Reflection Task Essays

Below are six (6) reflections tasks for your choice of three (3) throughout the summer term. You are not permitted to repeat any task. I have tried to include enough instructions for you to complete the task but few enough to allow you to make each of these your own. You have a lot of power in these activities to make it what you want. Some activities have time constraints (e.g., change your profile picture for 4 full days) so be mindful when choosing your task and how much time you have to submit your reflection essay. These are also organized in a fashion, should you choose to, to complete bulk essays ahead of their due dates to help you plan your term more efficiently. Rubrics for each task accompany the task description below. If you have any questions, please email me at dillon.148@osu.edu or see me during office hours.

Each reflection task essay must adhere to the following format:

- These essays must be a MINIMUM of 2 double-spaced pages or a MAXIMUM of 3 double-spaced pages (1" margins, 12pt Times New Roman font).
- DO NOT include your name or course/assignment information in the body of your document. This information, if you feel is necessary, can be included in a header or footer. Since you are submitting electronically, I will know which writing is whose submission. These essays are due in the Carmen Dropbox by 5pm EST the day they are due.
- Title your document with the title of your choice of reflection task
- Use proper grammar, spelling, and citations/quotations per APA guidelines. If you cite a theory, you must include the source in your bibliography.
- You are permitted to use a less academic tone, speaking in the 1st person throughout. However, do not become too relaxed as this is an academic essay for a grade.
- Be thorough AND brief.
- Complete the task as described within the time period (if necessary). Some of these tasks are asking you to go outside your comfort zone (e.g., "friending" or liking the page of a politician, celebrity, or athlete you do not like or disagree with).
- Write briefly (1 paragraph) of what you actually did. Include URLs or screenshots if it helps illustrate your point (include this in your appendix after your essay).
- Reflect on the task you completed: how uncomfortable was it at first? Was it easy? What did you learn about the communication technology through this task? No matter your reflection, be certain to reflect on **the social implications of this communication technology and how your personal behavior or beliefs have changed.**
- This description is not a comprehensive list or explanation of what is expected for specific essays. Please review the rubric associated with each task to determine how to best construct your essay.
- You are not permitted to turn in work from another class or assignment for any writing assignment in this course. All work submitted for a grade in this class must be an original work (never before seen). If this caveat confuses you, please see me.

Identity and self-presentation

Our online identities supposedly proclaim are true selves through pictures, text, associations, and friendships. One of the first things we may do when we meet someone is to search them on Google, Facebook, or Twitter. But do the attributes we choose to present online create our identity in the same way our clothes or actions do? This task asks you to examine your own, and a best friend's, online identity with a magnifying glass.

This reflection tasks asks you to complete the following steps:
1. On your Facebook or Twitter profile, visit your "About Me" section. If possible, print what it contains (be sure to expand sections if necessary). You will not be submitting this printout.
2. Visit your best friend or a sibling's "About Me" section. If possible, print what it contains (be sure to expand sections if necessary). You will not be submitting this printout.
3. Review what this section contains (don't make any changes).
4. Review the privacy settings for this section.
5. If you want to make changes, keep a log of what changes you make. This can be a simple log, for example, "I needed to update my employment" or "I unliked a few groups that are outdated."

Once you have completed the task, write an essay answering the following:
• Write 1 paragraph detailing what you did. Have the settings in the "About Me" section changed since you first joined the social network? What changes did you make?
• According to the Warranting Theory (Walther & Parks, 2002) when in anonymous or computer mediated environments we may be more apt to misrepresent information about ourselves. Reflect on this effect and determine if this may be true for you. Why or why not?
• Reflect on your best friend's or sibling's "About Me" section. Is this a true representation of their personality as you know them? Why or why not?
• What are the social implications of your online identity being different than your actual identity? How could this affect you on the job market, when looking for a new friend or significant other, or in other ways?

"Frenemies"

The Internet and social media give us access to a nearly infinite number of people and groups, some desirable, others not so much. In this environment, we can sometimes create an online echo chamber, where we only communicate with those we agree with, like, or are similar to us. This task asks you to step out of your comfort zone a little bit for a short while.

This reflection tasks asks you to complete the following steps:
1. Decide on an individual, celebrity, group, or cause you either dislike or disagree with. For example, as a New York Yankee fan, I would "like" the Facebook page or follow the Twitter feed for the Boston Red Sox. I do not wish you to associate with any group or individual you feel threatened or completely disgusted by (if you have questions, please see/email me).
2. Begin following this individual or group on some sort of social media: Twitter and/or Facebook. Be certain the updates from this individual or group will appear in your daily feeds.
3. Follow the individual or group for 4 full days.
4. Comment at least once during these four days. It is important you are polite, civil, and respectful in your post and within the guidelines of the user agreements of the media you are using. Don't post anything you would not feel comfortable reading out loud to an audience of President Gee or your grandmother.
1. Keep a log of any activity you have a strong (positive or negative) reaction to from this individual or group. This can be a simple document listing, for example, "Day 1: Big Papi bragging about the Sox sweeping the Yanks really made me mad."

Once you have completed the task, write an essay answering the following:
• Write 1 paragraph describing the individual or group you decided to follow, what social media you used to follow, and tally (with examples) of reactive posts. Include if you unfriended/unfollowed.
• Reflect on what it was like to have an "enemy" amongst your news feed of "friends."
• Compare and contrast your opinion of this individual or group before and after this task.
• Describe and reflect on your comment. Were there replies? Did you engage with other friends or supporters? How did it make you feel? How did it make you react (if at all)?
• What are the social implications of online echo chambers? Did you form or change your opinion?
• What are the social implications of differing opinions in support/fan pages?

News lockdown

Social media is rapidly replacing television and print media as the conduit for breaking news. News of celebrity deaths (or births), current events, weather reports, and even investigation revelations become instantaneous in the form of tweets, status updates, and blog entries. Dissemination is clear, but what is unclear is the authority and accuracy of this breaking news. This task asks you to rely on social media alone for your news for 24hrs.

This reflection tasks asks you to complete the following steps:
1. Choose a 24hr period where you will prohibit exposure to television, radio, online (e.g., www.huffingtonpost.com or www.espn.com) or print news. Not even weather!
2. During this 24hr period, you can only rely on your Facebook or Twitter news feeds for any news. You cannot click on any links, but are permitted to review the information your friend (or group) posted, their comments, others' replies or comments. You are permitted to inquire further, for example, posting, "I can't open the link. Can you give me the gist of the article?"
3. Keep a log of the news you were exposed to. If it is a lengthy list, you can simply tabulate the number of sports, current events, celebrity, weather, or breaking news you were exposed to.
4. The day after your fast ends, compile a list of news stories you were unaware were being explored (see step 3 if it's a lengthy list).

Once you have completed the task, write an essay answering the following:
• Write 1 paragraph describing what you did in this task. Are you a news junkie and this task was difficult, or is this how you get your news anyway? What does your log reveal on what you were exposed to and what you were excluded from?
• Reflect on your trust of news when you cannot independently verify it yourself.
• Reflect on the social implications if news is only filtered by those you know online. What are the larger implications for society? For you personally?

Grieving Online

The Internet has served as a space for individuals to communicate their grief or to work through their grieving process openly and publicly. Many of us have grieved for a stranger, someone we think we knew but did not (e.g., celebrities), offered condolences to friends or family online for their loss, or perhaps even continued "communicating" with a loved one that has passed away offline, but their online presence remains. Grief is a very personal experience yet we do this without any actual interpersonal contact. This task asks you to reflect on your own personal experience with grieving online.

This reflection tasks asks you to complete the following steps:
1. Choose one of the following grief behaviors to examine and reflect on:
    a. Offering condolences online to a friend for their loss
    b. Expressing grief for a celebrity/famous individual's death. For example, notifying and/or personally commenting on the loss someone else has posted.
    c. Remaining "friends" or a "follower" of someone who has passed away (social media account of deceased individual is still active).
    d. Expressing grief for a stranger (not famous). For example, commenting on an RIP page or Memorial Page for a fallen solider, ill child, or local community member.
2. Determine your relationship, if any, with the deceased or grieving individual.
3. Capture the communication on your behalf, or others. If taking screenshots, include them as an appendix to your essay and be certain to black out names and pictures to keep the privacy of others.

Once you have completed the task, write an essay answering the following:
• Write 1 paragraph describing what you did. What grief behavior are you reflecting on? What is your relationship?
• Reflect on the actual communication you wrote regarding the death of the individual. Compare and contrast this communication with what you could (or have) said offline and in person.
• Reflect on your relationship with the deceased individual. Is it easier or more difficult to grieve online for a stranger vs. someone you knew personally?
• What components of FtF grief (offline, in-person) are evident in grief online? What is absent?
• What are the social implications of grieving online? Has it changed or created new traditions? Prior to this task, were you aware of the personal implications?

Cyber-Upstanders

The SIDE theory (Lea & Spears, 1991) suggests when online, individuals become deindividuated and we rely on social identities to fill in gaps a FtF conversation may otherwise cover. The reliance on social identities can tend to lead us to overuse stereotypes or assign stereotypes to others. Any perusal of an Internet comment board or provocative Facebook meme will find plenty of stereotypes. This task asks you to be mindful of stereotypes and aggressive interpersonal communication online.

This reflection tasks asks you to complete the following steps:
1. Keep a log for 3 full days of any stereotypes or aggressive interpersonal communication you find in your news feed (Facebook) or Twitter feed. If you do not wish to use social media, please choose another interactive Internet feed (e.g., MOOG, Reddit, etc) you frequent and gain my approval before embarking on this task.
    a. Stereotyped communication could be sweeping generalizations about an entire group (positive or negative), disguised as humor (in form of memes, jokes, imitations). Some stereotypes are framed as positive attributes of an entire group, such as all Asians are good at math, while others are framed as negative attributes of an entire group, such as all Hispanics are illegal immigrants[1].
    b. Aggressive interpersonal communication online is straightforward and can include taunting, teasing, extortion, ostracism, flaming, trolling, intimidation, repetitive insults or threats.
2. In your log, keep descriptions of who, what, when, where, and why. Do not use full names (use initials) and if possible the relationship between the communicators. See below for an example:

Who	Where	When	Why	What	Upstander?
A.B. (friend)	Facebook	Day 1	Venting in status	"OMG. Too many bad drivers on campus today. Who gave all the chicks the car keys this morning? LOL."	Yes. Another friend wrote, "bro, you know ur gf can see this, right? not cool."
B.S (friend)	Twitter	Day 1	Tweet	"out of a 100 person class 60 are Asian. I thought this was America #osuproblems."	No (4 RT, 2 Favorites)

3. Determine if anyone online called the individual on the offensive behavior. Be sure to include if you personally pointed out the communication. If no one felt comfortable enough to stand up (likelihood is slim), note that as well.

Once you have completed the task, write an essay answering the following:
•   Write at least one paragraph detailing what you did to complete this task. How many instances did you witness? What was the ratio to bystanders to upstanders?
•   Reflect on bystander non-intervention. Did you participate in intervening? Were you surprised by the number of individuals who either stood by (did nothing) or stood up to the offensive communication? What do you think prohibits or encourages intervention?
•   Reflect on the type of communication you witnessed. How much was framed as humorous? How much was framed as aggressive?
•   What are the social implications of allowing offensive communication to continue? What are the effects online? Offline?

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[1] The stereotypes listed here are only included for examples and do not reflect my personal opinions.

"Slack"tivism

Kony 2012. Share this status and this puppy will be rescued. Retweet or favorite if you think cancer sucks. Social media and the Internet have offered a unique environment for social activism to succeed, fail, or fall into a gray area of "slactivism." Slactivism refers to online charitable behavior that rarely goes beyond the code necessary to "like" or "retweet." This reflection task asks you to examine your own online activism and determine how much impact is truly made offline.

This reflection tasks asks you to complete the following steps:
1. Examine your social media (e.g., Facebook or Twitter) identity and determine if you have engaged in any online activism. This can include, but is not limited to:
    a. "Liking" or following social activist pages such as Amnesty International, World Wildlife Fund, Alzheimer's Association.
    b. "Liking" or following individual movement pages such as "1 Million Moms Against ____," "1 million clicks and President Gee uses neckties"
    c. Sharing, retweeting, or favoriting a call to action
    d. Signing an online petition
    e. Commenting, posting on a wall, or tweeting an elected official via social media
2. Cap your own behavior at ten of the most recent activities.
3. Examine the what, when, how, and why of these activities.
4. Determine if you followed-up with any offline activities in the form of volunteering, donations, actual communication with the official, etc.
5. If you have not followed-up with offline behavior connected to the social activism, determine if you should, desire to, or can.

Once you have completed the task, write an essay answering the following:
• Write at least one paragraph detailing what you did to complete this task. How involved did you find yourself with online activism?
• Would you consider yourself a "slactivist?" Why or why not?
• Compare and contrast offline activism with online activism.
• How often, in your experience, has online social activism lead to offline action? Are there specific types of activism that is more effective online? Why or why not?
• Reflect on the social implications of online-only activism with little to no offline activities.