

The Online Emergence of Pushback on Social Media in the United States: A Historical Discourse Analysis

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Little is known about resistance to digital media in general and to social media in particular—especially beyond the realm of individuals enacting their media preferences. This article addresses that gap through a historical discourse analysis of the emergence of discursive resistance to social media use across multiple U.S. sociocultural realms. I analyze forms of pushback that became widely visible online between 2009 and 2011 and examine indicators of their emergence. Leveraging concerns about the ubiquity and constancy of digital ICTs more generally, I map ways that resistance to social media was framed in regards to work and organizational dynamics, politics, and the military, as well as personal and relational issues—motivated by distinct yet related reasons.

Keywords: social media, digital media, nonusers, refusal, resistance, rejection, discourse analysis, historical analysis

Introduction

By the end of the first decade of the 21st century, digital media (DM) had become both ubiquitous and constant elements of many realms of life in industrially advanced countries. Many social network services (SNS) were launched in the United States in the mid-2000s, including MySpace in 2003, Facebook in 2004, and YouTube in 2005 (Curtis, 2013; Foster, 2012). By 2008, two-thirds of the online population worldwide was using social media (SM) (Nielson Company, 2009; Radwanick, 2011). In 2010, use of Facebook in the United States surpassed Google, Yahoo!, and Microsoft websites (Boulton, 2011), and by 2012, two-thirds of U.S. adults with Internet access had Facebook accounts, making Facebook the largest SNS in the United States (Rainie, Smith, & Duggan, 2013). Individuals were not the only type of SM users during this period; a large and growing number of organizations employed various kinds of SM as well, including businesses and nonprofits, interest groups, and community and political organizations (cf., Falkow, 2010; Peekhaus, 2010).

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However, employing Facebook use rates by U.S. adults as a proxy for social media use by U.S. adults in general indicates the growth of SM use may have reached its apex in 2012. Through phone surveys of American adults in 2012, Pew Internet and American Life Project researchers (Rainie et al., 2013) found that 61% of current Facebook users had voluntarily taken a break from using Facebook for a period of several weeks or more at some point in the past. Twenty percent of online adults who were not using Facebook said they previously used the site. The reasons they provided shared many of the themes articulated by current Facebook users who had taken a break in the past, such as too much of a time sink, too little privacy, and too much gossip. Most significantly for this article, the survey found that one-third of online adults in the United States were not using Facebook and of that group 92% were not interested in becoming Facebook users. Although some portion of online adults who are not using Facebook may be using other SNS, these findings suggest that pushback against social media is a significant social phenomenon.

As SM were introduced and developed during the latter half of the 2000s, they were typically heralded uncritically as the next generation of interactive digital platforms for information sharing and relationship building. Early concerns about social media tended to be primarily about kids' use (cf., Pierce, 2006; Wallace, 2006)² or the detrimental effects of social media use on romantic relationships (Gershon, 2011).

Inarguably, both individual and organizational users of SM have continued to find many benefits in these technologies, and there is no evidence to date of any large-scale movements to abstain permanently from SM, much less unplug completely. However, across many genres of online media produced for general audiences in the United States, there are now frequent messages about the need for caution (for various reasons) and "balance" in regard to the use of DM, in general, and SM, in particular, (cf., Estrada, 2013; Plot, 2012). This occurrence was predictable, since cautionary and critical arguments have been made concerning every new generation of ICTs (cf., Fischer, 1994; Kline, 2003; Mander, 1978; Marvin, 1987; Wartella & Reeves, 1985). Some analyses of the history of the Internet address concerns that were voiced publicly about these technologies as they emerged and evolved (Abbate, 1999; Turner, 2006). Accounts of the development of SM foreground the similarities and contingencies between the developmental trajectories of SM and other DM (cf., boyd & Ellison, 2007; Curtis, 2013).

Digital media use by U.S. adults has been studied extensively and a (thin) vein of research on use explores nonuse as well (cf. Hampton, 2010; Hargittai, 2007; Turkle, 2011). However, many empirical studies of DM that address nonuse in the United States tend to assume that use is desired by (or desirable for) nonusers, and frame the "digital divide" as something that should be overcome. In contrast, Katz and Rice (2002) identified a population they termed "Internet dropouts"; their study became part of a small but growing number of studies that probe former Internet users' reasons for going offline (Hargittai, 2004; Lenhart, 2003; Wyatt, 2003; Wyatt, Thomas, & Terranova, 2002).

² Impacts on youth have been central to debates about every generation of media (Wartella & Reeves, 1985).

A couple recent studies in this vein have focused on identity and class performance aspects of social “media refusal” (Portwood-Stacer, 2013) and “Internet resistance” (Woodstock, 2011). I conceptualize pushback broadly, as including discourses about reducing or avoiding media use, altering media practices, and attempting to influence media policies. There is a dearth of knowledge about pushback against DM in general, and SM in particular—especially beyond the enacting of individual media preferences. For example, organized resistance by groups and efforts to change SM platform providers’ policies remain understudied. My aim is to help fill that gap through an historical discourse analysis of the emergence of discursive pushback against SM across multiple sociocultural realms.³

Research Questions and Methods

Although the development of resistance to SM is unsurprising, the timing of—and multiple and various expressions of—emergent resistance and the particular arguments that precipitated the pushback against SM are important to understand. Therefore I aim to sketch the pushback on D/SM historically as it emerged in online inscriptions. Three overarching research questions guided this exploratory study: (1) When did cautionary and/or resistant discourses about adult SM use emerge online? (2) In which sociocultural realms did cautionary discourse about SM arise? And (3) which kinds of concerns were expressed by which kinds of influential voices in the early years of resistance to SM?

A systematic content analysis of a particular genre of online texts (such as news articles) about the topic of resistance to SM would not have enabled me to answer these questions. Rather, to build and analyze a data corpus of multiple types of texts—in order to identify multiple types of authors and discover their particular expressions of resistance—I conducted chronologically sensitive discourse analysis of heterogeneous texts published between 2006 and 2013 in a wide variety of online genres including magazine and news websites, blogs, SM industry publications, business fora, civic-oriented websites, government agency sites, and other types of online media. I constructed, organized, and analyzed this data corpus through a mix of historical research methods adapted for online historiography, including the retrospective discourse analysis of online texts (with close attention to the types of sources), the use of archived websites, and both topical and temporal reference and hyperlink tracing (Brügger, 2012; Foot & Schneider, 2010; Rogers, 2013). Evidence for the chronological aspects of my analysis included news reports, copyright dates, in-text references, and the timestamps of archival impressions of webpages.⁴ As

³ I employ boyd and Ellison’s (2007) definition of SM as a class of Web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system. (p. 210)

The primary focus of this article is resistance to SM; however, because SM is digital and because other types of DM and SM are equated in many texts, I use the phrase digital/social media (abbreviated to D/SM) as an umbrella term when it is either not possible or not necessary to specify SM.

⁴ Although archival impressions of Web pages such as those available via the Internet Archive’s Wayback Machine cannot be used to determine exactly when a Web page was produced, timestamps in the URL of

a way of marking a cultural-historical turn, this study traced and documented some of the diverse voices that were among the first to articulate online the necessity and benefits of bounding and limiting SM participation in various ways. I compiled and analyzed expressions of growing unease regarding the constancy and ubiquity of these technologies, articulations of the hidden, unintended, and/or undesirable costs of being so networked, and recommendations from a diverse array of sources for strategically reducing SM use, altering SM practices, and influencing the policies of SNS.

I found that occasional concerns about SM were articulated in a few types of online media in 2006–2008. However, during 2009–2011, a multivoiced wave of pushback emerged across multiple genres of online media, cautioning the public about the downsides of unbounded and constant use of SM. To set the context for this analysis, in the following section I briefly describe the SM milieu in the late 2000s, then explain how resistance to SM was discursively constructed during that era in regards to work and organizational dynamics, politics, and the military, as well as personal and relational issues.

The Social Media Jungle of 2010

A frequently expressed, top-level concern of many individuals and organizations in the late 2000s was the effort required to maintain profiles and manage relations across a plethora of SNS. Already in 2008, future-oriented technology thinkers pointed to the need for more robust filters on information flow, whether through SNS updates, RSS feeds, and/or tweets. In 2008, online rants were often rhetorically styled as networked-but-isolated cries in the (online) wilderness for help in “finding ways to limit the firehose of information” (Krynsky, 2008, blog), and for managing digitalia:

I need less data, not more data. I need to know what is important, and I don't have time to sift through thousands of Tweets and Friendfeed messages and blog posts and emails and IMs a day to find the five things that I really need to know. . . .

So where is the startup that is going to be my information filter? I am aware of a few companies working on this problem, but I have yet to see one that has solved it in a compelling way. Can someone please do this for me? Please? I need help. We all do. (Schonfeld, 2008, blog)

The high-profile articulation of similar concerns in *The Washington Post* late in 2010 was representative of many other contemporaneous but lower profile protests of “enough already” regarding SM, yet distinctive in its authoritative tone and in its insistence on individual responsibility: “In an onslaught of sites designed

archival impressions evidence the existence of a Web page at a particular point in time and provide a way to compare changes made to a particular Web page over time. Since 1996, the Internet Archive has conducted a broad archival sweep of the Web several times each year, so for a Web page produced in the 2000s, the likelihood of having been archived at least once within a year of its initial appearance online is quite high according to validation tests (Murphy, Hazarina Hashim, & O'Connor, 2007). Contact the author for more information on the methods employed in this study.

to aid connection, communication and cross-promotion, individual stopping points must be declared. When will *you* go 21st-century Amish?" (Hesse, 2010, para. 7)

Hesse's question was not rhetorical: The rest of her article discussed reasons why SM use requires boundaries and strategies for bounding it. Responses to the article, archived online, evidenced that her question was one that many were asking themselves in one form or another as they weighed the potential benefits of using yet another SNS against the costs—of time, energy, finances, and productivity. The timing of Hesse's article, and the large number of responses, are evidence that by the end of 2010, the array of SNS and constant barrage of updates had become jungle-like and overwhelming to even highly networked users. I argue that Hesse's article along with the texts I analyze below indicate that by 2010, public conversations about SM were enlarging from primarily why, when, and how to best use it to include more nuanced discussions of why, when, and how to bound it, suspend it, and/or retreat from it for both individual and collective aims. However, to understand this pushback, it is necessary to probe beyond such top-level concerns of individuals about the confusing, time-consuming aspects of choosing between platforms, managing profiles, and bounding use.

Looking back further, and more broadly, I present evidence that while some relatively narrow and/or isolated expressions of concern about SM were evident online in 2007–2008, the pushback against social media became widely visible between 2009 and 2011. Leveraging concerns about the ubiquity and constancy of digital ICTs more generally, resistance to SM was framed in regards to work and organizational dynamics, politics, and the military, as well as personal and relational issues—and resistance in each realm was motivated by distinct yet related reasons. The following three sections analyze discourses of resistance in each of these realms.

Pushback in Organizational and Work Realms

Pushback on SM participation within organizational and work realms was precipitated by several conflicting concerns from employers/managers and employees, (due to differences in their perspectives), and by a desire shared by employers/managers and employees to maintain focus and creativity in one's work. Within organizations whose employees had access to SM during their work hours, by the late 2000s, a common concern on the part of employers/managers was whether employees were wasting work time on nonwork activities online. According to a national survey of employed adults in 2009, about 60% of U.S. executives said they had "a right to know how employees portray themselves and their organizations in online social networks," and about one-quarter of U.S. employers had policies concerning employees' online activity (Deloitte, 2009). Fifty-one percent of survey respondents who categorized themselves in 2009 as "employees" said that an employer's restrictions would cause them to modify their behavior online.

Another common concern of managers was employees' lack of attentiveness and focus when they were texting, surfing, and otherwise digitally multitasking during work meetings. Whether in response to managers' distress about this, or employees' own sense of unease over their tendency to check out from in-person interactions in order to check-in online, business consultants began recommending "attention etiquette" as a strategy for taming the "check-in" impulse that compels many people to monitor their SM

accounts in situations when it is inappropriate to do so, including during work meetings (cf., Gleib & Belsky, 2011).

It was not only office-based managers who expressed concerns about their employees' D/SM participation during work hours and introduced policies to curb it. In an unprecedented move in September, 2009, the NBA banned basketball players, coaches, and team staff involved in the game from using cell phones, PDAs, and Twitter and Facebook for the period beginning 45 minutes before each game through postgame media interviews (Stein, 2009). In February 2011, Mississippi State University basketball coach Rick Stansbury prohibited his players from using Twitter after some posted critical comments following a loss. Stansbury's explanation of his decision was "some young men just don't understand once they put something out there for everyone to see, there is no taking it back" (Associated Press, 2011, para. 6). A few weeks later, in March 2011, pro-baseball team manager Kirk Gibson of the Arizona Diamondbacks made the news when he prohibited laptops, iPads, and other personal digital devices from being used in the team's clubhouse (Casselberry, 2011).

During 2009–2011, employers/managers had a growing number of newly introduced tools at their disposal to monitor employees' SM participation, and the feedback they provided employees on the basis of the data generated by these tools undoubtedly constrained SM use in some ways. Monitoring tools such as Tenero's Social Sentry, introduced in 2010, were designed and marketed to enable employers to collect detailed data on their employees' public SM content and activities (see Figure 1).⁵

⁵ Archival impression from March 2010, available at <http://web.archive.org/web/20100325215852/http://www.teneros.com/socialsentry>.

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Figure 1. Tenero's description of Social Sentry in 2010.

Tenero's announcement of Social Sentry included this assessment of SM problems:

Employees are spending an increasing amount of time on social networks services in the workplace. In fact, more than 70% of white collar workers have a Facebook account, with more than two thirds of them accessing Facebook during work hours. This increased activity in the workplace has caused major issues for companies. For instance . . . companies such as Domino's Pizza and British Airways have suffered major brand damage due to derogatory comments made by employees on social networks. (Teneros, 2010)

The announcement text explained that Social Sentry

provides granular, real-time tracking and can identify and monitor employee public communication happening from any location, within the corporate network or public Internet. In addition, Social Sentry offers the ability to monitor select users or the entire employee base to eliminate corporate exposure related to communication. (Teneros, 2010)

The clear aim of this class of SM monitoring services is to provide employers with actionable data on specific employees' SM participation as a way to reduce and/or otherwise control it.

Although tools like Social Sentry may have been useful for some employers, the legality of some forms of monitoring employees' online activities came under scrutiny in the United States by mid-2010 (Spencer, 2010). Attempts were made in 2012 to pass federal legislation in the United States to protect employees' SM privacy, but these efforts failed (Ballman, 2013). However, acting on concerns about employers' demands for access to employees' SM account passwords and content that were initially raised in 2010 and 2011, eight U.S. states passed laws in 2012–2013 protecting employees' SM privacy (Ackley, 2013; Ballman, 2013; Valdes, 2013).

Beyond the questionable legality of monitoring employees' SM participation, employers wrestled with another potential downside to employee monitoring: the risk of demoralizing productive employees. By the late 2000s, it was fairly well-established in management literature that workplace surveillance could be counterproductive (cf., Fraser & Dutta, 2008). In the words of a management consultant, "Having someone look over their shoulder or police them drives creative people crazy and demotivates them" (Warner, 2009, p. 4). Thus, employers/managers seeking to optimize their employees' performance in relation to SM had to find ways to balance any forms of monitoring and control of their employees with trust, flexibility, and creativity-boosting latitude.

In order to help workers improve their focus, productivity, and performance by reducing the churn of digital multitasking, a new crop of software tools was created in the late 2000s to help workers increase their attention span and stay on (one) task. For example, RescueTime, an automated time tracking and management Web service, beta-launched in 2007⁶ and was marketed as a service for both workers and managers (see Figure 2).⁷

⁶ Descriptions of RescueTime from 2007 are available at <http://www.techmalaya.com/2007/12/05/record-your-computer-usage-rescuetime> and <http://web.archive.org/web/20070329061240/http://www.rescuetime.com>.

⁷ Archival impression from March 2007 are available at <http://web.archive.org/web/20070329061240/http://www.rescuetime.com>.

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Figure 2. RescueTime homepage in 2007.

Since its launch, RescueTime has provided a "Tour for Individuals" in which the product is billed as a tool "for knowledge workers who want to be more efficient and productive," along with a "Tour for Managers" that promises RescueTime will "provide you with powerful business intelligence and help your team get more productive."⁸

The examples so far in this section all illustrate strategies that companies, managers, and/or workers developed in the late 2000s to curb or curtail D/SM use during work. In the organizational/work realm, the arguments articulated against D/SM were framed in terms of creating times and places in which workers could be either online-but-highly-focused, or remain offline during work hours. However, some decided during this period to opt out of certain D/SM entirely to improve the quality of their work. For example, a Christian ministry leader, Mark Oestreicher, had by the late 2000s more than 4,000 Facebook friends, 1,500 Twitter followers, and 2,000 daily readers of his blog (Ross Jr., 2009). In 2009, he deactivated his profiles and "unplugged" from SM in order to regain a sense of centeredness at work as well as to invest in face-to-face relationships. Interviewed for a Religion News Service article a few months later, Oestreicher commented that he was surprised by how little withdrawal he experienced: "I think that

⁸ Descriptions of RescueTime from 2008, available at <http://web.archive.org/web/20080211215717/http://www.rescuetime.com/forbiz>, http://web.archive.org/web/20080211215723/http://www.rescuetime.com/product_tour, and <http://www.rescuetime.com>.

was primarily because I so immediately saw a return of four things I was hoping for: time, presence, focus and creativity," he said. "My family could tell the difference, and my co-workers also. It was rather astounding, actually" (quoted in Ross, Jr., 2009, blog). Oestreicher's decision to not just reduce SM use but opt out entirely for an extended period, absent any managerial pressure, was newsworthy both because it was an uncommon choice for U.S. adults in general in 2009 and because it was countercultural in some religious camps. As Oestricher's interviewer noted, "In an age when many religious leaders embrace the latest technology and even 'tweet' from the pulpit, some—like Oestreicher—are reassessing the potential negative impact of online overload (Ross Jr., 2009, blog).

Pushback in Political and Military Realms

Unsurprisingly, the view of D/SM articulated publicly by political and military leaders in the late 2000s was quite cautionary. In public statements by high-profile leaders in those realms, D/SM were framed consistently as political and security risks to be mitigated via strict protocols if not outright abstinence. For example, following Barack Obama's election to the U.S. presidency in late 2008, his campaign's use of SM was touted as a factor in his victory (Carr, 2008). But the question of whether Obama would continue to send personal e-mails was debated by the public as well as by his political advisors (Heary, 2009; McCullagh, 2009). His predecessor, George W. Bush, had stopped using e-mail after his inauguration in 2001 in order to preclude any risk of digital eavesdropping and in light of public records laws such as the Freedom of Information Act (Berke, 2001). Obama won his battle to continue to use e-mail (via a highly secure BlackBerry), but the question provoked much online discussion about the lack of security of all digital communication (Heary, 2009).

Within the U.S. military in the late 2000s, SM evoked several concerns. One was that U.S. military personnel (MP) on the ground in conflict zones would inadvertently risk the safety of themselves and/or co-combatants by using SM carelessly. For example, geotagging and other forms of location-based social networking became causes for alarm within the military in the late 2000s because the embedded geodata in photos taken on MP's and civilians' smartphones and uploaded to the Web could result in the unintended and dangerous broadcasting of sensitive information such as troop locations. Military leaders worried that the aggregation of geodata from multiple photos in, say, a Flickr stream, could reveal much more than any individual Flickr user intended or even imagined possible.

To counter this risk while allowing some personal and agency-promotional uses of SM, the U.S. Department of Defense issued a "directive-type memorandum" in February 2010 establishing their policy on SM use by MP and assigning "responsibilities for responsible and effective use of Internet-based capabilities, including social networking services." (U.S. Deputy Secretary of Defense, 2010, para. 1). Following the release of that memorandum, the U.S. Army and Navy began posting training modules on the Web with titles such as "OPSEC [Operations Security] and Safe Social Networking" and "Geotags and Location-Based Social Networking: Applications, OPSEC, and Protecting Unit Safety" that addressed the security risks of textual references to the location of MP, geotagging, and use of other location-based

social networking features (U.S. Army, 2011, n.d.; U.S. Naval OPSEC Support Team, 2010). For example, see Figure 3.⁹



Figure 3. Slide from the U.S. Navy's OPSEC and social networking 2010 training module.

Key statements from these training modules include:

"The increased popularity of these [location-based social networking] applications is changing the way we as a digital culture view security and privacy on an individual level. These changes in perception are also creating OPSEC concerns on an Army level,"¹⁰ and "Deployed Soldiers, and Soldiers conducting operations in classified areas, should not use location-based social networking services. These services will bring the enemy right to the Army's doorstep."¹¹

⁹ Retrieved from www.cpf.navy.mil/staff/n2n39/.../opsec_and_social_networking.ppt; URL incomplete by producer's design.

¹⁰ Retrieved from <http://www.slideshare.net/USNavySocialMedia/geotags-and-location-based-social-networking>, slide 9.

¹¹ Retrieved from <http://www.slideshare.net/USNavySocialMedia/geotags-and-location-based-social-networking>, slide 15.

These statements and others urge (and sometimes command) MP to disable geotagging and GPS on their smartphones. Although military concerns over geotagging and location-based social networking are acute for obvious reasons, the same concerns were echoed by U.S. civilians in blog posts and online articles beginning in 2010. By 2011, instructions for disabling GPS and geotagging features in SM were widely available online, such as "How to Avoid the Potential Risks of GeoTagging" on the popular platform wikiHow.com (Multiple authors, 2011).

Militaries around the world became increasingly concerned about information warfare via SM during the late 2000s (van Nierkerk & Maharaj, 2013). In the United States, military leaders and civilian supporters were especially concerned about "enemy combatants" use of SM in general and YouTube in particular to glorify U.S. casualties in Iraq and Afghanistan and influence public opinion internationally against the U.S. military. Brittany Fiore-Silfvast (2012) introduced the concept of "user-generated warfare" to characterize the ways that content-sharing sites such as YouTube "emerged as venues for competing wartime information and images" (p. 1) among military, insurgent, and civilian groups. Fiore-Silfvast argues that multiple kinds of warring actors engage in battle by exploiting "generative technologies" as weapons via SNS, leveraging the capacity of users to influence the technological, informational, and organizational assets and resources of an adversary. Deconstructing a case of user-generated warfare called "Operation YouTube Smackdown" (OYS), she analyzed how "a large, decentralized civilian user group [self-organized primarily by conservative bloggers since 2007] . . . attempts to collectively regulate 'Internet terrorists' and terrorist supporters by regulating information and destroying their capacity to communicate and mobilize" (p. 4) on YouTube. For example, see Figure 4.¹²

¹²See <http://www.webcitation.org/query?url=http%3A%2F%2Fmuninn-quottheraven.blogspot.com%2F2010%2F01%2Fwelcome-to-operation-youtube-smackdown.html&date=2010-05-28>.



Figure 4. Screenshot of Operation YouTube Smackdown blog tools.

Supporters of OYS accused the YouTube corporation of pandering to terrorist through its terms of service, lax monitoring, and slow response to flagged content. Fiore-Silfvast (2012) quotes an OYS leader's explanation of OYS's stance toward the YouTube corporation:

We object to YouTube making a profit hosting videos celebrating the death of Coalition Soldiers (and pretty much everyone else) while washing their own hands of any responsibility. We're out to smack those videos down, and maybe shake a little sense into YouTube in the process.¹³

This statement exemplifies a significant form of pushback on the content-neutral policy adhered to by not only YouTube but most SM companies throughout the 2000s. OYS pressured the U.S.-based YouTube corporation to revise its terms of service in light of the political and paramilitary battles that were being organized and enacted via its platform, with some success (Fiore-Silfvast, 2012). As of January 2012, the

¹³ See <http://www.webcitation.org/query?url=http%3A%2F%2Fmuninn-quoteraven.blogspot.com%2F2010%2F01%2Fwelcome-to-operation-youtube-smackdown.html&date=2010-05-28>, quoted in Fiore-Silfvast (2012, p. 10).

SmackDown Corps' website claimed it had succeeded in getting more than 55,000 "terrorist supporting videos" removed from YouTube.¹⁴

In 2010, the disclosure of U.S. military videos and thousands of classified U.S. diplomatic cables by Julian Assange and the WikiLeaks antisecrecy group hampered government/military attempts to control potentially sensitive digital communication. Suspected of passing classified documents to the WikiLeaks group, U.S. Army private Bradley Manning was charged in 2011 with multiple crimes.¹⁵ The fact that *Wired* magazine published more than 30 articles about Manning in 2010 and 2011 alone indicates the significance of Manning's case to the magazine's editors and its tech-oriented readership.¹⁶ Criticisms and U.S. actions against Manning, Assange, and the WikiLeaks group were discursively framed in *Wired* and other similar publications as worrisome incursions into DM, and in particular on one of the core tenets of hacker ethics—that "information wants to be free" (Stewart Brand, cited in Clarke, 2000).

Since WikiLeaks' disclosures took place via DM, efforts by political and military leaders—around the world as well as in the United States—to prevent further informational compromise included expunging digital content and curbing the use of DM for particular kinds of communication. For instance, Carne Ross, a former British diplomat, characterized the disclosure of thousands of classified U.S. diplomatic cables by Julian Assange as "an event of historic, if not seismic, significance" and summed up the implications of WikiLeaks for all governments in this way: "If a government as professional, technically sophisticated, and well-protected as the U.S. can suffer a breach of this magnitude, no government is safe" (Ross, 2010, e-zine). Ross argued that WikiLeaks would have profound and long-lasting consequences for corporations and individuals:

And here is the obvious implication, which reaches beyond governments to companies and even to individuals. Thanks to WikiLeaks, you can now expect that day to come when your most private and candid communications will appear for all to peruse. In preparation for that moment, you better make sure that your private dealings match your public declarations, if not perfectly then at least pretty close.

For companies and individuals as much as for governments, deeds will henceforward have to match words. If they don't, you can assume you will suffer a WikiLeaks crisis of your own, for it is from that discrepancy (or hypocrisy, read another way) that WikiLeaks finds its energy—and other leakers will in the future. Like it or not, what has happened this week is of profound importance, and its lessons are profoundly important too. (Ross, 2010, e-zine)

¹⁴ See <http://web.archive.org/web/20120118114616/http://smackdowncorps.com>.

¹⁵ See <http://www.wired.com/threatlevel/2011/03/bradley-manning-more-charge>.

¹⁶ See

<http://www.wired.com/search?query=manning&cx=010858178366868418930%3Afk33zkiunj8&cof=FORID%3A9&ie=UTF-8>.

Another implication of WikiLeaks acknowledged by political leaders in 2010 was that in order to avoid future embarrassment, less would be communicated—both face-to-face and digitally, by anyone concerned about the possibility of future disclosure and thus embarrassment. That is, since WikiLeaks reduced expectations of privacy to the level enabled by postcards, some leaders indicated that diplomatic communication would be reduced overall, and complex and sensitive messages would be expressed less often, particularly via digital means. The following comment by Ehud Barak, defense minister of Israel, represents this perspective: “Diplomacy will look different today. People, diplomats in every corner of the world, will be much more cautious when they speak, and not just with the Americans . . . it will shake the diplomatic conversation” (Haaretz Service, 2010, para. 2). Although Mr. Barak seemed to be referring to in-person conversations, his caution obviously applied to digitally mediated communication as well.

In sum, the pushback in 2009–2011 on D/SM in the political and military realms was unsurprising in light of the WikiLeaks disclosures, the use of YouTube by enemies of the United States, and the security risks to U.S. MP. Online texts indicate that there was also growing unease with several aspects of SM in the personal and relational realms as well during those years, as explained in the next section.

Pushback in Personal and Relational Realms

Although the majority of discourses about the use of SM for personal and relational purposes was primarily if not solely positive in the late 2000s, resistance had emerged as well. By 2011, the wave of “Facebook resisters” had grown large enough to warrant a lengthy article in *The New York Times* (Wortham, 2011), and “quitting Facebook” was trumpeted as “cool” (Clark Estes, 2011). Five distinct desires were consistently articulated across diverse genres of online texts as primary reasons for pushback against SM in the personal and relational realms, through abstinence, time-bounding, or other modes of reducing use. The five desires were (1) the desire for downtime, (2) the desire to connect more in face-to-face relationships, (3) the desire to create space for one’s kids to enjoy traditional childhood activities, (4) the desire to reduce time spent on attention-seeking online noise, and (5) the desire to retain (or restore) a sense of privacy. These five reasons corroborate the findings of Portwood-Stacer (2013) and Woodstock (2011), and extend them. I elaborate and illustrate each of these briefly below, and discuss ways some SM pushback discourses construct concerns about marketing spam and privacy as personal and relational issues.

The forming of the organization Reboot in early 2010 illustrates how the desire for downtime drove pushback on D/SM. Reboot, started by a group of Jewish artists to “reboot” the cultures, traditions, and rituals of Jewish life, launched a website called the Sabbath Manifesto, centered on 10 principles for carving out a weekly day of rest (see Figure 5).¹⁷

¹⁷ See archival impression from 2010 at <http://web.archive.org/web/20100305170845/http://www.sabbathmanifesto.org>. See also <http://www.sabbathmanifesto.org/about>.

Sabbath Manifesto
Slowing down lives since 2010

A Provisional Guide for Observing a Weekly Day of Rest

What is this?
The Sabbath Manifesto is a creative project designed to slow down lives in an increasingly hectic world.
We've created 10 core principles completely open for your unique interpretation. We welcome you to join us as we carve a weekly timeout into our lives.
To find out more [click here](#)

The Ten Principles

01. *Avoid technology.* 5 Comments
02. *Connect with loved ones.* 3 Comments
03. *Nurture your health.* 2 Comments
04. *Get outside.* 1 Comment
05. *Avoid commerce.* 3 Comments
06. *Light candles.* Start Dialogue
07. *Drink wine.* 4 Comments

Contact | Blog

Figure 5. Sabbath Manifesto's homepage in March 2010.

In some Jewish traditions, Sabbath-keeping has long included avoidance of machines, so it is unsurprising that Principle #1 was avoid technology. In March 2010, Reboot inaugurated an annual 24-hour technology abstinence day, the National Day of Unplugging, which was covered in the national news media (cf., Considine, 2010; Miller, 2010). The newly declared holiday was celebrated for a second time in March 2011, with hearty (and occasionally ironic) online endorsements from the Huffington Post, PCWorld, and other high-profile DM outlets (cf., Golijan, 2011). A *PCWorld GeekTech* writer urged readers to participate, observing that “even geeks need to disconnect now and then,” and assuring them

As much as we love it when you read *GeekTech* every day of the week [...] we won't hold it against you if you decide to avoid the blog this weekend. It's OK; we understand, and we'll still be here when you come back on the grid.¹⁸

The *Huffington Post's* description of the holiday highlighted the tools that Reboot developed to assist holiday observers, including a smartphone app that announces a user's temporary logout to their Facebook and Twitter communities, a cell phone “sleeping bag” that helps block the glow of a phone's screen (see Figure 6),¹⁹ and a “phonekerchief” that Reboot explains enables one to give dinner partners

¹⁸ See http://www.pcworld.com/article/221127/national_day_of_unplugging_is_this_weekend.html.

¹⁹ The earliest archival impression of this image is from April, 2010, available at http://web.archive.org/web/20100410161528/http://www.sabbathmanifesto.org/sleeping_bags.

undivided attention by using the service-blocking hanky made with silver fibers that block incoming calls/texts. The inscription on the hanky is "My phone is off for you."²⁰



Figure 6. Cell phone sleeping bag designed by Jessica Tully.

In 2010, another group inaugurated a similar project, called the BigTurnoff, with the tagline "Twenty-four hours offline. Together."²¹ The website promoted a 24-hour DM fast on January 1, 2011. Maintained through the first few months of 2012, the site's resources included about a half-dozen interviews with a variety of people examining why and how they had chosen to abstain periodically from DM and discussing their concerns about SM.²² The website claimed that 500 people reported participating in the first annual "big turnoff" event on January 1, 2011, and they planned a similar promotion for January 1, 2012.

One of the individuals interviewed on the BigTurnoff articulated the second desire that motivates some people to opt out of SM: the desire for in-depth relationships. He explained,

²⁰ See http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/03/04/national-day-of-unplugging_n_831176.html, http://www.sabbathmanifesto.org/sleeping_bags; see earliest archival impression from March 2010: http://web.archive.org/web/20100410161528/http://www.sabbathmanifesto.org/sleeping_bags.

²¹ http://web.archive.org/web/20100715000000*/http://bigturnoff.org.

²² Archival impressions of the Big Turnoff homepage from 2012 evidence that sometime between January and July 2012, the group let the domain lapse; see <http://web.archive.org/web/20120106050250/http://bigturnoff.org>, and http://web.archive.org/web/20120715000000*/http://bigturnoff.org.

I've been really beginning to wrestle with this over the last six months, this idea that I have a lot of friends, even person-to-person friends, but I feel like there's a deeper part of me that lacks just real relational community. It's like there are all these people that I'm connected with, but who do I call on when I really struggle? I would find myself extremely lonely at times, and I would wonder, "How is that possible? Look at all this interaction I have with people." I would just find that it's not just an extreme in our culture, but that it was also happening with me.²³

As a result of these experiences, he decided to deactivate his Facebook account in order to invest more time in face-to-face interactions.

Those experiences are central themes in Sherry Turkle's (2011) book *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other*. One online discussion of that book in early 2011 included the following exchange, illuminating how deeply concerned many parents were for their kids—the third theme in resistance to D/SM in the personal realm:

Reader #1: Dr. Turkle brings us wonderful data and observations about how we are adjusting to the chaotic flood of technology on our minds (and brains). So how do parents utilize the emerging concepts and facts to harness these forces for the good of their kids?

Reader #2: I just read a post by a parent asking the same question (Children Growing up in the Digital Age: A Parent's View at <http://ow.ly/3EpFY>). I'm not sure parents have good sources of information on the subject, and there's clearly a very real need.²⁴

One of the tools discussed above in relation to businesses and knowledge workers, RescueTime, has also been marketed as an Internet use/time management tool for families since 2010 (see Figure 7).²⁵ RescueTime's "Tour for Families" explains:

RescueTime is a web-based time tracking and management tool that brings powerful business intelligence tools into your home to help your school-aged family members get more done and be more productive. Learn how you and your family spend time on the computer. See which websites your family members or children are visiting and spending the most time on. Set goals and budgets for spending time online.²⁶

²³ See <http://web.archive.org/web/20110517103845/http://bigturnoff.org/main/?p=355>.

²⁴ See http://www.amazon.com/manage-organize-media-consumption-homes/forum/Fx1J0SBW5C5KGDM/Tx336M4SQXTIWP/1/ref=cm_cd_dp_ef_tft_tp?_encoding=UTF8&asin=0465010210&store=books.

²⁵ See http://web.archive.org/web/20100823224431/http://www.rescuetime.com/tour_family.

²⁶ See http://web.archive.org/web/20100823224431/http://www.rescuetime.com/tour_family and http://www.rescuetime.com/tour_family.

In this framing, children's online activities don't need to be prohibited, just monitored and discussed.

sign in with
OR

Product Tour for Families

RescueTime is a web-based time tracking and management tool that brings powerful business intelligence tools into your home to help your school-aged family members get more done and be more productive.

Learn how you and your family spend time on the computer. See which websites your family members or children are visiting and spending the most time on. Set goals and budgets for spending time online.

The best way to get a sense of how it works for you or your family is to [sign up for a free trial](#). You'll be up and running in a minute or two. Not yet ready to give it a try? Scroll down for some feature screenshots.

Features

Time Tracking (with no data entry!)

RescueTime sits in the background and measures which application, web site or (optionally) document is actively being used. What and when you track time is up to you. You can set up automated scheduling, selectively delete tracked data, or allow your family to control their own schedules/data.

[Start free trial](#)

In this screenshot, time would log for youtube.com. No time will log for other tabs or the HW Outline window unless they are in focus.

Figure 7. Screenshot of RescueTime's Tour for Families.

However, while some parents in the late 2000s were seeking guidance on raising their kids as digital natives, others were taking more radical steps to keep their kids offline. Notably, many Silicon Valley technologists/parents were preventing, delaying, and/or curbing their own kids' use of DM, and sending their kids to tech-free Waldorf schools (Fost, 2010). The concerns these parents expressed about kids' involvement with online activities went beyond the risk of compromised privacy or exposure to inappropriate content. They worried "about the sheer amount of time kids spend plugged in: the mental energies dissipated, the social opportunities missed, the books not read" (Fost, 2010, para. 7).

The fourth desire driving SM pushback is the desire to reduce the noise-to-signal ratio. Over 80% of U.S. businesses used SM for marketing in 2010 (Falkow, 2010). In addition to posting advertisements on SNS, marketers aimed to leverage SM to burnish their client companies' image and boost their popularity by sponsoring contests, giveaways, and incentives for satisfied customers to promote them. But all that marketing activity on SNS had become repelling to some.

To illustrate, a Web developer/blogger explained that social marketing

gets on my nerves because it's fake. It's a bunch of impostors crashing our party, trying to turn a buck. Think of it like the friend or family member at a social gathering who's trying to push a product on anyone he can corner. It's out of context and it certainly isn't welcome. (Pehlivanian, 2010, blog)

He characterized viral marketing similarly:

I also hate "viral marketing" because it too is fake. You don't walk into a room and say, "hey guys, you have to hear this joke, it's the best joke you've ever heard! It's so awesome you're going to tell all your friends about it, and they're going to tell their friends, until my whole target demo . . . err . . . everyone hears it!" If you've ever found yourself in that awkward situation you'll know that the joke usually sucks. (Pehlivanian, 2010, blog)

Social marketing spam was one reason some people deactivated their Facebook accounts during 2009–2011. For example, one Facebook dropout wrote about SM on the Big Turnoff blog:

There's just so much junk. Just a flood of stuff. Not to mention the important stuff, but people just flood it with crap. And then I flood it with crap too. Part of is that you have to comb through ninety percent fluff to get to that ten percent of good stuff and it becomes really hard to do. So that actually became really frustrating. Facebook decides what feeds you get so when you want to get the really important stuff you have to really work to do it. . . . It was a simple tool, but now that there are half a billion people on it it's really not that simple anymore.²⁷

Marketing experts responded to the pushback by recommending less intrusive and more nuanced SM marketing strategies, advising clients that less could be more via Facebook (cf. Yared, 2011).

Still, SM scams abounded in the late 2000s, relying on so-called "stalker offers," free games, free access to porn, and appeals for money from fraudulent accounts. A March 2011 survey by BitDefender, a leading Internet security company, indicated that many SM users were easy prey for scams, via appeals to users' voyeuristic or altruistic instincts (*Bulldog Reporter*, 2011). The same report noted that "as people concentrate more personal information in social networking profiles, scams become more damaging, especially as social profiles are increasingly integrated with mobile devices that carry still more personal and financial [data]" (*Bulldog Reporter*, 2011, blog).

In February 2011, Connecticut's Attorney General George Jepsen asked Facebook to provide documentation of "the number of complaints it had received in the last 18 months about fraudulent or hacked accounts, policies for responding to such complaints and how long it took the company to do so"

²⁷ See <http://web.archive.org/web/20110517103845/http://bigturnoff.org/main/?p=355>.

(Jarzemsky, 2011). The Attorney General's request was most likely prompted by the fact that a Connecticut legislator had recently had her identity misused on Facebook in a money solicitation scam. This request by Jepsen was intended to increase the legal responsibility of SNS companies for scams based on fraudulent accounts. However, it also reveals the intertwined problems of the high noise-to-signal ratio in SM caused in part by scams, and some of the ways that personal identity and privacy are compromised. Rather than attempting to dodge the request, Facebook responded rapidly and substantively, according to a press release from the Attorney General's office several months later noting that Facebook had made it "easier for users of its SM website to report imposter profiles" (Jepsen, 2011, para. 1).

Concerns over the loss of privacy increased with SM participation. "Americans are more worried about their privacy being violated online than they are about terrorist attacks, losing their jobs or bankruptcy" (Hickey, 2011, para. 1), according to a 2011 survey sponsored by the Web browser-maker Opera Software. Despite a decade of advocacy by groups such as the Electronic Privacy Information Center,²⁸ the response from the U.S. government was still slow, weak, and largely ineffective from the perspective of privacy advocates. In December 2010, the U.S. Federal Trade Commission proposed a "Do Not Track" (online) tool parallel to its "Do Not Call" registry (Federal Trade Commission, 2010), but the mechanisms for implementing and enforcing such a tool were left unspecified.

The private sector capitalized on individuals' desire to protect or regain their online privacy in the late 2000s and offered a variety of services oriented toward online privacy and/or personal reputation. For instance, the MyPrivacy service offered by Reputation.com promised to "find and remove your personal information from websites that sell it"; several competitors offered similar services.²⁹ (See Figure 8.)³⁰

For those who preferred to hunt down and recapture their personal information themselves, lengthy tutorials with titles like "How to Remove Your Personal Information from Google and Internet" were available from many websites.³¹

²⁸ See <http://epic.org>, archived frequently by the Internet Archive since 1996. For archival impressions of the EPIC site from 2010, see http://web.archive.org/web/2010*/http://epic.org.

²⁹ See <http://web.archive.org/web/20111021152433/https://www.reputation.com/myprivacy>; see also ClaimID, available since 2006, for example, <http://web.archive.org/web/20061025134115/http://claimid.com/>, and Integrity Defender launched in 2009, for example <http://web.archive.org/web/20091129092554/http://www.integritydefender.com>.

³⁰ Archival impression from <http://web.archive.org/web/20110912013841/http://www.reputation.com/products>.

³¹ Compare <http://web.archive.org/web/20080328005114/http://www.squidoo.com/personalinformation> (no mention of privacy risk via social networking sites) with <http://web.archive.org/web/20090109080332/http://www.squidoo.com/personalInformation>.

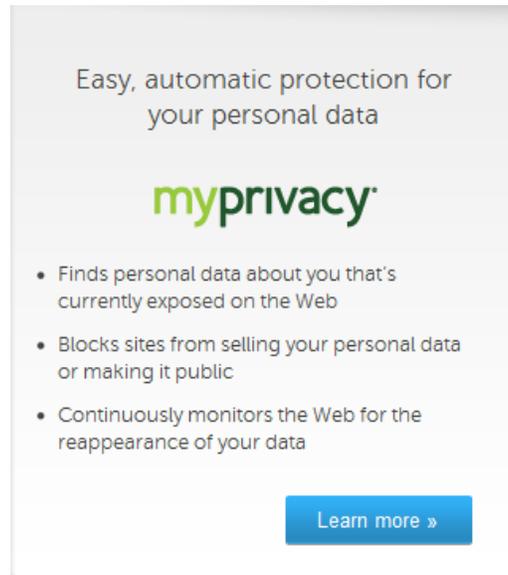


Figure 8. Overview of MyPrivacy in 2011.

Many individuals bemoaned the complexity of privacy settings on SM in the late 2000s and the lack of nuanced settings to allow users to ensure that only particular people see particular content/updates. The default setting for Facebook and several other SNS automatically opted users into new info-sharing (i.e., privacy-breaching) features. Some SM users wondered (in blog posts and online discussions) what it would take for the default mode to become a volitional opt-in.

Across the five desires motivated expressions of resistance to SM in the personal and relational realms, pushback discourses advocated for increased selectivity on the part of users, campaigns against privacy incursions by SNS, bounding of SM use, and other changes in SM practices. As a SM consultant advised in 2009:

Don't say yes to every SM related invitation. Look for value. If you don't value your own time, how will others? I know that much of this may seem anti-social but if you've been deep in the trenches for a while, you have some idea where you can make cuts. Make 2010 the year you work smarter. And stop trying to keep up with the geeks. (Connor, 2009, e-zine)

The examples presented in this section evidence that critical reflection on the implications of SM participation in personal/relational realms was widespread in 2009–2011, motivated by multiple desires.

Conclusion

In summary, 2009–2011 was heralded as the period during which texting and posting on SM sites replaced talking (Jayson, 2010). This analysis indicates that it should also be understood as the period during which a broad-based pushback on D/SM emerged in the United States. This historical discourse analysis of heterogeneous online texts evidences that a diverse array of influential voices—including cultural opinion leaders, sports' coaches, business leaders, workers' advocates, military officials, technologists, and parenting experts—articulated cautions against the indiscriminate use of D/SM during this period. The inauguration of the National Day of Unplugging in 2010, and the numerous news accounts during these years about individuals choosing to limit or cease their use of D/SM, are further evidence of the emergence of a wave of resistance.

This research is limited by its reliance on online texts. Inclusion of print and broadcast media materials produced during 2009–2011 would likely corroborate the findings of this analysis, but such an analysis may surface other discourses as well. Although general patterns of D/SM use and nonuse were cited, it was beyond the scope of this study to correlate detailed use data with discourse data. Future research in this vein could employ systematic content analysis of particular genres of texts, and/or a larger-scale historical analysis. In addition, analyzing the similarities and contingencies between discourses of pushback on social media and on earlier generations of media would be enlightening. In conclusion, discussions of the downsides of SM became widespread in 2009–2011, in reference to organizational, work, political, military, personal, and relational realms. I have sketched what can be characterized as widespread calls from cultural influencers across a diverse array of sectors for curbing SM participation, altering SM practices, and influencing the policies of SNS. Resistance to the culturally hegemonic idealization of ubiquity and constancy in SM was articulated in terms of desires for partial or total, periodic, or long-term unplugging. Findings from this study suggest that contemporary discourses about SM have been shaped by the cautionary arguments that emerged online in 2009–2011; this is a topic for future research.

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