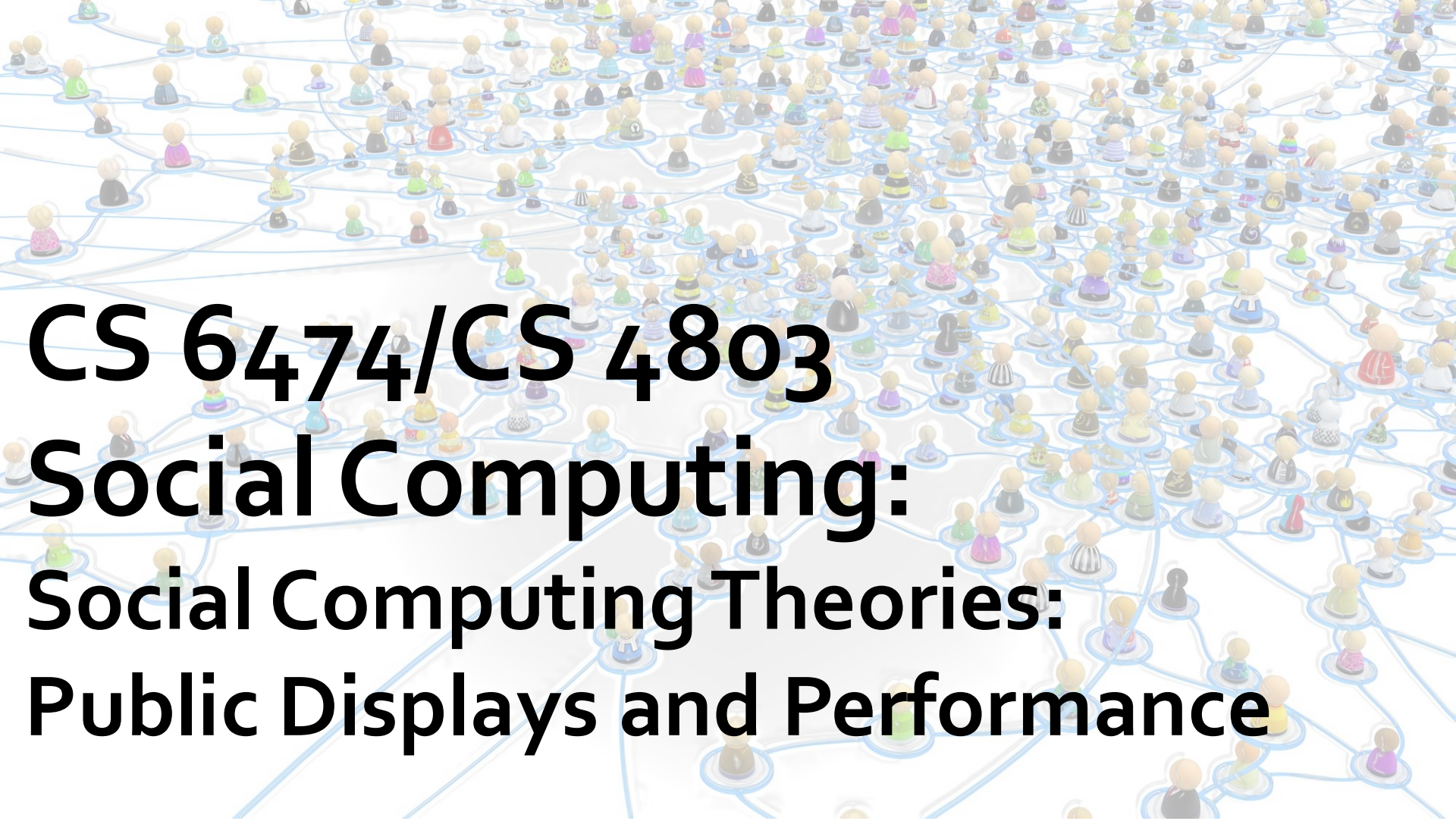

CS 6474/CS 4803 Social Computing:

Social Computing Theories: Public Displays and Performance

Munmun De Choudhury

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Week 4 | February 2, 2026

Term Project Proposal Specs

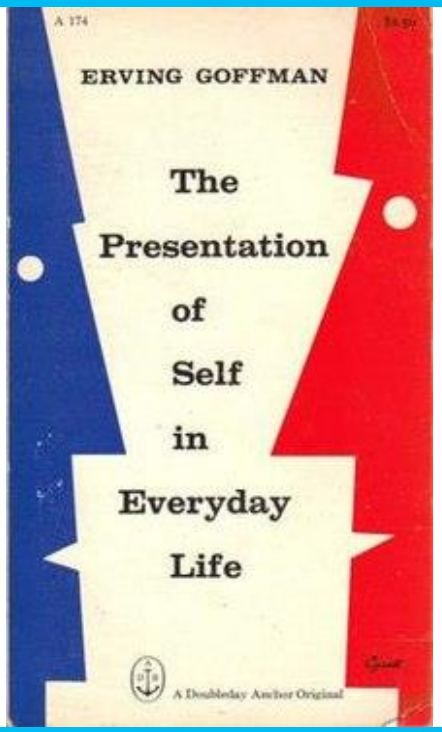
Proposal Presentation Specs

- Register your team information latest by Feb 11
  - Cannot present if the team doesn't sign up
  - Link to signup form also on course website and Canvas
- We will randomly assign teams to presentation slots on either Feb 16 or Feb 18.
  - This will be completed by Feb 12.

Proposal Presentation Specs

- Email the slides to the TAs and me by 11:59pm ET the night before your scheduled presentation.
  - PDF format only
- Structure:
  - What is the problem
  - Why is it important
  - What has been done so far
  - Are there any/what are the gaps in this prior research?
  - How does your project close these gaps/extend current state of the art
  - Outline of study design/data analytic plan
- Proposal Due Feb 18

“Life itself is a dramatically enacted thing”



Erving Goffman

‘‘The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life’ (1959).

The participant's dramaturgical problems of presenting one's self

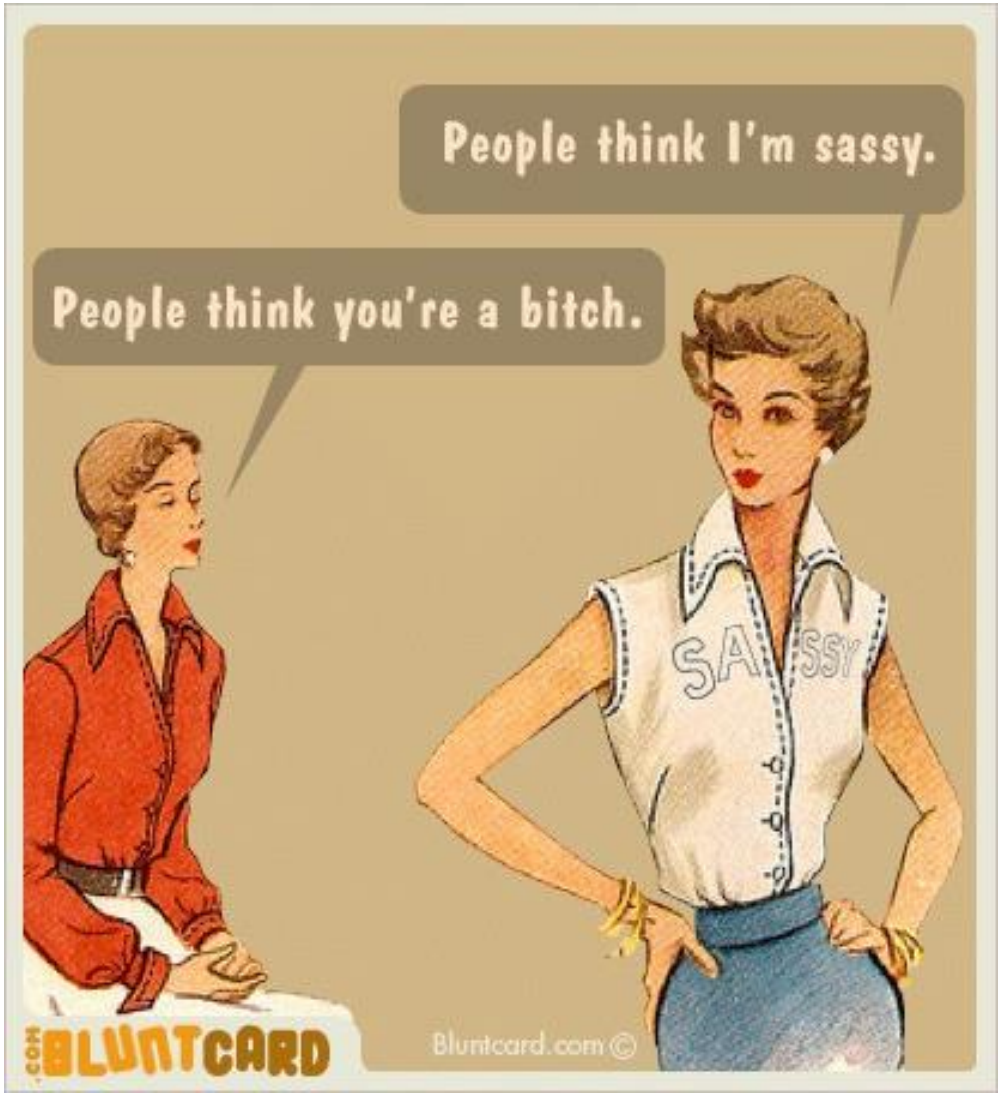
- "a potentially infinite cycle of concealment, discovery, false revelation, and rediscovery"

The legitimate performances of everyday life…

- …are not "acted" or "put on" in the sense that the performer knows in advance just what he is going to do"

Connection between performance and life/front stage and back stage

Expressions we give vs. give off



- "The expressiveness of the individual appears to involve two radically different kinds of sign activity: the expression that he gives, and the expression that he gives off"

What he meant …

We present ‘ourselves’ using six different aspects…

But there are implications…

Front

The Joe Schmo Show

- "A given social front tends to become institutionalized in terms of the abstract stereotyped expectations"

Idealization

- “incorporate and exemplify the officially accredited values of the society”

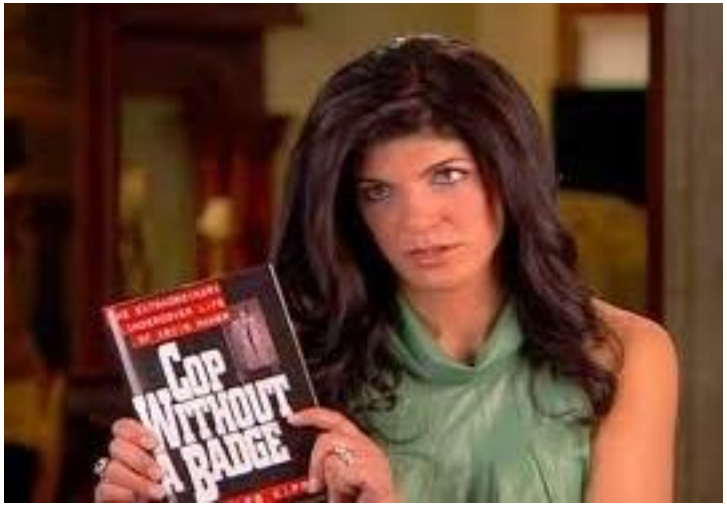
Dramatic Realization

- “In mobilizing his behavior to make a showing, he will be concerned not so much with the full round of the different routine he performs but only with the one from which his occupational reputation derives.”

Maintenance of Expressive Control

- “the audience may misunderstand the meaning that a cue was designed to convey, or may read an embarrassing meaning into gestures or events that were accidental, inadvertent, or incidental and not meant by the performer to carry any meaning whatsoever”

Concealment



Real Housewives

- “we tend to conceal from our audience all evidence of ‘dirty work’

Why is Goffman's theory valid and applicable to social computing platforms?

After reading Goffman, does it make you disbelieve everything your friends share/do on social media?

Class Exercise 1

Sort the social computing platforms below based on how much performance you expect to see:

Twitter/X
Instagram
Reddit
LinkedIn
TikTok
Snapchat
WhatsApp

The Presentation of Self in the Age of Social Media: Distinguishing Performances and Exhibitions Online

- Self-presentation can be split into performances, which take place in synchronous "situations," and artifacts, which take place in asynchronous "exhibitions."
- Introduces a theory of "lowest common denominator" culture employing the exhibitional approach

Class Exercise 2

1) What are some examples of performance (Goffman) and exhibition (Hogan) in existing social computing platforms?

2) What are some design features in these platforms that enable (or hinder) "performance" or "exhibition"?

Class Exercise 3a

Examine the functional regions of performance (Goffman) and exhibition (Hogan) in the context of *anonymous* social computing platforms.

Is the "lowest common denominator" approach still valid?

Class Exercise 3b

Examine the functional regions of performance (Goffman) and exhibition (Hogan) in the context of *ephemeral* social computing platforms.

Is the "lowest common denominator" approach still valid?

The Many Faces of Facebook: Experiencing Social Media as Performance, Exhibition, and Personal Archive

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ABSTRACT
The growing use of social media means that an increasing amount of people's lives are visible online. We draw from Goffman's theatrical metaphor and Hogan's exhibition approach to explore how people manage their personal collection of social media data over time. We conducted a qualitative study of 13 participants to reveal their day-to-day decision-making about producing and curating digital traces on Facebook. Their goals and strategies showed that people experience the Facebook platform as consisting of three different functional regions: a *performance region* for managing recent data and impression management, an *exhibition region* for longer term presentation of self-image, and a *personal region* for archiving meaningful facets of life. Further, users' need for presenting and archiving data in these three regions is mediated by temporality. These findings trigger a discussion of how to design social media that support these dynamic and sometimes conflicting needs.

Author Keywords
Reminiscing; personal archives; curation; identity; exhibition

media the feeling of an art exhibition in a museum [11]. In this metaphor, performances leave behind digital traces that act as digital artifacts of the performance, and the accumulation and collection of these artifacts causes these spaces to take on the character of a long-term identity "exhibition," rather than that of an ephemeral performance.

The value of these exhibitions is not limited to others. Much of the content that people create in social media has personal meaning [4], and the emerging personal value of content in these media has been explored in recent studies [15, 25, 29]. Thus, despite these systems' focus on social purposes, it is fair to say that "*today there is an increasing desire to use online social media as a way for archiving life experiences and reflecting on identities*" [9, p15].

These shifts and emerging goals triggered us to rethink the nature of social platforms, the curation of data that they afford, and the ways that individual users conceptualize and experience social media and the data they create in them.

Both the archive and the exhibition metaphors point to the

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Strategic self-presentation online: A cross-cultural study

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Culture
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ABSTRACT

Contemporary social networking sites (SNSs) make idealized self-presentation and image maintenance difficult because users' audiences are becoming more diverse and individual users must negotiate often unanticipated *other-provided information* in the form of text posts and digital images on their profile pages. This cross-cultural study examines how audience-related variables affect a range of strategic self-presentation and image management behaviors online. Results from samples of Singaporean and American SNS users ($N = 411$) show that while Americans update their profiles with text-based wall posts more frequently, Singaporeans share significantly more photos. Audience diversity is positively associated with active management of other-provided information, and females share more photos and actively manage unwanted photo tagging. Cultural identity and the tendency to 'friend' unknown others interact on managing other-provided wall posts; individualistic cultural identity exhibited positive relationships with these reactions for those less likely to friend unknown others but negative ones for those more likely to friend unknown others. Implications for the theoretical understanding of and practical suggestions about self-presentation online are discussed.

Article

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The spatial self: Location-based identity performance on social media

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Abstract

As a growing number of social media platforms now include location information from their users, researchers are confronted with new online representations of individuals, social networks, and the places they inhabit. To better understand these representations and their implications, we introduce the concept of the "spatial self": a theoretical framework encapsulating the process of online self-presentation based on the display of offline physical activities. Building on previous studies in social science, humanities, and computer and information science, we analyze the ways offline experiences are

Quantifying the Invisible Audience in Social Networks

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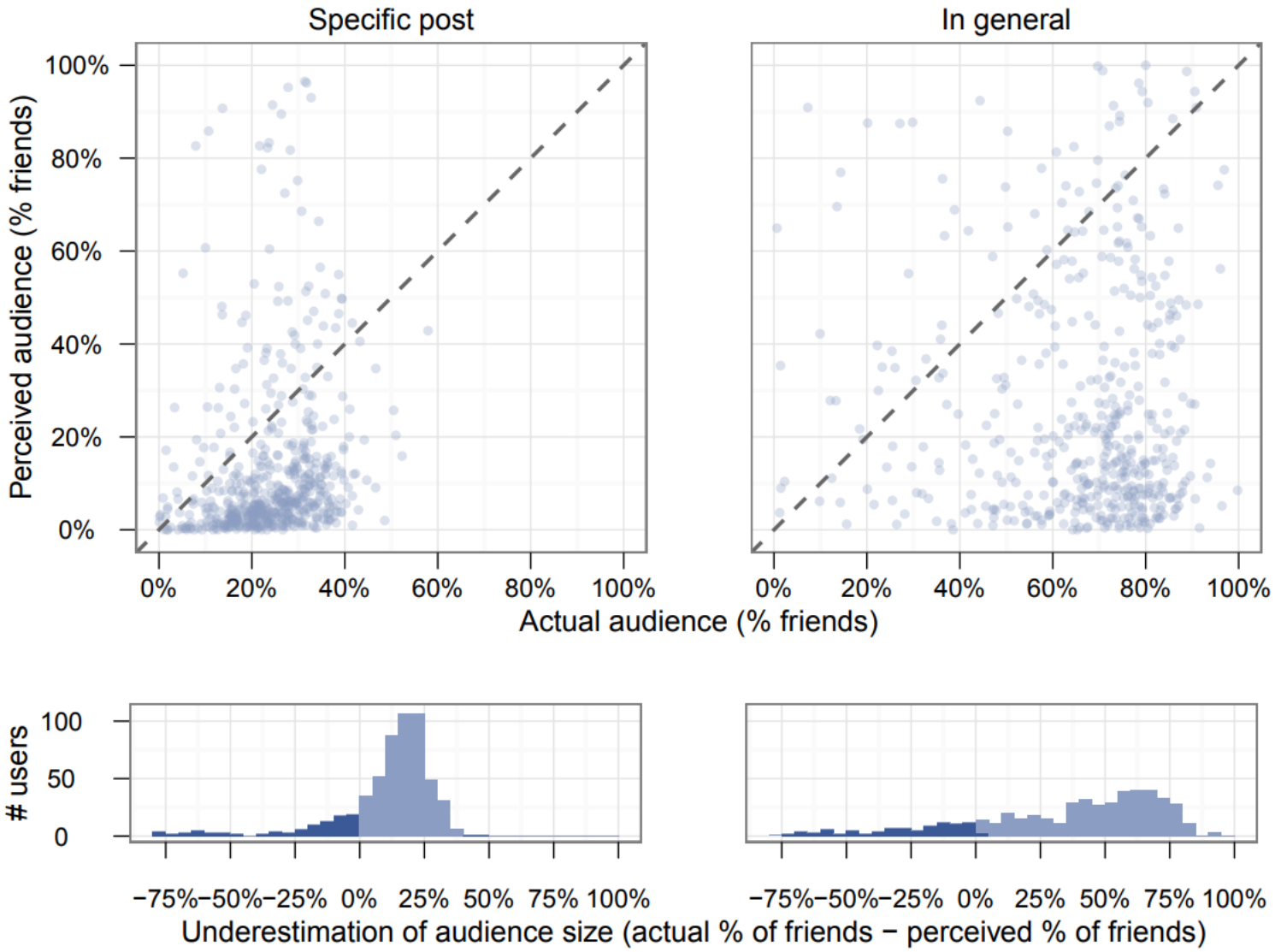
ABSTRACT

When you share content in an online social network, who is listening? Users have scarce information about who actually sees their content, making their audience seem invisible and difficult to estimate. However, understanding this invisible audience can impact both science and design, since perceived audiences influence content production and self-presentation online. In this paper, we combine survey and large-scale log data to examine how well users' perceptions of their audience match their actual audience on Facebook. We find that social media users consistently underestimate their audience size for their posts, guessing that their audience is just 27% of its true size. Qualitative coding of survey responses reveals folk theories that attempt to reverse-engineer audience size using feedback and friend count, though none of these approaches are particularly accurate. We analyze audience logs for 222,000 Facebook users' posts over the course of one month and find that publicly visible signals — friend count, likes, and comments — vary widely and do not strongly indicate the audience of a single post. Despite the variation, users typically reach 61% of their friends each month. Together, our results begin to reveal the invisible undercurrents of audience attention and behavior in online social networks.

may not see the content, or may not reply. While established media producers can estimate their audience through surveys, television ratings and web analytics, social network sites typically do not share audience information. This design decision has privacy benefits such as plausible deniability, but it also means that users may not accurately estimate their invisible audience when they post content.

Correct or not, these audience estimates are central to media behavior: perceptions of our audience deeply impact what we say and how we say it. We act in ways that guide the impression our audience develops of us [17], and we manage the boundaries of when to engage with that audience [2]. Social media users create a mental model of their imagined audience, then use that model to guide their activities on the site [27, 38, 26]. However, with no way to know if that mental model is accurate, users might speak to a larger or smaller audience than they expect.

This paper investigates users' perceptions of their invisible audience, and the inherent uncertainty in audience size as a limit for users' estimation abilities. We survey active Facebook users and ask them to estimate their audience size, then compare their estimates to their actual audience size using server logs. We examine the folk theories that users have de-


Specific post
In general
Perceived audience (% friends)
100%
80%
60%
40%
20%
0%
0%
20%
40%
60%
80%
100%
Actual audience (% friends)
users
100
50
0
−75%
−50%
−25%
0%
25%
50%
75%
100%
Underestimation of audience size (actual % of friends − perceived % of friends)

Theory	Prevalence
Guess	23%
Based on likes and comments	21%
Portion of total friend count	15%
How many friends might log in	9%
Who they regularly see on the site	5%
Number of close friends and family	3%
Who might be interested in the topic	2%
Based on privacy settings	2%
Another explanation given	8%

Table 1: The relative prevalence of folk theories for estimating audience size. Participants most often used heuristics based on the amount of feedback they get on their posts or their number of friends.

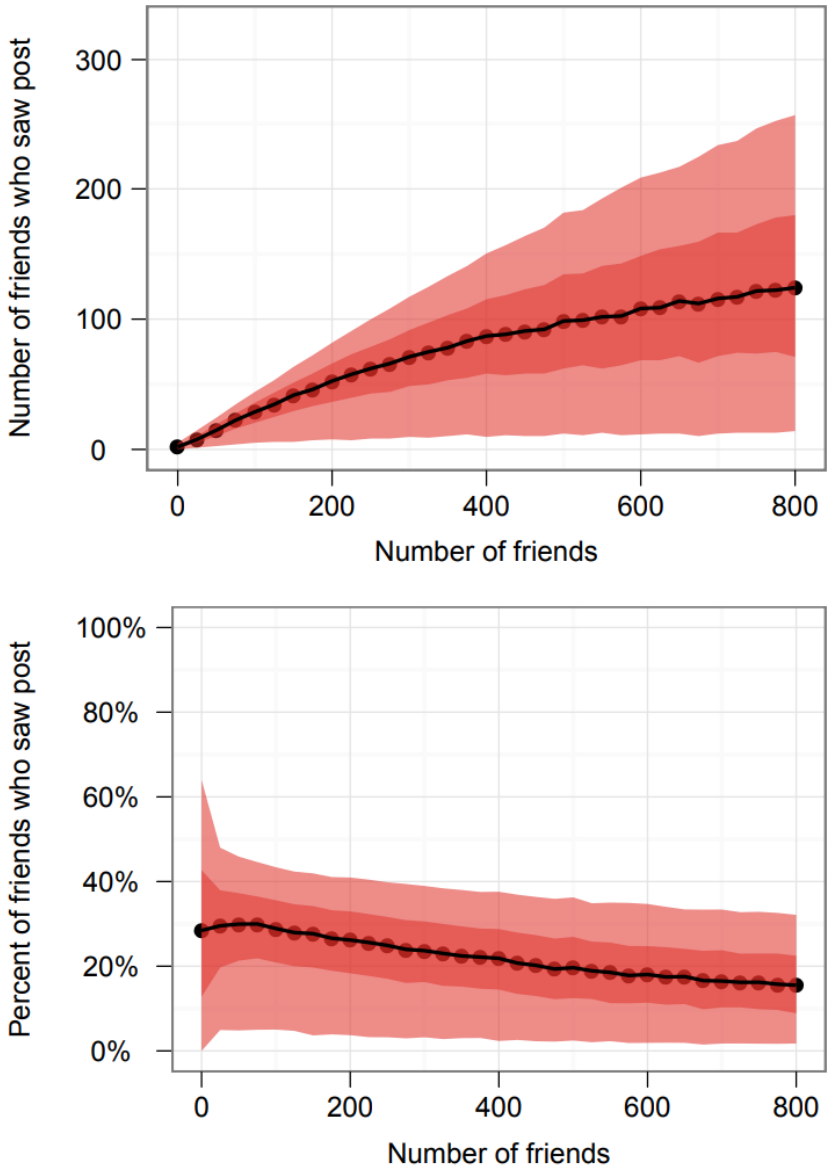


Figure 2: Users with the same number of friends have highly variable audience sizes. Panels show the distribution of the number of friends (top) and fraction of friends (bottom) who saw a post as a function of friend count. The line and bands indicate the median, interquartile range, and 90% region.

Hogan says: “A key difference in exhibitions is the virtual “curator” that manages and redistributes this digital content”. What would be examples of a virtual curator on Instagram?

The Algorithmic Crystal: Conceptualizing the Self through Algorithmic Personalization on TikTok

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NICOLE B. ELLISON, School of Information, University of Michigan, USA
JEFFREY T. HANCOCK, Department of Communication, Stanford University, USA

This research examines how TikTok users conceptualize and engage with personalized algorithms on the TikTok platform. Using qualitative methods, we analyzed 24 interviews with TikTok users to explore how algorithmic personalization processes inform people's understanding of their identities as well as shape their orientation to others. Building on insights from our qualitative data and previous scholarship on algorithms and identity, we propose a novel conceptual model to understand how people think about and interact with personalized algorithmic systems. Drawing on the metaphor of crystals and their properties, the *algorithmic crystal framework* is an analytic frame that captures user understandings of how personalized algorithms (1) interact with user identity by *reflecting* user self-concepts that are both *multifaceted* and *dynamic* and (2) shape perspectives on others encountered through the algorithm, by orienting users to recognize parts of themselves *refracted* in other users and to experience ephemeral, *diffracted* connections with groups of similar others. We describe how the algorithmic crystal framework can extend theory and inform new lines of research around the implications of algorithms in self-concept development and social life.

CCS Concepts: • **Human-centered computing → Empirical studies in collaborative and social computing**.

Additional Key Words and Phrases: algorithms, self-concept, crystallized self, folk theories, TikTok