

Kraus
Digital Anthropology
Davies
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Final Project: The Assemblages of a Digital Persona

What is identity?

Upon creating this “fake person,” it was scary how easy it was to type in credentials and as long as I had a date of birth and unique username, I was able to create a whole pseudo-identity.

Lillian Marin is now a unique person on the following social media sites: Spotify, Pinterest, Facebook, SnapChat, and Instagram. Lillian also has a Twitter account, but Twitter was the one site that flagged me as a threat. What was interesting about Twitter is I signed her up with a link to her Facebook account. I hand picked her interests by what was sent by Professor Davies. I verified the account via email. However, somehow Twitter picked up that Lillian could possibly not be valid, and now I am unable to even reach a page in her persona to try to re-verify.

While developing Lillian’s social media, I found myself relying on photos the most. I do not know if this is due to my generation’s relationship with social media. Instagram and Facebook were easy enough to set up, but when trying to like certain movies and books, I was unable to find selections. Instagram, due to just being photos, was limited to content without an actual person and their face. Given her hobbies and background, I found myself gravitating towards posting just about the provided narrative. I understand social media usually isn’t so cut and dry, but it was hard to think of potential idiosyncrasies to post about when given a map of interests.

I also noticed that I kept getting ideas of things to post for Lillian as I went about my day, but due to it being on my computer and not cell phone, I was unable to post a lot of them. It is interesting how having social media on a handheld device gives constant access to our immediate thoughts and feelings. If I had Lillian's social media on my phone, I may have been able to create better content for her pages. In retrospect, I wish I would have had a day of just posting as Lillian, but I was afraid of signing out of my personal accounts on my phone.

Given the limited history, Facebook has not popped ads but a lot of recommended articles and videos are Chicago-area based. I was confused at first, but realized it was due to the IP address in my work computer. The one musician I followed on Facebook was a David Bowie fan page (her cat's name is Bowie from an ex-boyfriend). A lot of other fan pages for David Bowie are also on Lillian's feed. Due to the limited elapsed time and content, I don't think Facebook knows how to advertise to Lillian. In fact, a few suggested videos were the same suggestions on my personal Facebook page.

As I write this, Instagram also kicked me out. When trying to send a confirmation code to sign back in, it is flagging me as not valid. It took me a few tries to get my cell phone to go through to get the confirmation code. As I look at suggested content, Lillian is getting a lot of funny videos about cooking, home improvement, babies, dogs, cats, and relationships. I liked about three suggested cat videos, and after about an hour, a few more cat videos popped up on the feed. The suggested videos had also picked up antiques as an interest of the user.

I tried sharing a pin to Facebook. It only showed Pinterest. Then, on Instagram, I decided to share one of the suggested videos to Facebook. I was wondering if perhaps it would change the advertising algorithm. The suggested reels changed slightly, picking up that Lillian was from

a smaller town (Hastings, MN), nursing (she is a Public Health Manager), and more videos similar to what was reposted (funny video about men and girlfriends).

This final project made me realize in order to get data on the user, social media depends on each of these accounts communicating with one another. By sharing a video from one platform to the other, both sites gain information. By watching videos and liking certain ones, the page will gain more access to what will interest the user. The user and media sites must interact in order to build viable marketing targets. The less content the user engages, the more generic the advertising and suggestions will be.

Pettis states, “In other words, the evolving infrastructures of social media pull us in two different directions. On the one hand, we are being increasingly herded toward the same stories, the same sites, the same viral pseudo-events, thanks to protocols like hashtags and other trending signals. On the other hand, our digital diet has lost its daily punctuation, thanks to the recent vast increase in ‘time-shifted consumption.’” (*Infinite Distraction*, p. 91). I found truth in this sentiment by being a fake person on social media. The hashtags I used were not very popular, because part of me did not want to bring attention to Lillian’s profile. Lillian is 32 and I am 37, and I found a lot of suggested content to be the same as Rachel Kraus’. Instagram seems to think all women in their thirties like cooking and home project crafts despite their posts. The assemblage takes a bit longer than a week to pick up on the breadcrumbs left by the user.

Zubroff isn’t as delicate about the topic of surveillance mining. Per the article “The Discovery of Behavior Surplus”: “1. A new economic order that claims human experience as free raw material for hidden commercial practices of extraction, prediction, and sales; 2. A parasitic economic logic in which the production of goods and services is subordinated to a new global architecture of behavioral modification...” While our project is a good start to see exactly

what and how Lillian's data will be used in the bigger picture, Emily and I both agreed it would be more interesting to see what our profiles looked like in six months. While we are used to Google popping ads in a moment of mentioning a certain brand or item, it appears to need a cell phone and some history to accurately send messages to the user.

Below is a reminder of what was given for a made-up person. I highlighted in yellow what was picked up by social media by the advertising/marketing algorithm. The writing in red is what was missed.

Here is your fake person. The image is also made up and is from

<https://thispersondoesnotexist.com/>

This is Lillian Marín. She is a **Public Health Services Manager** in the Dakota County Government center in **Hastings, MN**. She is **32, female** and is unmarried, but has been with the same partner for three years. She lives in **West Saint Paul** with her two **cats**, Sandy and **Bowie**. Bowie she inherited from a previous long-term relationship. She really dislikes the outdoors and prefers **indoor activities—bowling, curling, and even basketball** sometimes. She enjoys shopping for **antique** furniture, watching horror movies. She took a **painting** class once and dreams of finding time to do that again. She grew up in an agnostic home, but discovered **organized religion** in high school. She **crafts—earrings and small jewelry**—and occasionally sells those things on her Etsy page.

Another reflection worth sharing was the juggle of viewing Emily's character, Patrick, and trying to pick up his user profile. At first, I just glanced at photos and made assumptions, but after reading his tags and comments, the person Emily was supposed to communicate was much more clear. It takes many different facets on social media to read, view, and engage to get to know the digital self - much like the assemblage which makes up humanity online.