a. Day 1 – 8 Debates (Round 1)
    b. Day 2 – 8 Debates (Round 1)

8. **Week Eight – Debate**
    a. Day 1 – 8 Debates (Round 2)
    b. Day 2 – 3 Debates – (Semifinals & Finals)
      i. Debates
      ii. Discussion post-debate

9. **Week Nine – Platforms and Accessibility**

a. Day 1 – Accessibility pt. 1
  i. Reading: Vishwanath, Aditya, Matthew Kam, and Neha Kumar. "Examining low-cost virtual reality for learning in low-resource environments." *Proceedings of the 2017 Conference on Designing Interactive Systems*. 2017.
  ii. What is Accessibility – how do platforms shape this?
      1. Example: For people who are deaf, blind, unable to type. Discuss how design of digital platforms can limit these spaces. Look back at historical examples from Small Project One.
  iii. **Piracy and the Impaired Cyborg: Assistive Technologies, Accessibility, and Access**
      1. Non-intuitive accessibility (e.g. how Reddit is intimidating to many women, and Pinterest is a very intimidating place for men.)
          a. Recall / Discuss:
          b. Massanari, A. (2017). #Gamergate and The Fappening: How Reddit's algorithm, governance, and culture support toxic technocultures. *New Media & Society*, *19*(3), 329–346.

Small Project 2 Reflection due

b. Day 2 – Accessibility pt. 2
  i. Reading: Bin Morshed, Mehrab, et al. "When the internet goes down in Bangladesh." *Proceedings of the 2017 ACM Conference on Computer Supported Cooperative Work and Social Computing*. 2017.
      https://medium.com/chainrift-research/m-pesa-a-case-study-in-financial-inclusion-5b14cb7c612f
      https://www.hbs.edu/faculty/Pages/item.aspx?num=50788
  ii. When there is no accessibility to these digital platforms at all
      1. Example: Recall Wasserman article from earlier in the course, how a mobile vs. Wired internet may shape this.
      2. Trickle-down innovation vs. indigenous innovation
          a. Example: M-PESA (Kenyan Banking App)
  iii. When you cannot stay on a platform:
      1. Platform Migration
          a. Discuss: Casey Fiesler and Brianna Dym. 2020. Moving Across Lands: Online Platform Migration in Fandom Communities. Proc. ACM Hum.-Comput. Interact. 4, CSCW1, Article 042 (May 2020), 25 pages. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1145/3392847
      2. Limiting/Leaving
          a. Discuss: Discuss: Shion Guha, Eric P.S. Baumer, and Geri K. Gay. 2018. Regrets, I've Had a Few: When Regretful Experiences Do (and Don't) Compel Users to Leave Facebook. In Proceedings of the 2018 ACM Conference on Supporting Groupwork (GROUP '18). Association for Computing Machinery, New York, NY, USA, 166–177. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1145/3148330.3148338
      3. Non-Use
          a. Discuss: Eric P.S. Baumer, Phil Adams, Vera D. Khovanskaya, Tony C. Liao, Madeline E. Smith, Victoria Schwanda Sosik, and Kaiton Williams. 2013. Limiting, leaving, and (re)lapsing: an exploration of facebook non-use practices and experiences. In

Proceedings of the SIGCHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems (CHI '13). Association for Computing Machinery, New York, NY, USA, 3257–3266. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1145/2470654.2466446

Short assignment 4 – in 500 words or less, describe a platform you've used in the past that you've since left. What compelled you to leave? If you can't think of a platform that compelled you to leave, recall a platform that you've seen evolve or change while you've used it. Did those changes make you feel differently about the platform?

10. **Week Ten – Gaming the Crowd**
    a. **Day 1 – Games**
        i. <mark>**Reading:**</mark> Ringland, Kathryn E., et al. "" Will I always be not social?" Re-Conceptualizing Sociality in the Context of a Minecraft Community for Autism." *Proceedings of the 2016 CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems*. 2016.
            Harrell, D. Fox. "Computational and cognitive infrastructures of stigma: Empowering identity in social computing and gaming." *Proceedings of the seventh ACM conference on Creativity and cognition*. 2009.
            https://www.nytimes.com/2019/11/18/technology/personaltech/google-stadia-review.html
        ii. **Economic Models & Connection to Other Media**
        iii. **Physical Forms**
            1. **Sony, Microsoft, PC, Nintendo, Sega (as platforms)**
                a. **Format Wars!!!! Bluray vs HD-DVD**
                b. **Netflix machines?**
            2. **Evolution of Gaming Platforms**
            3. **Change in Industry with online gaming/digital games.**
            4. **[remember when Sony made it so you couldn't lend your friends your games?]**
        iv. **Online Gaming**
            1. **Change in Industry Model**
            2. **How Games are Priced (App Store)**
            3. **More diversity/indie games out there (often crowdfunded)**
        v. **Sticky Models**

Short Assignment 4 Due

    b. **Day 2 - Crowd Funding and Crowd Sourcing**
        i. **Reading:** Michael D. Greenberg, Julie Hui, and Elizabeth Gerber. 2013. Crowdfunding: a resource exchange perspective. In CHI '13 Extended Abstracts on Human Factors in Computing Systems (CHI EA '13). Association for Computing Machinery, New York, NY, USA, 883–888. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1145/2468356.2468514
            Mollick, E. (2014). The dynamics of crowdfunding: An exploratory study. *Journal of business venturing*, *29*(1), 1-16.
            Lee, J., & Seo, D. (2016). Crowdsourcing not all sourced by the crowd: An observation on the behavior of Wikipedia participants. *Technovation*, *55*, 14-21.
        ii. **Positives:**

1. **XKCD Guy / Exploding Kittens**
2. **Critical Role**
3. **MIT Baloon Challenge!**
   iii. **Negatives:**
1. **Ouya**
2. **Medical / Transition Crowdfunding**
   a. **Discuss:** Barcelos, C. A. (2019). 'Bye-bye boobies': normativity, deservingness and medicalization in transgender medical crowdfunding. *Culture, Health & Sexuality*, *21*(12), 1394-1408
   iv. **Wikipedia – Is Crowd Sourced Really Crowed Sourced?**
1. **Discuss: Lee and Seo Article**
2. **Discuss:** Shachaf, P., & Hara, N. (2010). Beyond vandalism: Wikipedia trolls. *Journal of Information Science*, *36*(3), 357-370.
   v. **Crowd Sourced Platform Knowledge:**
1. **Discuss:** Bishop, S. (2019). Managing visibility on YouTube through algorithmic gossip. *New media & society*, *21*(11-12), 2589-2606.

11. **Week Eleven – Global Perspectives on Silicon Valley Platforms**
    a. **Day 1 – Post Colonial Perspectives (part 1)**
       i. **Reading:** Ravishankar, M. N., Shan L. Pan, and Michael D. Myers. "Information technology offshoring in India: a postcolonial perspective." *European Journal of Information Systems* 22.4 (2013): 387-402.
       Inani, L., Vertesi, J., Dourish, P., Philip, K., & Grinter, R. E. (2010, April). Postcolonial computing: a lens on design and development. In Proceedings of the SIGCHI conference on human factors in computing systems (pp. 1311-1320).
       https://www.wired.com/2008/07/the-playstation-2/
       ii. What is post-colonialism?
1. Discussion of key concepts of what colonialism is
   a. Computational colonialism – continues through the domination of technology from the west to other countries.
   b. **The PlayStation Wars in the Democratic Republic of Congo**
      i. **Discuss: https://conflictmineral.wordpress.com/the-playstation-war/**
      ii. **https://kotaku.com/whats-all-this-playstation-wars-business-5028998**
2. Discussion of post-colonial frameworks in computing
   a. **History of global dynamics of power shape wealth, economic strength and political influence.**
   b. **Discuss: ICT4D**
   c. **Discuss: Economics of Gaming, Economics of Apple/iPhone, Recall the PlayStation Wars**
3. Discussion of decolonial frameworks in computing
   a. Discuss: Marisol Wong-Villacres, Adriana Alvarado Garcia, and Javier Tibau. 2020. Reflections from the Classroom and Beyond: Imagining a Decolonized HCI Education. In Extended Abstracts of the 2020 CHI Conference on Human Factors in

> Computing Systems (CHI EA '20). Association for Computing Machinery, New York, NY, USA, 1–14. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1145/3334480.3381808

    b. Discuss: Decolonial AI; Dipto's Work, indigenous platforms like M-PESA

Short assignment 5: In 500 words or less, reflect on your positionality[1] as a person within a colonial space of technology. Who are you? Where may you be a colonizer, a colonized person?

    b. Day 2 – Post Colonial Perspectives (part 2)
        i. Reading: Wyche, Susan P., Sarita Yardi Schoenebeck, and Andrea Forte. ""Facebook is a luxury" an exploratory study of social media use in rural Kenya." *Proceedings of the 2013 conference on Computer supported cooperative work.* 2013.
Ahmed, Syed Ishtiaque, et al. "Ecologies of use and design: individual and social practices of mobile phone use within low-literate rickshawpuller communities in urban Bangladesh." *Proceedings of the 4th Annual Symposium on Computing for Development.* 2013.

Short Assignment 5 Due

12. Week Twelve – Platforms From Other Places
    a. Day 1. – In Class Project W/Short Lecgture
        i. Reading: Simpson, E. and Semaan, B. (2020) "For You or "For You?": Everyday LGBTQ+ Encounters with TikTok. To Appear in: The Proceedings of the ACM Conference on Computer Supported Cooperative Work and Social Computing (CSCW 2020). New York: ACM. **https://tinyurl.com/y59yfz2m**
        ii. Introduce Small Project 3
Small project 3 – Together in a small group, select 1 of the following platforms and prepare to present the platform to the class. Who are they, where are they from, how do they make money, are there privacy concerns… go wild in your presentation.

TikTok/Douyin	FlipKart	AliBaba
WeiChat	Messaging as Commerce (Weibo)	Line

        iii. Discussion: How are platforms from other places different?
            1. Collectivism?
            2. Platform Values?
        iv. In-Class Work Times
    b. Day 2 – Group Presentations on Platforms From Other Places
        i. Group Presentations.
Small Project 3 Due

---

[1] https://www.dictionary.com/e/gender-sexuality/positionality/#:~:text=Positionality%20is%20the%20social%20and,and%20outlook%20on%20the%20world.

Commented [ES2]: Diptop + John, Can you fill in what we'd talk about in a second day? I tried to fill in some of the post/de-colonial questions with some real-life examples from DRC. With the second day, I would think we'd want to discuss how to push back against colonial Points of View?

13. Week Fourteen – Physical and Social Networks as Platforms
    a. Day 1
    b. Day 2
14. Week Fifteen –
Reading:
    a. Day 1 – Ecosystems of platforms – platforms stop being an island and start being an archipelago
    b. Day 2

Final Due

Commented [ES3]: https://doi.org/10.1145/3274313 - as an example of ecosystems