Thesis Project Portfolio

Times Newer Roman: A Crowdsourced Font as a Social Media

(Technical Report)

How Social Media Inscribes Values into Its Users

(STS Research Paper)

An Undergraduate Thesis

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Discourse on the internet has become significantly worse over the past decade. Though different social media platforms and discussion mediums on the internet have varying levels of toxicity, researchers are not able to pinpoint the design decisions and algorithms that contribute to a more hostile discussion environment. Times Newer Roman is a parody social media platform where users can draw letters of the alphabet and vote on drawings to create a crowdsourced font. The website serves as an experiment to examine how design aspects such as anonymity, feed algorithms, and voting systems affect the quality of content of a social media platform. After the experiment is concluded, the data will help contribute to the field of online discussion. Since internet communication is heavily integrated in society, all features of an online discussion platform must have its impact on human to human interactions considered. Using Actor Network Theory, the prescriptions of a platform's attributes can be analyzed to pinpoint how a user's mood is altered by social media. In the opposite direction, a user's actions can inscribe a feature by communicating anything the user wants, reflecting the user's mood. Actor Network Theory provides a framework that can encapsulate the volatile nature of social media, with the users and technology changing to meet each other's needs. By analyzing the results of the Times Newer Roman drawings and votes, the correlation between certain social media features and drawing quality can be established. It was found that anonymity encourages a negative feedback loop and that voting causes a positive feedback loop, with the features prescribing negative and positive values. In addition to the experiment results, the results of a Google Forms survey that asks about the participant's social media usage and opinions on

platform aspects will also be analyzed. The most common responses mentioned recommendation algorithms and users of a platform as the worst aspects of social media. Using ANT, it can be established that recommendation algorithms can incur a negative feedback loop throughout a social media system. Both Times Newer Roman and the survey are conducted independently and are used to support each other's results. The research in tandem with Times Newer Roman website will hopefully start a conversation about social media design and nudge internet communications companies to implement features that can foster a safer and more civil discussion environment.