Many internet and digital media users choose to make and share ideas, information, stories, music, photos, video, and so on. They consider it enjoyable and creative and a big part of the online experience.

The result is a participatory culture in which members of the public take active part in the creation and consumption of their cultural products and are often expected to share them freely and widely.
The so-called sharing economy transcends the internet. Companies like Uber and Airbnb have devised ways for such products as cars and vacation homes to be shared or rented instead of purchased.

Many digital sites and apps seem free to visit or use. Personal information for which users are not compensated is generally provided during such visits.

Social media platforms, such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Wikipedia, YouTube, and a host of blogs and other sharing sites, rely heavily if not entirely on individuals producing content for public consumption and thus engaging in digital labor.
It has also become common to express one’s creativity by remixing and reconfiguring existing content, like music and video.

In this *remix culture*, materials are taken from the pieces of existing texts, whether it is legally permissible to do so or not, and new versions are created.

As these new texts are then frequently remixed by others, the processes of production and consumption become merged – hence the combo words “prosuming” and “prosumption” that have been popularized by sociologist George Ritzer.
CROWDSOURCING

When several or more people take on or share a task in a distributed but collective manner, physically separated from one another, the activity is called *crowdsourcing* (or, when the task is explicitly oriented toward raising money, *crowdfunding*).
CROWDSOURCING

Some say that crowdsourcing returns to the masses a certain level of power.

With the ability to find one another in social networks, share information, and contact members of other groups and networks, individuals are given a voice, a platform from which to speak.

There is power in numbers, and there is power in digital networks.
LIKING AND FOLLOWING, AND BEING LIKED AND FOLLOWED

We take part in a different type of economy, one not predicated solely on finances, when we are online. In this economy, which business and management professors Thomas Davenport and John Beck have called the *attention economy*, attention is a much-desired currency, and is particularly easy to measure on social media, in the form of likes, follows, and comments.
OWNERSHIP OF ONLINE CONTENT

The highly participatory sharing economy has complicated copyright matters.

Information on the internet and digital media is often prosumed, crowdsourced, and remixed—created collaboratively by producers and consumers alike, sometimes in large batches.

While general concepts and thoughts (and, interestingly, titles of works) cannot be copyrighted or therefore “owned,” specific intellectual contributions are legally protected. But it is very difficult to isolate and quantify such specifics, especially in the modern media environment.
OWNERSHIP OF ONLINE CONTENT

Creative Commons licenses permit creators to waive some of their copyright rights and state this clearly. It has been credited with expanding the *public domain* in which creative works can be freely produced, consumed, distributed, and remixed or repurposed at will.
Professional journalism and news dissemination have changed dramatically as ordinary citizens untrained in journalistic techniques and ethics have begun to share and publish information on social media without a “gatekeeper.”

*Citizen journalism* has opened up possibilities for spreading information widely and quickly. On social media, it can even go viral. But accuracy and ethics are sometimes sacrificed.
ACCURACY, INACCURACY, AND THE RISE AND TRANSMISSION OF “FAKE” NEWS AND INFORMATION

It is now possible to duplicate websites widely through the use of bots and algorithms that systematically share (and even create) the misinformation in ways that look very real.

Bots can also resemble humans online and it can be difficult if not impossible to tell the difference.

This is a big problem, for it is becoming harder and harder to tell what information comes from a legitimate news site or person, what is accurate and fact-based, and what is merely propaganda, intended to represent an inaccurate, often biased or extreme, point of view.

How much responsibility social media companies like Facebook and Twitter bear in solving this problem is a key debate in the modern digital era.
VERTICAL, OR ASYMMETRICAL, SURVEILLANCE

As people become increasingly available and visible to one another in digital contexts, online surveillance has become a constant reality.

Surveillance is considered asymmetrical or “vertical” when a strong hierarchical power structure is involved, as when governments or corporations seek to track or monitor someone's online activity so as to influence, manage, protect, or direct behavior.

Personal information collected through this process is routinely mined, gathered, shared, and sold for purposes that range from commercial to political to legal.
VERTICAL, OR ASYMMETRICAL, SURVEILLANCE

In many instances, the people being watched may not know they are being surveilled or that the activity is pervasive and ongoing. As the power structure is asymmetrical and does not favor them, they may not feel that they have the means to resist such surveillance.
VERTICAL, OR ASYMMETRICAL, SURVEILLANCE

On the other hand, surveillance can sometimes be positive. It can

• assist in the rescue of people stranded or lost, as locations can often be remotely tracked via one’s smartphone.
• prompt the suggestion of new information or the introduction of new people into one’s life.
• help people fend off intrusions, attacks, or crimes and make them safer
VERTICAL, OR ASYMMETRICAL, SURVEILLANCE

Some organizations specialize in finding or “mining for” the bits of information that we are constantly providing when we are online, and using them to make inferences about what we would like to buy or do or even be.

This is called *data mining*, and it is important to remember that it can and likely does happen all the time when we are online.

In data mining, information is extracted (“mined”) from a larger body of information in order to uncover details or patterns about the behavior of a person or organization.
VERTICAL, OR ASYMMETRICAL, SURVEILLANCE

Some companies exist solely to do this kind of data mining, aggregation, and analysis. In other cases, media organizations like Facebook and Google mine, collect, and aggregate data as people use their products and sell this information to advertisers and to data mining firms that collect it in huge databases.
HORIZONTAL, OR SOCIAL, SURVEILLANCE

To look at what others are doing online is an ordinary, expected part of the online experience. But it really is another type of surveillance.

Rather than surveillance coming from someone more powerful, in these instances surveillance is more “horizontal,” and is undertaken by people with roughly similar amounts of power.

This everyday, continual kind of “watching” or looking at one another’s profiles and online activities is a common part of day-to-day life on digital and social media, and has been termed social surveillance by communication professor Alice Marwick.
The internet is not a private place; there are really no corners in which to hide.

Everything can be potentially accessed and seen, multiple audiences and contexts come into contact with one another, and it is difficult to ascertain who may or may not see content at any given time.

It is also more difficult for data to remain obscured and hidden on the internet, which inevitably diminishes our autonomy and freedom.
PRIVACY AND OBSCURITY

Whether we realize it or not, we constantly leave a *digital footprint* when we are online and even when we are simply sending text messages.

It is important to be aware of this at all times when we are in digital spaces. We must remember that everything we do online is public and archived, and can be viewed and interpreted by anyone at anytime – parents, younger siblings, law enforcement, future employers, even your teachers.

Jobs have been lost, and reputations ruined (Google “Justine Sacco”), when this is forgotten – even momentarily.

Let’s be careful out there!
These lecture slides support the Sage Publications book *Superconnected: The Internet, Digital Media, and Techno-Social Life* (second edition, 2018) by Mary Chayko (Rutgers University) and were created by Mary Chayko and Shravan Regret Iyer, 2018. Text is excerpted from, and sources are referenced in, the book. Permission to use and share this slideshow is granted; please acknowledge Mary Chayko as author. For permissions and options for customizing these slides, contact Prof. Chayko at mary.chayko@rutgers.edu.

Review copies of *Superconnected* and copies for purchase may be obtained [here](#).