

Staying Safe Online

Montpelier Senior Center



Week #4

Social Media

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

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1

1

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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2

2



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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3

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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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6

6

Social Media Today

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- 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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7

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CompuServe (closed 2009)

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8

8



USENET Started in 1979

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USENET (NEWSGROUPS)

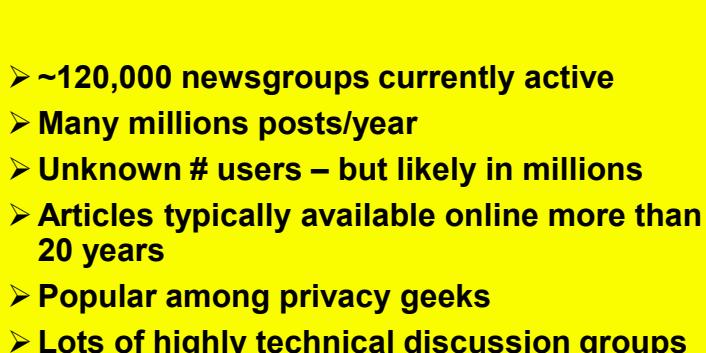
USENET Satire example: alt.sex.bestiality.hamster.duct-tape

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9

The screenshot shows a Usenet client interface with a search results list for the keyword 'ubuntu'. The results are displayed in a table with columns for Subject, Status, Size, Date, From, and Group. The list includes various Ubuntu-related posts and files, such as 'Ubuntu 9.04 desktop-386.iso' and 'Ubuntu 9.10 ultimate-2.4-64'. The client interface includes a search bar, search type dropdown, and download controls.

9



USENET

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- ~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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10

10



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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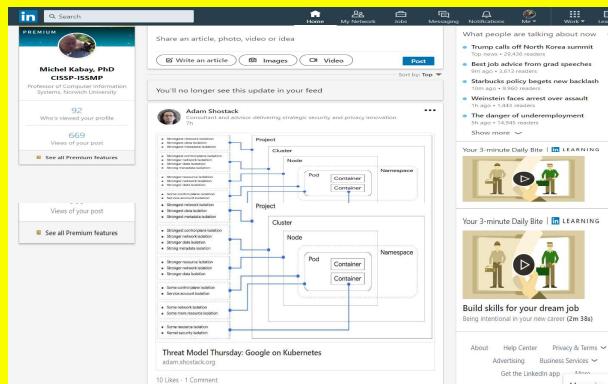
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11



LinkedIn (1.1B users 2025)

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



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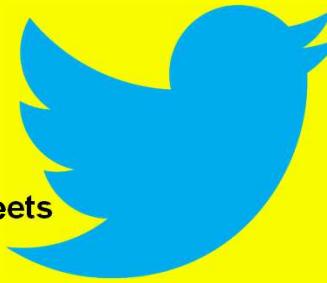
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12



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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13

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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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14

14



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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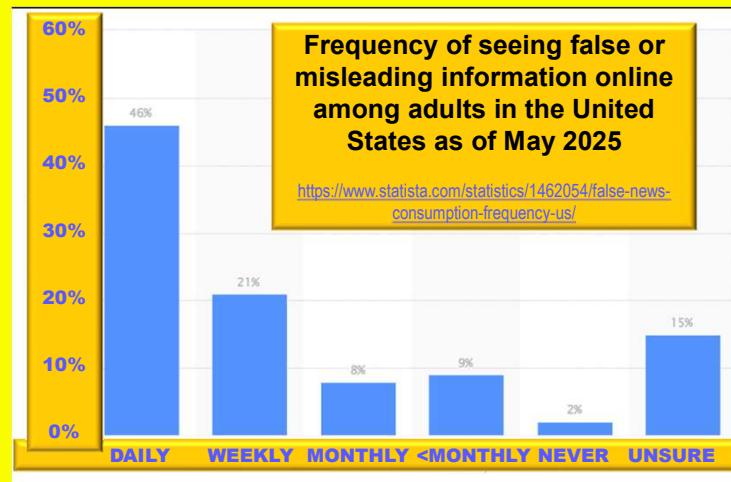
15

15



Effectiveness of DISINFO

- 2025: false news online



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16

16



Checking Validity of “News”

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



Trump demolished entire White House East Wing?

Snopes › Fact Check

Oct 23, 2025 ... 20 that "Trump lied" and "destroyed" the East Wing for the ballroom (archived): DONALD TRUMP HAS JUST DESTROYED PART OF THE WHITE HOUSE. TRUMP ...



Toyota refutes Trump's claim about \$10B investment in US

Snopes › News

Oct 31, 2025 ... Trump lied again and Toyota called him out! How many other so-called deals and investments has he lied about?" Similar claims spread on ...

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17

17



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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18

18



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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19

19



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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20

20



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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21

21



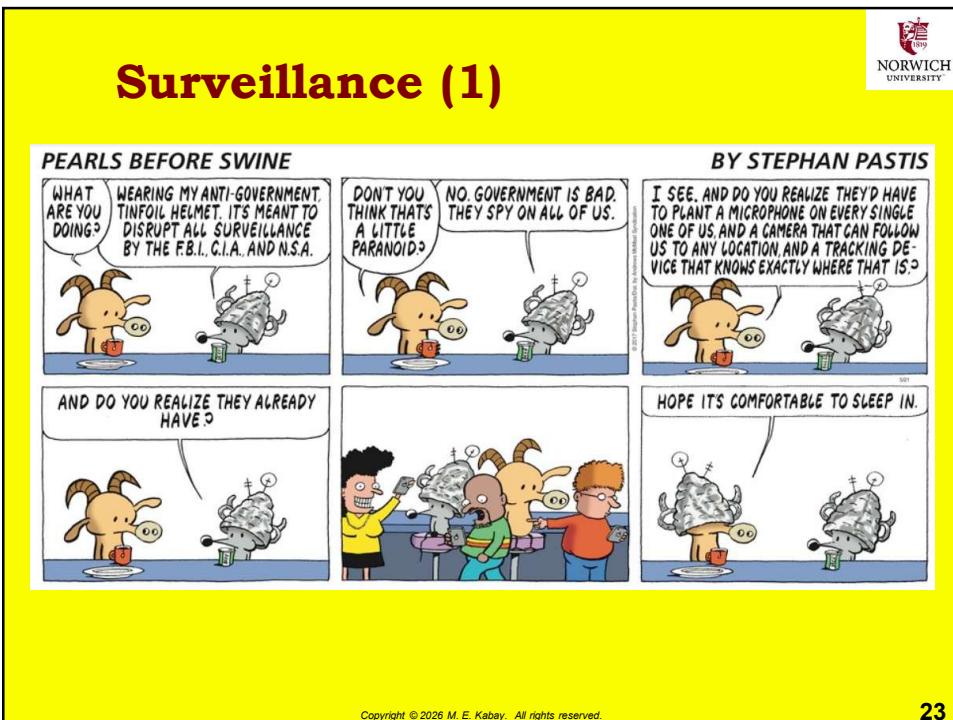
Increasing Intermediation

- 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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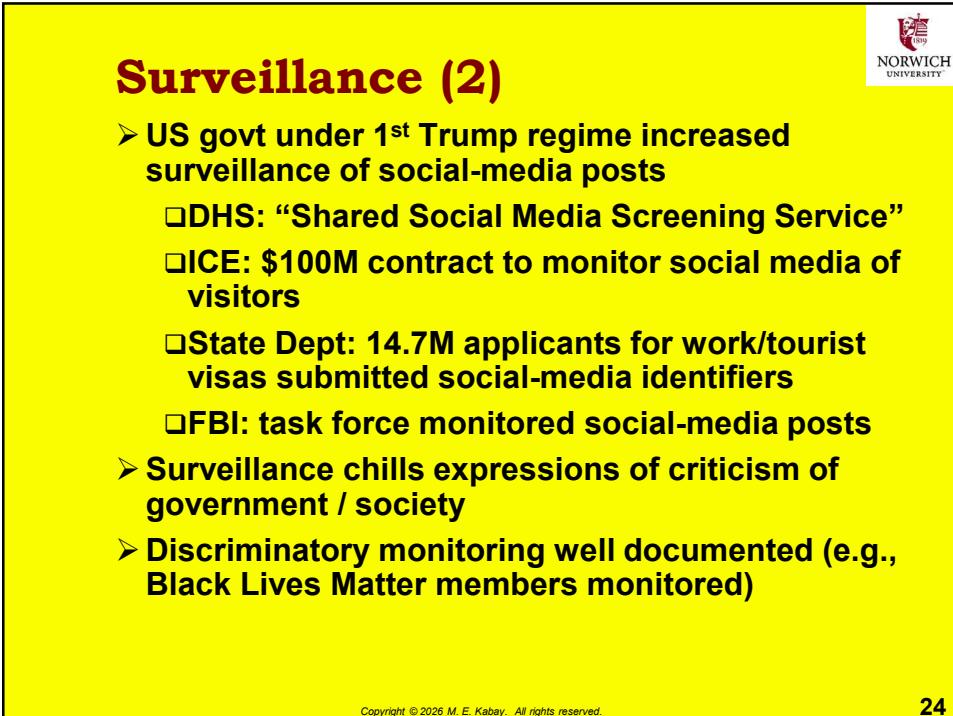
22

22



23

23



24

24



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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25

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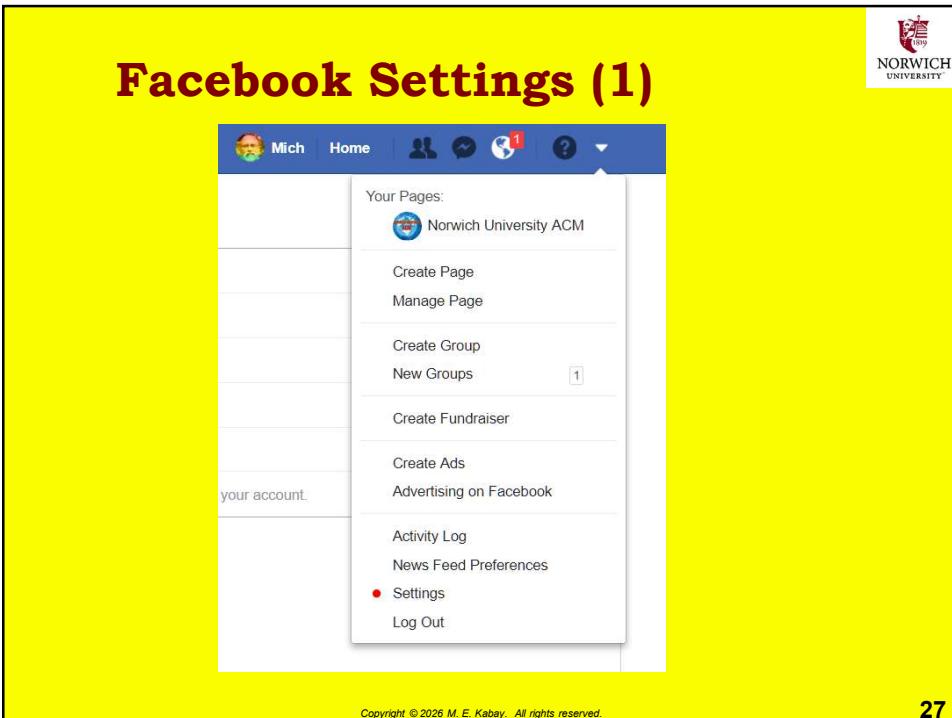
Identity Theft using Social Media (2)

- 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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26

26



Facebook Settings (1)

Mich Home

Your Pages: Norwich University ACM

Create Page Manage Page

Create Group New Groups 1

Create Fundraiser

Create Ads Advertising on Facebook

Activity Log News Feed Preferences

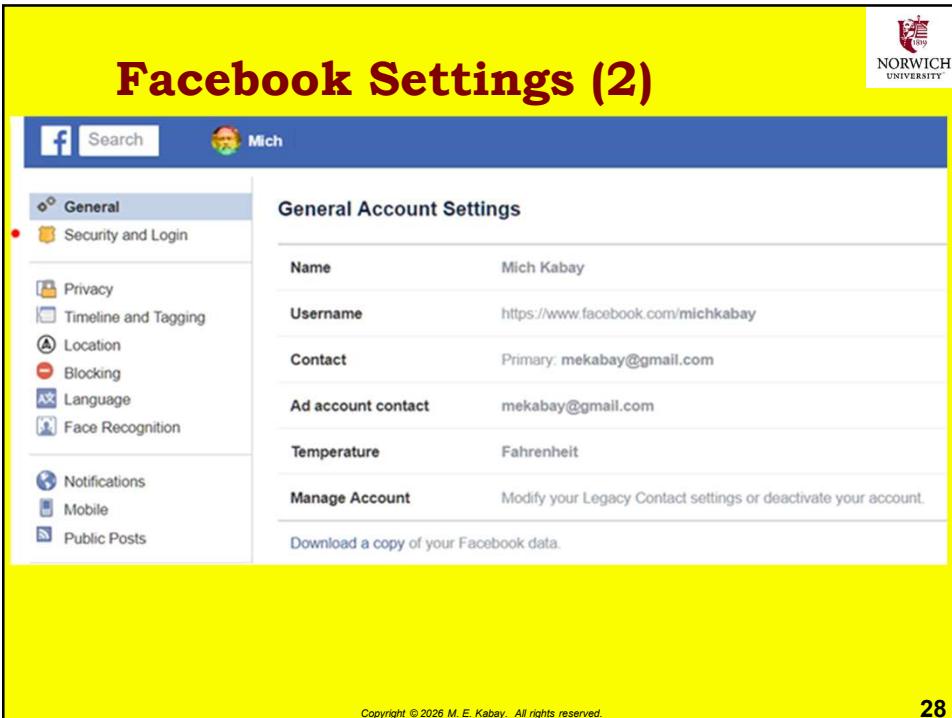
Settings

Log Out

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27

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Facebook Settings (2)

Search Mich

General

Security and Login

Privacy

Timeline and Tagging

Location

Blocking

Language

Face Recognition

Notifications

Mobile

Public Posts

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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28

28



Facebook Settings (3)

Security and Login

Where You're Logged In

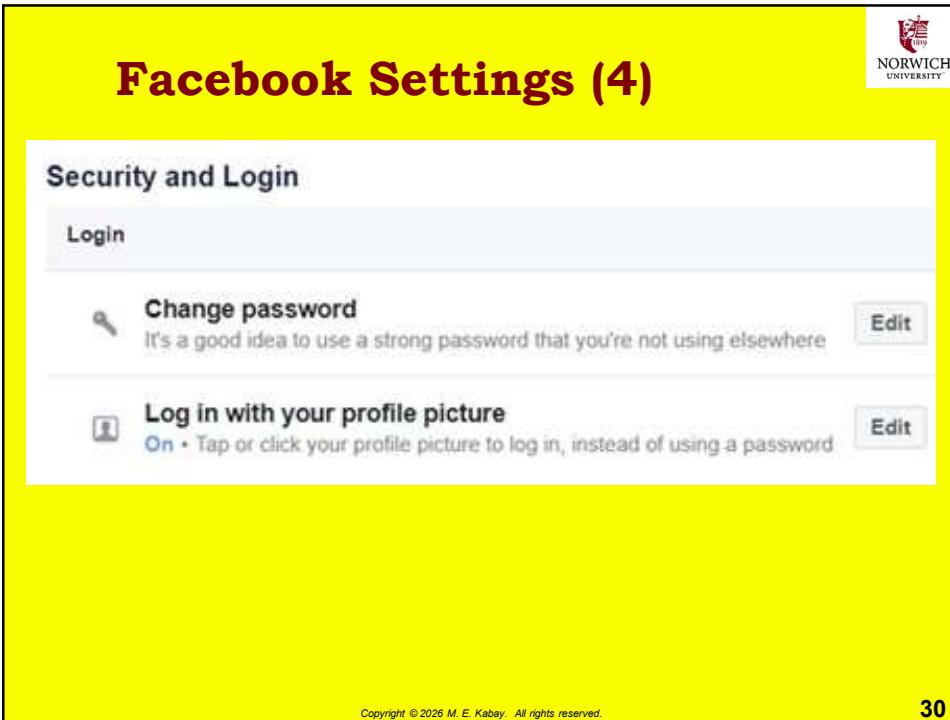
Windows PC · Townshend, VT, United States
Opera - Active now

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

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29

29



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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30

30

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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31

31

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

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32

32



Facebook Settings (7)

Advanced

Locked Encrypted notification emails

Add extra security to notification emails from Facebook (only you can decrypt these emails)

[Edit](#)

See recent emails from Facebook

See a list of emails we sent you recently, including emails about security

[View](#)

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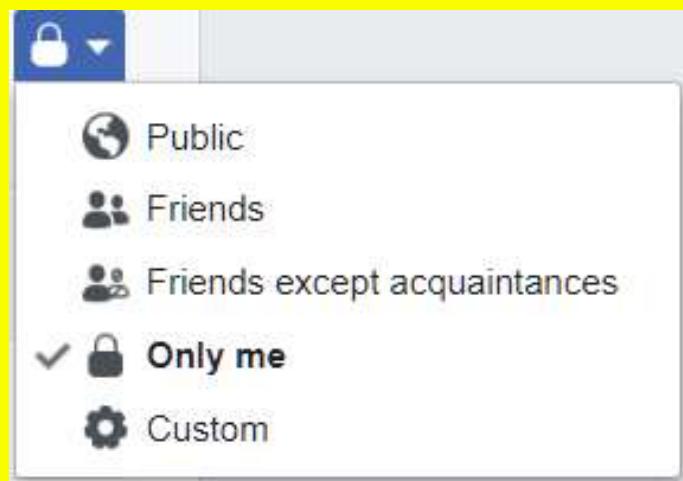
33

33

Facebook Settings (8)



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



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34

34



Facebook Settings (9)

Religious Views

Jewish Atheist

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.

Edit

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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35

35

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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36

36



37

37