

Staying Safe Online
Montpelier Senior Center

Week #4

Social Media

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<https://tinyurl.com/3b6p3h8s>

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Topics

- **Social-Media History**
- **The Profit Mechanism: Advertising & Profiling**
- **Cambridge Analytica Case**
- **DISINFO via Social Media**
- **Trolling & Cyberbullying**
- **Privacy Issues**
- **Political Implications**
- **Censorship**
- **Return of Intermediation**
- **Surveillance**
- **Identity Theft using Social Media**
- **Facebook Settings**

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Social-Media History



- Cave art (40,000 BCE)
- Graffiti (13,000 BCE)
- Cork Bulletin boards (1801)
- Electronic systems (1970s ff)
 - ❑ CompuServe (1969)
 - ❑ PLATO (1970s)
 - ❑ USENET (1980)
 - ❑ IRC (1980s)
 - ❑ Blogs (1990s)
 - ❑ AIM (1997)
 - ❑ LinkedIn (2002)
 - ❑ MySpace (2003)
 - ❑ Facebook (2004)
 - ❑ Twitter (2006)
 - ❑ Weibo (2007)

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Cave art (40,000 BCE)

Cave of Hands
(13,000 BCE)



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Graffiti (13,000 BCE)



Alexamenos Graffito
(200 CE)




Graffiti art in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

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Cork Bulletin boards (1801)



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Social Media Today



- Computer-mediated technologies
- Facilitate
 - ❑ creation & sharing of information,
 - ❑ ideas,
 - ❑ career interests and
 - ❑ other forms of expression via virtual communities and networks
- User-generated content
 - ❑ Text posts, comments
 - ❑ Digital photos & videos
 - ❑ Results of artificial intelligence (AI)

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_media

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CompuServe (closed 2009)



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USENET Started in 1979



USENET Satire example: alt.sex.bestiality.hamster.duct-tape

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USENET

- ~120,000 newsgroups currently active
- Many millions posts/year
- Unknown # users – but likely in millions
- Articles typically available online more than 20 years
- Popular among privacy geeks
- Lots of highly technical discussion groups

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Blogs on Variety of Media

- Originally “weblogs” but now on any medium
- Diary-like “posts” w/ most recent first
- ~440M bloggers worldwide
- Becoming highly focused
- Lots of illustrations and videos (e.g., on YouTube)
- Increasing amount of AI-generated materials
- Earning money
 - ❑ Advertising own or others’ products
 - ❑ Some bloggers earn >\$millions
 - ✓ Ariana Huffington: \$250,000,000/year
 - Huffington Post – news discussions
 - ✓ Engadget (tech) – \$50,000,000/year



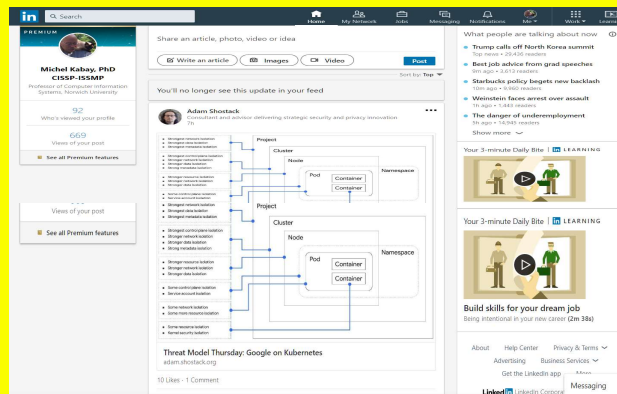
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LinkedIn (1.1B users 2025)


- Free
- Premium
 - ❑ \$30/mo to \$170/mo depending on features



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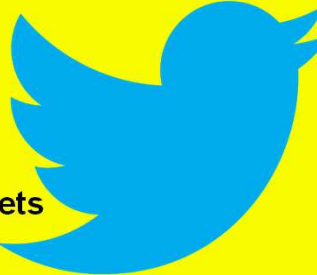
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Twitter – now “X”

- Widely used mechanism for broadcasting information and opinions
- Bought by Elon Musk in 2022
 - ❑ Renamed it to X
 - ❑ 557 million users in 2025
- Anyone can read “tweets”
 - ❑ Must register to post free tweets
 - ❑ X Premium costs U\$84/year
- Max 280 characters/tweet for free
 - ❑ But “X Premium” can post 25,000 characters/post



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Weibo (578M users 2025)

- Generic term 微博 means “microblog.”
 - ❑ Most popular: *Weibo.com* for *Sina Weibo*
 - ❑ Others: Alibaba, Baidu, Ctrip, JD.com, QQ, YY, WeChat, Tmall, Taobao
- 140 Chinese characters code for more info than 280 letters via X
- Sina Weibo – most used
- Strictly monitored by Chinese government (see later under “Censorship”)

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DISINFO via Social Media



- DISINFO = disinformation = deliberately incorrect information or false rumors
- Methods for spreading DISINFO
 - ❑ Selective censorship (e.g., China)
 - ❑ Hacking/leaking (e.g., DNC email hack)
 - ❑ Tricking search algorithms (e.g., padding sites with thousands of invisible links to target to raise its profile in GOOGLE search)
 - ❑ Bots (from “robots”): automated fake users to spread false information
 - ❑ Trolls: humans who deliberately post lies and accusations to generate controversy

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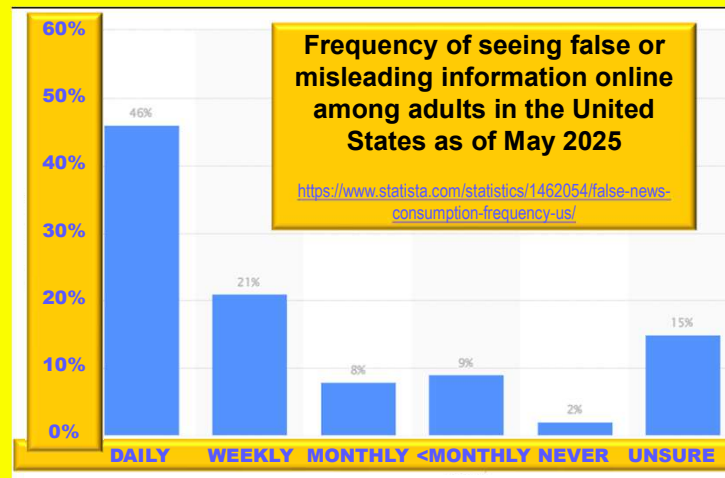
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Effectiveness of DISINFO



- 2025: false news online



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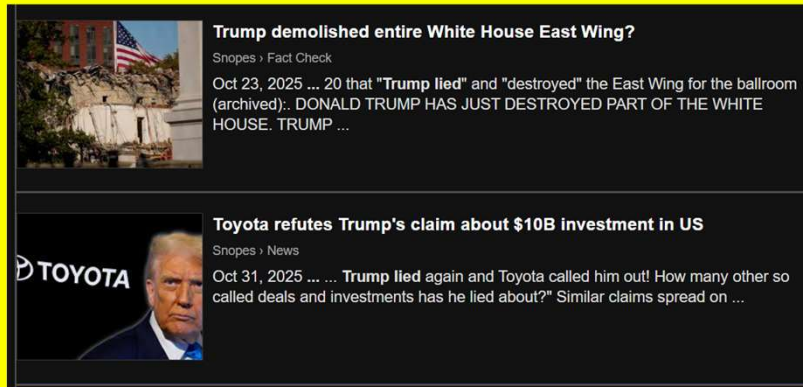
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Checking Validity of “News”



- The more shocking the “news,” the more important to CHECK ITS VALIDITY
- Valuable site: SNOPE.COM
<https://www.snopes.com/>



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Trolling & Cyberbullying



- Trolls
 - ❑ Deliberately foment discord
 - ❑ Post off-topic comments
 - ❑ Insults, abuse, threats
- Cyberbullies
 - ❑ Target specific individuals or groups
 - ❑ Post sneers, insults, & lies
 - ❑ Can include threats of harm
 - ❑ May post doctored photographs
 - ❑ Often directed at women
- Can report threats to social-media or to police

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Privacy & Control Issues



- Confidentiality
 - ❑ Limits on *who* sees *what* about *whom*
- Control
 - ❑ Degree to which confidentiality can be maintained
- Classic failure of privacy
 - ❑ Young people send nude or otherwise embarrassing pictures to a few supposed friends
 - ❑ But recipients have complete *control*
 - ❑ Sender does not limit whether recipient(s) share sender's info with others w/out permission
 - ❑ E.g., nude photos can spread through the Internet like cancer

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Political Implications




- Sharing information can challenge dictatorships
- “Arab Spring” demonstrated power of uncontrolled communications via smart phones
- Possible to
 - ❑ Distribute recordings challenging govt lies
 - ❑ Plan & announce meetings, rallies
- Terrifies dictators – they shut down networks
- Increasingly important in 2026
 - ❑ Resisting rise of Fascism from federal govt



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Censorship

- 1st Amendment of US Constitution
 - ❑ Controls *government* suppression of information
 - ❑ No restriction on suppression by private individuals or organizations
- Most other nations do *not* have severe restrictions on government control of information
 - ❑ E.g., *hate speech* illegal in Canada & EU
 - ❑ Anything that threatens power of dictatorships
 - ✓ Chinese suppression of challenges
 - ✓ Misogynistic Demented Orange Racist Narcissistic Sociopath threatens to terminate FCC licenses for major news

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Increasing Intermediation

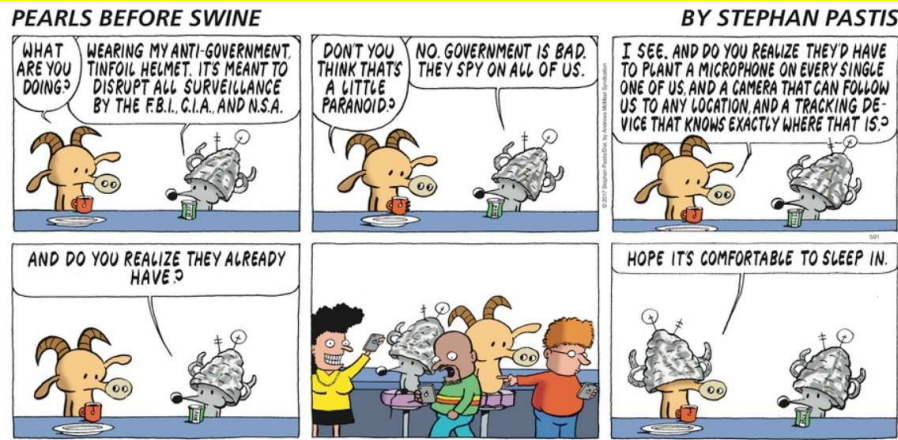
- Disintermediation: reduction in power of conventional news sources to control information
- Social media increasing control over content: *intermediation* returns
 - ❑ NO RESTRICTION on private firms' control over content
 - ❑ Blocking accounts
 - ❑ Deleting posts
 - ❑ Reducing visibility of posts
 - ❑ Government and law-enforcement "requests"
 - ✓ Constant "presidential" demands to fire Jimmy Kimmel and other commentators

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Surveillance (1)



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Surveillance (2)



- US govt under 1st Trump regime increased surveillance of social-media posts
 - ❑ DHS: “Shared Social Media Screening Service”
 - ❑ ICE: \$100M contract to monitor social media of visitors
 - ❑ State Dept: 14.7M applicants for work/tourist visas submitted social-media identifiers
 - ❑ FBI: task force monitored social-media posts
- Surveillance chills expressions of criticism of government / society
- Discriminatory monitoring well documented (e.g., Black Lives Matter members monitored)

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Identity Theft using Social Media (1)



- **Authentication** is tying an identifier (e.g., user name) to a specific person (i.e., YOU).
- If someone forgets a password, systems may ask for additional authentication using secret questions chosen by the user.
- Some authentication routines allow users to choose whose answers are supposedly unknown by others
 - ❑ What was the name of your school in grade 3?
 - ❑ Who was your prom date in high school?
 - ❑ What was the name of your first pet?

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Identity Theft using Social Media (2)



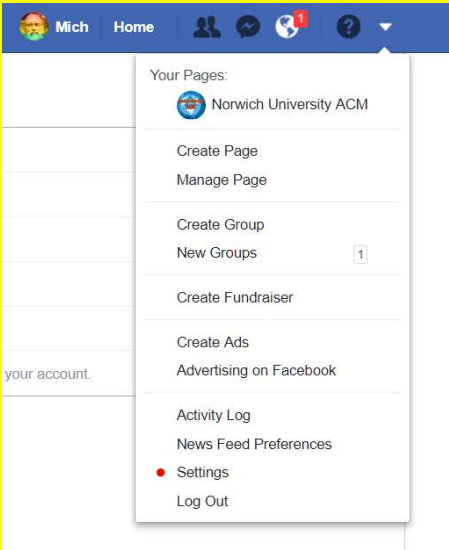
- However, anyone can see public information from social media
 - ❑ Including answers to all the secret questions!
- Identity thieves can use the information to impersonate victim
- ID theft can result in
 - ❑ Theft of \$\$ via credit cards, banks, loans
 - ❑ Spoofing identity to tarnish/destroy reputation using fake accounts
- Use social-media settings to *restrict access* to such information
 - ❑ E.g., "Friends only"

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Facebook Settings (1)

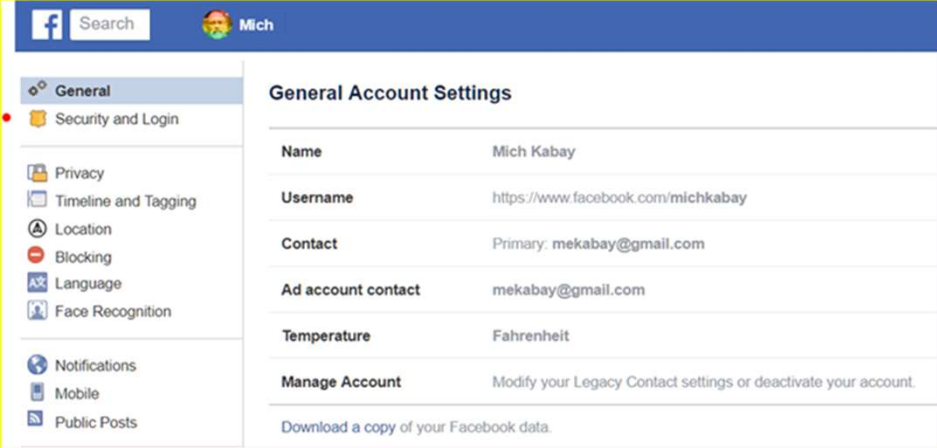


The screenshot shows the Facebook account menu for a user named 'Mich'. The menu is open, displaying various options. The 'Settings' option is highlighted with a red dot. The menu includes options for 'Your Pages' (Norwich University ACM), 'Create Page', 'Manage Page', 'Create Group', 'New Groups', 'Create Fundraiser', 'Create Ads', 'Advertising on Facebook', 'Activity Log', 'News Feed Preferences', 'Settings', and 'Log Out'.

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Facebook Settings (2)



The screenshot shows the 'General Account Settings' page in Facebook. The left sidebar contains a list of settings categories: General, Security and Login, Privacy, Timeline and Tagging, Location, Blocking, Language, Face Recognition, Notifications, Mobile, and Public Posts. The 'General' category is selected. The main content area displays the following settings:

General Account Settings	
Name	Mich Kabay
Username	https://www.facebook.com/michkabay
Contact	Primary: mekabay@gmail.com
Ad account contact	mekabay@gmail.com
Temperature	Fahrenheit
Manage Account	Modify your Legacy Contact settings or deactivate your account.
Download a copy of your Facebook data.	

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Facebook Settings (3)

Security and Login

Where You're Logged In

**Windows PC** · Townshend, VT, United States
Opera · [Active now](#)

**LG V10** · Townshend, VT, United States
Facebook app · 3 hours ago

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Facebook Settings (4)

Security and Login

Login

**Change password**
It's a good idea to use a strong password that you're not using elsewhere

Edit

**Log in with your profile picture**
[On](#) · Tap or click your profile picture to log in, instead of using a password

Edit


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Facebook Settings (5)

Security and Login

Two-Factor Authentication



Use two-factor authentication
Log in with a code from your phone as well as a password

Edit



Authorized Logins
Review a list of devices where you won't have to use a login code

View



App passwords
Use special passwords to log into your apps instead of using your Facebook password or login codes

Add

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Facebook Settings (6)

Setting Up Extra Security



Get alerts about unrecognized logins
On • We'll let you know if anyone logs in from a device or browser you don't usually use

Edit



Choose 3 to 5 friends to contact if you get locked out
On • Your trusted contacts can send a code and URL from Facebook to help you log back in

Edit

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Facebook Settings (7)



The screenshot shows the 'Advanced' section of Facebook settings. It contains two items: 'Encrypted notification emails' with an 'Edit' button, and 'See recent emails from Facebook' with a 'View' button. The background is yellow.

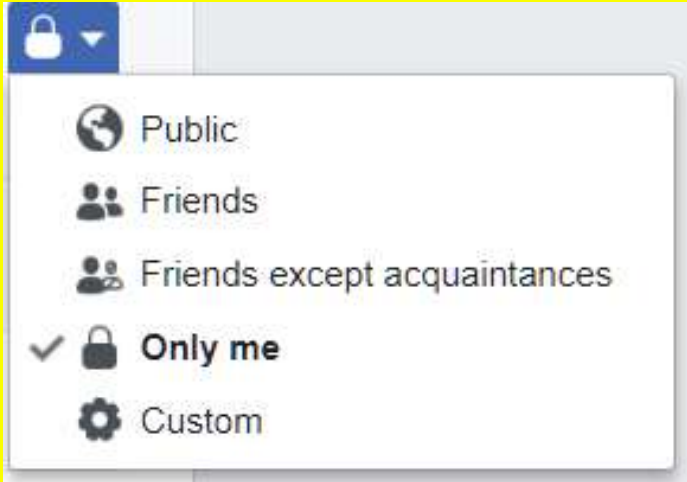
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Facebook Settings (8)

➤ Can control who can see EVERY ELEMENT of your Facebook profile



The screenshot shows the privacy settings dropdown menu on a Facebook profile. The options are: Public, Friends, Friends except acquaintances, Only me (which is selected with a checkmark), and Custom. The background is yellow.

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Facebook Settings (9)



Religious Views **Jewish Atheist**   Edit 

The G-d I don't believe in is the G-d of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Seriously: we celebrate Jewish values in a humanistic tradition rooted in the Reconstructionist Movement.

Political Views **Commie left-wing radical**

Life-long dedication to workers' rights, support for community and diversity, rejection of prejudice, exploitation and dehumanization

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Practical Guidelines



- Set social-media controls to permit only “friends” to comment on your posts
- When evaluating a “friend request”, examine the sender’s own page to see what they are like
- If you receive hostile comments, block the sender
- If you receive offers of love, profit, or requests for money, block the sender
- Block all attempts from strangers to get you to reveal confidential information
- Don’t repost “news” without checking its validity

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OK, STAY SAFE!



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