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Social Media Users' Perceptions of Roles and Responsibilities

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Given how much the behavior of social media users influences the content displayed to other users—directly, through the content they post, and indirectly, through the content they click, watch, like, or comment on—assessing the attitudes shaping user behavior are essential to understanding and ultimately positively affecting content on social media sites. The purpose of this study was to understand how respondents perceive the role of social media user and the associated responsibilities. An online survey (n=395) asked users of several popular social media platforms how they view their role and that of other users, and who they say is currently responsible for and who should be responsible for various aspects of content on social media sites. Results of the survey indicate that a majority view social media companies or journalists as responsible for keeping users informed, maintaining civility on social media sites, and other obligations. The only area where the majority said users bear responsibility was to report harmful content. The survey results reveal how users see themselves as having little responsibility for the content on social media sites and expect social media companies and journalists to provide oversight.

Keywords: social media, user behavior, roles, role theory, ethics

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Social media sites provide users opportunities to connect with each other, create and share content, and access and interact with content created by other users. The sites provide this service for no upfront cost, selling users' attention and data to advertisers to generate enormous revenue (Taplin, 2017; Leskin, 2020; Vanian, 2024). Creating an account and sharing and interacting with content on social media platforms is so easy that most users need little to no training or education before joining and beginning to produce and consume content (Roberts, 2019). The barriers to publishing thoughts, opinions, and creative work in a public forum have been reduced in terms of cost, technical skills, and access to tools, such that nearly half the world's population has an account on at least one social media site. Users can record videos on their smartphone and post them to YouTube or TikTok in seconds and potentially

generate millions of views—and in some cases, a corresponding number of advertising dollars.

The most popular social media sites in the United States—YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok—have millions of daily posts and visitors (Gottfried, 2024). Content that users see on these sites is created by a mix of professional accounts, amateurs, and bots, but all social media sites depend on users not only to create much of the content, but also to filter, organize, and prioritize information indirectly through their interactions with content. Social media users determine the content that will be displayed to others by viewing, sharing, liking, commenting on, or reposting content. They have a great deal of influence over which information receives the most attention online, whether they exert that influence overtly by posting, liking, sharing, or commenting on content, or more covertly, through behaviors such as clicking or reading, that may be used by algorithms to determine which content to display in more user feeds (DeVito, 2017).

However, the users who are responsible for the creation, dissemination, and prioritization or filtering of content are given very little sense of that role when they join and begin using social media sites. There are two sources of information about their role on social media sites: the Terms of Use and Privacy Policies written in legalistic terms meant to limit the liability of the sites and the companies that own them, and the implicit messages conveyed through the platforms themselves, which give users a sense that participation is easy, anyone can do it, and no special training or education is required (Roberts, 2019). Sites do not explain to users the role they play in shaping content seen by other users, nor are they imbued with any sense of responsibility to inform or productively direct the attention of other users. The algorithms used to select content are considered intellectual property and are opaque to users (Pasquale, 2015; DeVito, 2017).

This paper reports the results of a survey that asked users (n=395) of several of the most popular social media platforms who should be responsible for the quality of content on social media, and how they viewed their own role and that of other users. The survey posed a series of questions about whom they consider responsible for the content and civility on social media sites, and whom they think should take responsibility for those things. To contextualize the survey and its results, this paper first discusses social media users, their roles, and ethical norms guiding behavior, as well as expectations explicitly

articulated in the Terms of Use and User Agreements that users ostensibly agree to. Next, it explores role theory as a framework for examining user participation. Then, it describes the structure of the survey of social media users about roles and responsibilities for content on social media sites. Finally, the results of the survey are reported and analyzed, considering how users' understanding of their roles and responsibilities might shape their behavior, and the ethical implications.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Social Media Users and User Behavior

Social media is a broad term for sites that allow users to engage or connect with other users, including sites for sharing user-generated content (UGC), such as YouTube, as well as things like movie or book reviews, as on Rotten Tomatoes or Goodreads. As boyd and Ellison (2008) pointed out in the early days of social media, "The nature and nomenclature of these connections may vary from site to site" (p. 211), complicating the definition and categorization of the different kinds of social media sites. Social Networking Sites (SNSs) are the category of social media that Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) defined as "applications that enable users to connect by creating personal information profiles, inviting friends and colleagues to have access to those profiles, and sending e-mails and instant messages between each other" (p. 63).

The first SNSs were founded in the early 2000s—Friendster in 2002, MySpace in 2003, and Facebook in 2004. Over the next 20 years, social media continued to grow in reach, and aspects of social interaction were added to many sites, allowing users to create communities or add user-generated content on sites that were not primarily SNSs. By 2023, 83 percent of Americans reported using YouTube, 68 percent reported using Facebook, and 47 percent used Instagram, although that number was nearly 80 percent for 18- to 29-year-olds (Gottfried, 2024). Instagram and Facebook claimed more than 2 billion monthly users in 2022 (Rodriguez, 2021; Facebook, 2022), and TikTok claims more than 1 billion (Bursztynsky, 2021; Milmo & Hern, 2023). Social media platforms moved from web-based sites to apps on smartphones, and Facebook, along with Google, now takes in nearly half of all online advertising revenue (Cramer-Flood, 2021; Vanian, 2024).

The primary activities permitted by social media are content creation and content consumption. UGC is an essential element of social media, as Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) wrote, "When Web 2.0 represents the ideological and technological foundation, User Generated Content (UGC) can be seen as the sum of all ways in which people make use of Social Media" (p. 61). However, observations of early forums and other participatory media found that a majority of users primarily consume, or at most repost content created by others rather than create original content (Davis, 2005). Horowitz (2006) observed that on Yahoo! Groups, 1 percent of users started groups, 10 percent participated actively, while 89 percent were only "lurkers." Assessments of edits to Wikipedia, or article creation on Wikipedia found that less than 2 percent of users were responsible for most edits and articles. Awan's (2007) study of jihadist forums found that 87 percent of users had never posted, and of the remaining 13 percent, 7 percent had only posted once, 5 percent had posted at least 50 times, and only 1 percent had posted at least 500 times. Further studies seemed to confirm an imbalance in the participation of users (Anstead and O'Loughlin, 2011).

However, as social media evolved, the major platforms adopted algorithms to populate user feeds with content ranked according to machine-learning based on the behavior of other users (Van Dijck et al., 2018). This changed the influence that users could exert as participants, enabling a kind of passive participation that could take place without the user's intention or even awareness. Interacting with content created by others can lead to that content being evaluated by the algorithm as more successful in terms of engagement, resulting in further circulation to more users or higher placement in social media feeds. This is often associated with potential revenue, whether through advertising or influencer clout that could lead to better deals from brands. This has led to the use of bots and human-controlled fake accounts to artificially boost content (Bovet & Makse, 2019). As a result, the influence of users on the content that is deemed successful at garnering engagement and therefore shown to more users with the aim of boosting their time on the platform has resulted in a shift in the role of the user, but many users remain unaware of or at least unclear about this aspect of their role. The influence of user behavior on the content selected for other users is not explained prior to users beginning to share content, and in fact, explanations of how algorithms select which content to

promote are considered trade secrets by social media companies (Pasquale, 2015). As DeVito (2017) noted, "we do not have a clear picture of what the algorithm is, much less what values it is embedding into its story selection process" (p. 754), but the model of values DeVito created to mimic the Facebook news feed included relationships between users, explicitly expressed user interests, prior user engagement, and implicitly expressed user preferences.

Dogruel et al. (2020) found that users are "largely aware that algorithms are employed in a wide range of applications and show a basic understanding of how these systems work," but that there was "a discrepancy between their self-perception and the perception of others" (p. 12, 10), such that users suggested that the influence of algorithms on others' use was higher than on their own use. Further, Dogruel et al. (2020) concluded that users' awareness of algorithms was related to their perceived autonomy: when they believe they are in control, they are less aware of the influence of algorithms on their interactions, leading them to perceive algorithms as "autonomy-enhancing" when they felt they were in control.

Social media users, particularly in countries with strong economies and well-developed Wi-Fi, broadband, and 4G or 5G networks, spend substantial amounts of time each day consuming and generating content on social media platforms. Estimates vary, but one consumer research estimate found that people spend an average of nearly two and a half hours on social media per day (Kemp, 2024). Accounts on all sites are easily created, and none of the most popular social media sites require any training or other preparation before users begin to scroll or to post their own content.

Terms of Use and User Agreements

Research on social media and ethics has examined the obligations of journalists (see, e.g., Hindman, 2017), educators (see, e.g., Warnick et al., 2016), and researchers (see, e.g., Townsend & Wallace, 2017; Golder et al., 2017; Lunnay et al., 2015). However, little research has examined the ethics or obligations of users. Where it has focused on user behavior, it is generally on the negative side, examining how to minimize problematic user behavior, generally through content moderation (for a systematic review, see Ma et al., 2023). For example, Cheng et al. (2017) studied the ease with which anyone can become a

troll. There has been little focus on the relationship between the users and the platforms, or on the responsibilities communicated to users by the platforms themselves, especially prior to or aside from norm violations, which are often in the context of content moderation or removal.

One of the only sources of information about user behavior and what they may know or believe about their roles are in the user agreements that must be accepted before joining a social media platform. These explicit messages about the context for and consequences of users' participation appear in documents such as the Terms of Use, User Agreement, Privacy Policies, Community Guidelines, and other materials sites provide to users, or ostensibly require users to accept before proceeding. It should be noted that this requirement is ostensible because—despite requirements to indicate acceptance of the Terms of Use or other policies—it is quite easy to skip reading or to easily dismiss the agreements, and studies have indicated that most users do not read them (see, e.g., Obar & Oeldorf-Hirsch, 2018).

Many platforms include community guidelines or other similarly titled documents that are not required terms of service, but more akin to values statements. Milosevic (2016) found that, "the older the company, the more likely it is to have other corporate documents such as 'principles' or 'community standards/guidelines/rules,' which elaborate cyberbullying-related provisions and their enforcement" (p. 5173). However, Maddox and Malson (2020) noted that "for many, these [community standards] documents are too vague, and when they are enforced, they are not enacted satisfactorily, effectively, or equally." Milosevic (2016) similarly found "none of the companies in the sample publicized the definitions that its moderators used to assess whether a reported case constituted cyberbullying, abuse, or harassment" (p. 5173).

Roberts (2019) examined the Terms of Use, User Agreements, Privacy Policies and other documents provided to users by the six most popular social media sites in the U.S. (Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, Pinterest, Twitter, and Snapchat), and found that ethics or user responsibilities are not addressed in user documents. According to Roberts' (2019) analysis,

> The standards on the sites are generally articulated in terms of behaviors to be avoided if a user does not want to be banned from the site or have content removed

> from the site. Most of these behaviors were illegal, such as copyright infringement or defamation. The remaining behaviors were mostly related to protecting other users from harm or harassment or keeping out content that the sites presumably find disturbing or distasteful for other users (p. 9).

Roberts' (2019) analysis found that Terms of Use and other policy documents on the most popular social media sites were mostly legalistic, apparently aimed at limiting the criminal liability of the companies rather than imparting to users an understanding of their role as participants on social media, the impact of sharing and commenting on information, responsibilities they have to other users, or any ethical obligations. As Roberts (2019) noted, the policies "communicate to users that they are free to engage in whatever behaviors they want, as long as they don't explicitly violate the rights of others, generally in ways that are already subject to legal prosecution offline" (p. 8). Maddox and Malson (2020) described it as applying a laissez-faire approach to social media, one informed by a particular First Amendment jurisprudence of personal freedom. Essentially, users are made to feel that they may say or do whatever they want up to the point that another user is harmed and complains about it. As Roberts (2019) put it, "users are largely regarded as customers… being served by the site, rather than as participants with an obligation to engage in a way that promotes the social good or the needs of a democratic society" (p. 7).

Role Theory

Role theory offers a framework for explaining how people come to understand roles and the expectations associated with roles. The central concern, according to Biddle (2013), is with "patterns of human conduct—*roles;* with expectations, identities, and social positions; and with context and social structure as well as with the individual response" (p. ix). Role theory posits that roles are associated with common identities and determined by context (Lynch, 2007). The expectations associated with a role can be communicated by context, consequences, and social systems or socialization, but they may not always be shared (Biddle, 2013).

When it comes to social media, the context and social practices may communicate to users that their role is one with very few expectations, as discussed above, although there

has been little research to date on this topic. Creating an account and posting content on all the most popular social media sites is exceedingly easy, requiring no more than a minute. On some sites, it is not even necessary to create an account if a user already has an account on a site owned by the same company, such as YouTube and Google, or Instagram and Facebook. Users are not required to verify their identity or provide an address or payment. No training or education about the site is given to a user when they sign up. Sharing content is just as easy, and this ease may lead to an underappreciation of its importance, as Brennen and Brennen (2015) suggested, the proliferation of information de-emphasizes the value of experts or skilled professionals such as journalists. The structure of the platforms themselves can be understood to convey something about expected behavior to users. Kim et al. (2022) studied the impact of platform architecture on user behavior, specifically civility in online conversations, and found that "more civil interactions among users can be encouraged by altering the design and architecture of the online environment within which the interaction occurs" (p. 15).

As outlined above, the consequences for behaviors on social media sites are inconsistent and opaque. Milosevic (2016) and Maddox and Malson (2020) suggested that users find the policies and their enforcement unclear and unsatisfying. Supporting this idea, Matias (2019) found that announcing community guidelines increased compliance with the norms by new participants. Tyler et al. (2019) examined the impact of different enforcement systems for content moderation on content violations ranging from nudity to hate speech and bullying to determine how the enforcement of content moderation would affect users' likelihood to violate the rules again. They found that if users rated the procedures as just, they engaged in more self-regulation and lower recidivism rates. A growing body of research on transparency in content moderation (Jhaver et al., 2019; Jhaver et al., 2021), as well as how witnessing explanations about content moderation decisions can influence the behavior of "bystanders" (Jhaver et al., 2023), suggests the influence of a combination of consequences and socialization through the consequences of others on user behavior and role performance.

Socialization may vary among users depending on their particular network of friends or contacts. Brady et al. (2020) proposed "moral contagion" as a way to understand users' motivations to share content, including motivation, attention, and design. This

could be understood to fit within the socialization aspect of role theory, and yet it remains difficult to assess how users are socialized to understand roles online given the disparate, individualized experiences that each user may have. This study therefore aims to understand what users say about their own roles and responsibilities, and the responsibilities of other actors, such as the platforms, or journalists, who may play a role in content on social media sites.

METHODS

As role theory suggests that expectations about a role may be transmitted by context, consequences, and socialization, they may be difficult to determine except by directly asking people what they understand their role and its associated expectations to be. In order to understand how users perceive their roles and responsibilities on social media, a survey of social media users (n=395) was conducted using Amazon Mechanical Turk respondents. The gender of respondents skewed male, with 56 percent identifying as male, which is opposite the trend on the most popular social media sites. Respondents ranged in age from 19 to 74 years old, with an average age of 36.8. The survey was exploratory in nature, as there are no previous studies asking users about their perceived roles and responsibilities on social media sites.

The first six questions asked users to identify who they thought was currently responsible, and who they thought should be responsible for three different things: (1) ensuring that social media users are informed, (2) maintaining civility, and (3) ensuring all users are able to express themselves freely. Questions were phrased, "Currently, who is responsible for…" and "Who SHOULD take responsibility for…". The following four questions asked only who should be responsible for (4) reporting harmful content, (5) removing harmful content, (6) correcting mis information, and (7) for ensuring users respect the dignity of others on social media, and finally who should take responsibility for making social media platforms safe (see Appendix A). The response options for each question about who is and who *should be* responsible were: the company that owns the site, journalists, users, "no one," or other. Users were also asked about how they see their role and what they expect of their fellow users, with multiple choice options to indicate what they consider to be their role on social media sites.

A second phase of the survey asked users which social media sites they use, how often they check and post to each of the following sites: Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube, as well as their age, gender, and level of education. Responses were gathered in 2021 and were checked for validity. Results were analyzed using descriptive statistics, as this survey was exploratory in nature and did not seek to test any hypotheses about relationships between variables.

RESULTS

Ensuring Users Are Informed

Overall, most respondents said social media companies should take responsibility for ensuring users are informed, for maintaining civility on platforms, for ensuring that all users have an opportunity to freely express themselves, and for making platforms safe. In these four categories, social media users were the second-most common response as the ones who should take responsibility for those things. Regarding whom they see as currently responsible for keeping users informed about the news, 42 percent said social media companies, 28.1 percent said users of social media sites, 25.8 percent said journalists, and 3.3 percent said no one.

Regarding the perceptions of who is currently responsible versus who should be responsible, the largest gap (13.2 percent) was between the number of users who thought social media companies were currently responsible for keeping users informed, and the number who thought the companies should be responsible for doing so—in other words, significantly more users said they thought social media companies should take responsibility for keeping users informed than said the companies were currently doing so. Another big gap was between those who said they thought no one was responsible for making sure that users were informed about the news (15.7 percent), and those who thought no one should take responsibility (3.3 percent), suggesting a desire for more intervention in this area.

Civility, Freedom of Expression, and Dignity

Regarding whom they think should be responsible for maintaining civility on social media sites, 52.2 percent of respondents said social media companies, 33.2 percent said users, and 12.7 percent said journalists. In this category, the gap was quite small between

who participants said was currently responsible, and who they said should take responsibility, as 50 percent said social media companies were currently responsible, 33.7 percent said users, 9.6 percent said journalists, while 6.3 percent said no one.

In terms of who should take responsibility for ensuring that all users have an opportunity to express themselves freely on social media platforms, 64.3 percent said social media companies, 20 percent said users, 10.9 percent said journalists, and 4.1 percent said no one. The biggest gap here was in the number who said social media companies should take responsibility and the number who thought the companies were currently responsible, as 59.7 percent said the platforms were already doing so, reflecting a shortcoming gap of 4.6 percent.

Regarding the responsibility to respect the dignity of all users, respondents were asked whose responsibility it currently is to ensure that users do so, and 43.5 percent of respondents said the companies, 34.2 percent said the users, 10.6 percent said journalists, and 11.4 percent said no one.

Harmful Content, Misinformation, and Safety

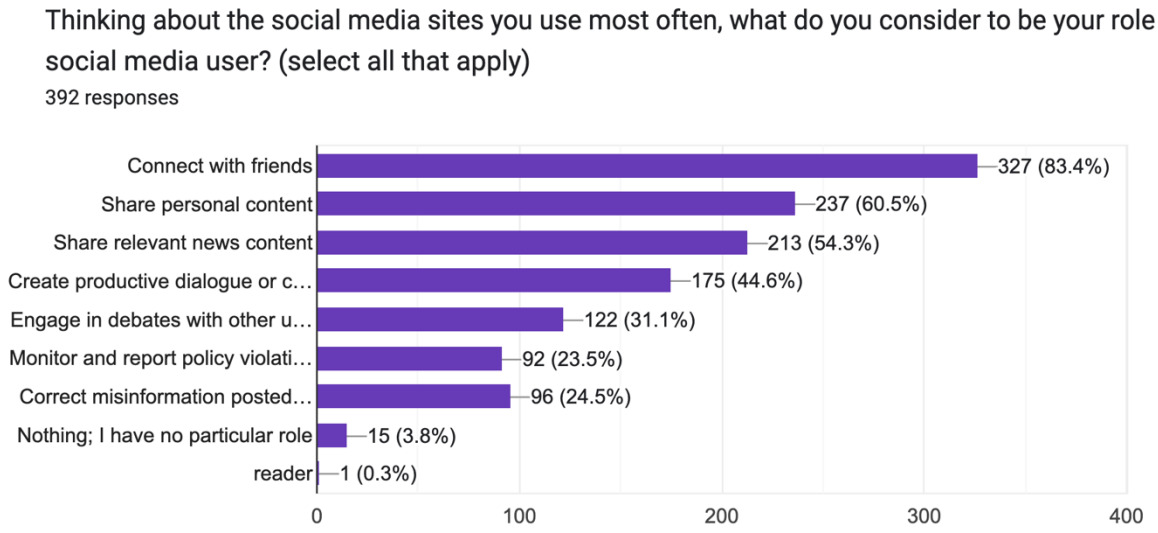
A majority of respondents indicated that they think the responsibility to report harmful content currently lies with the users (61.5 percent), only 22 percent with the social media companies, and 12.2 percent with journalists. The corollary responsibility to remove harmful content was seen as primarily lying with the companies (69.4 percent), while 19.7 percent said users are responsible for removing misinformation, and 8.4 percent said journalists. Regarding the responsibility to correct inaccurate or misleading information, nearly half of respondents (46.1 percent) said the companies are currently responsible, while 21.5 percent said users are responsible, and 17.5 percent said journalists are, and 13.4 percent said no one is taking responsibility for correcting misinformation. Two-thirds of respondents (67.1 percent) said that the companies should be responsible for making their platforms safe, while 16.5 percent said journalists, and 12.4 said users.

Users' Roles

In terms of what users indicated they think is their role on social media sites (see Table 1), the most popular options selected were "connect with friends" (83.5 percent), "share personal content" (60.6 percent), and "share relevant news content" (54.5 percent).

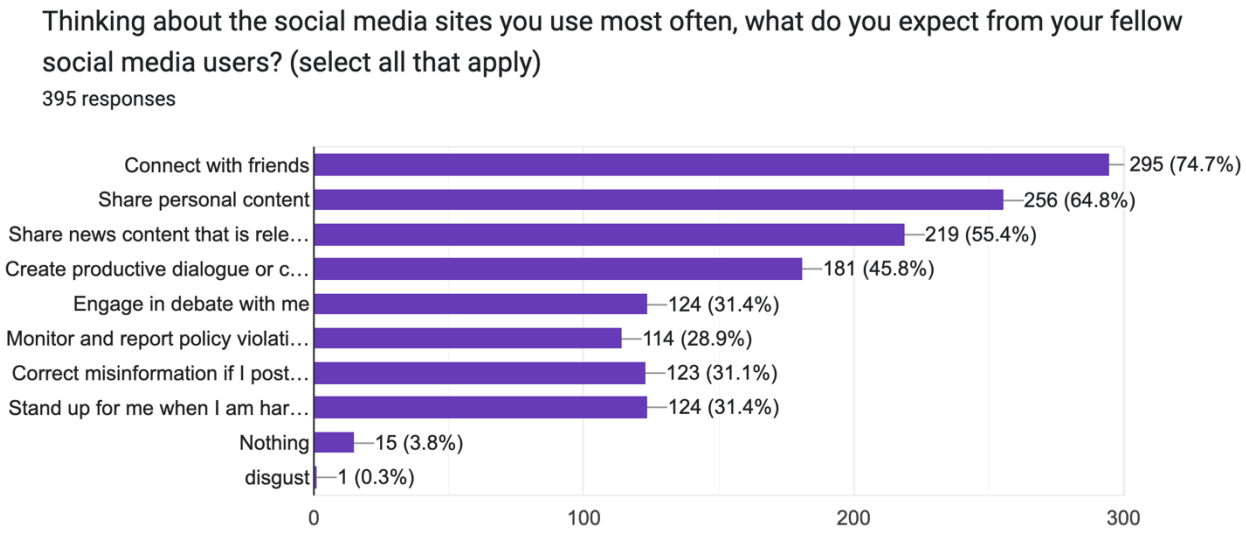
Fewer than half of respondents said their role was to "Create productive dialogue or conversation with other users" (44.8 percent), "Engage in debates with other users" (31.3 percent), "Monitor and report policy violations of other users" (23.4 percent), and "Correct misinformation posted by other users" (24.7 percent). One fifth of respondents (22 percent) selected all seven options, while 3.8 percent selected "Nothing; I have no particular role." One respondent (a 49-year-old male) entered his own response: "reader."

Table 1



When asked what they expect from their fellow social media users (see Table 2), the order of responses was nearly the same, with slight, mostly negligible differences in numbers: "Connect with friends" (-8.8 percent), "Share personal content" (+4.2 percent), and "Share relevant news content" (+0.9 percent), "Create productive dialogue or conversation with other users" (+1 percent), "Engage in debates with other users" (+0.1 percent), "Monitor and report policy violations of other users" (+5.5 percent), and "Correct misinformation posted by other users" (+6.4 percent), and "Nothing; I have no particular role" (no difference). There was one additional choice in this question, which was "Stand up for me when I am harassed"; 31.4 percent of respondents said this was something they expected of their fellow users. The same respondent who indicated his role was "reader" wrote in that he expected "disgust" from his fellow social media users.

Table 2



DISCUSSION

Overall, a majority of users said they believe the burden of responsibility should be in the hands of social media companies to maintain civility, to ensure users can freely express themselves, to remove harmful content, and to make platforms safe for all users. A plurality of respondents also said companies should be responsible for ensuring that users are informed. Many participants also indicated that they had high expectations of journalists to take on responsibilities for content on social media sites, which is particularly notable considering that journalists have no formal or official responsibility to manage or contribute to content on social media sites.

Very few respondents identified the users themselves as the ones who ought to take responsibility for content on social media sites. Most indicated content should be the responsibility of companies or journalists, or even no one at all, rather than users. These results are largely consistent with the expectations respondents said they have of the roles of other users, emphasizing the personal and social aspect of social media. The areas where the highest number of respondents indicated users should have some responsibility were for maintaining civility (33.2 percent), keeping users informed about the news (25.8 percent), and correcting misinformation (21.5 percent). Nearly two-thirds of respondents (61.5 percent) also identified users as responsible for reporting harmful content. The results reveal potential dissatisfaction with content online, reflected in the fact that the

two areas for which the highest number of respondents said "no one" was currently responsible were the categories of making sure users were informed (15.7 percent) and correcting misinformation (13.4 percent).

Questions regarding who is currently responsible and who should be responsible for certain indicate disparities in how users believe roles are being performed on social media. In terms perceptions of who is taking responsibility versus who should be responsible, the largest gap (13.2 percent) was between the number of users who thought social media companies were taking responsibility for keeping users informed, and the number who thought the companies *should* be responsible for doing so—in other words, significantly more users thought social media companies should take responsibility for keeping users informed than said they believed the companies were currently doing so. Another big gap was between those who said they thought no one was responsible for making sure that users were informed about the news (15.7 percent), and those who thought no one needed to take responsibility (3.3 percent).

Disparities in the responses to questions about their role as social media users and responses to questions about where responsibilities lie also suggest some incongruence. For example, while more than 60 percent of respondents said users are responsible for reporting harmful content on social media sites, when it came to identifying their role as social media users or their expectations of their fellow users, less than half that amount selected "monitor and report policy violations" (23.4 and 28.8 percent, respectively). This may have to do with the language of the question; perhaps they thought "monitoring" others sounded too strong.

On the other hand, while only 28 percent said users should be responsible for ensuring other users are informed, more than 50 percent selected "sharing relevant news content" as something that they saw as part of their role and something they expect of their fellow users. Whether this indicates a discrepancy between how users see a "role" and a "responsibility," or reflects a kind of hierarchy of responsibility, in which some users see sharing relevant news content as part of their role, but consider some other actor on social media to have an even greater responsibility to do so, is impossible to determine.

CONCLUSION

The survey results indicate that most users do not see themselves or other users as having responsibility for content on social media sites, or much of a role beyond connecting with friends and sharing their personal experiences. They do not see themselves as responsible for keeping other users informed about the news, maintaining civility, ensuring freedom of expression of users, removing harmful content, correcting misinformation, making social media safe for all users, or respecting the dignity of other users. The only responsibility respondents said users have was reporting harmful content.

Instead, participants mostly said that social media companies should be responsible for keeping users informed, and a majority said social media companies should take responsibility for maintaining civility and ensuring free expression. A significant number also indicated that journalists should bear some responsibility for improving content on social media. Reflecting some alignment between users and platforms, many social media sites had partnered with fact-checking organizations to provide checks on some content, although it is unclear whether this influenced respondents' perceptions. Overall, the findings are in line with the laissez-faire approach to engaging with content on social media argued by Maddox and Malson (2020).

Given that roles are communicated through the socialization, context, and consequences, there are implicit and explicit ways that social media platforms could make users aware of the responsibility they have to engage while considering the impact on other users and the broader public good, or to contribute to the information needs of citizens in a democracy. Social media sites could implicitly create an expectation of greater responsibility or understanding of the role of social media user as one imbued with some obligations by creating more barriers to participation. If users were required to complete a training that explained how their behavior on the site, both in actively sharing content and consuming content, can shape the content prioritized and shared with other users, they might have a better understanding of the role they played as users. Other trainings during the account creation process could include elements of media literacy education.

More friction could be added to the process of sharing content as well. This has been tested by a change made to Twitter (now X) in 2020 that asked users if they wanted to click on a link before retweeting it. Katsaros et al. (2023) found that intervening during

tweet creation decreased the posting of offensive content. Users could be asked to confirm that they have verified a piece of information before posting it, or to consider its impact on other users. Several other studies (Jhaver et al., 2019; Jhaver et al., 2021; Jhaver et al., 2023) have indicated that platform architecture can play a role in shaping user behavior.

Of course, adding language to those documents that emphasizes the role that users play in shaping content directly and indirectly, or emphasizing their social obligations to other users would help establish a different social context on social media platforms. Clarity in stating the responsibilities that the platforms themselves accept and the responsibilities that they leave to the users would go some way towards solving the issue of users not understanding what the policies of a site are or when they have been violated.

Social media platforms could also make their Terms of Use and other user agreements more difficult to skip over, and easier to understand. Writing these documents in plain language or presenting them in more user-friendly formats could make users more likely to read and understand them. Building on Tyler et al.'s (2019) study, creating a perception of procedural fairness appears to have potential to improve user adherence to rules.

Social media users could be asked to read and pledge to follow a code of ethics. At the very least, they could be exposed to ideas about ethics and the role they have in informing other users through shaping content that appears in social media feeds, and what that responsibility means in a free and/or democratic society. These changes will not, of course, make all social media users behave perfectly at all times. But it may go some way towards shifting the attitude away from one of total freedom from responsibility, to one of shared responsibility in a system that plays a significant role in shaping the public's attitudes and views.

In terms of limitations, this study was exploratory in nature, reflecting the lack of research to date about the perceptions of roles of social media users, so the questions had not been tested for reliability. The framing of the questions was a little nuanced, given the aim to distinguish between who is currently taking responsibility for something, and who should take responsibility for it. An attempt was made, through the structure of the questions, capitalizing the word "should," and placing the two related questions one after the other, to help respondents see the difference between the questions. However, it must

be acknowledged that respondents—and in particular, Amazon Mechanical Turk respondents, who may be eager to complete questionnaires as quickly as possible—may not read the questions with as much care as hoped and necessary to properly understand the intended distinction. This sample also skewed male and somewhat older than the user bases of many social media sites (Instagram and TikTok, for example).

Future research on user roles and responsibilities could be conducted using qualitative approaches, such as focus groups, that would allow a researcher to be certain that participants were clearly distinguishing between how they saw responsibilities currently, and what they believed responsibilities should be allocated or adopted.

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