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Section 3: Safety and online videos

Ways in which videos are created and shared online.

Introduction

Digital stories, generally, are short stories created by combining recorded narrative with images (still or moving. In short, they are a type of video as they merge audio and visual elements to tell as story.

Generally, there are two ways of sharing videos on the internet.

Produce offline, then publish online

This method is for both long-form and short-form videos. There are video-sharing sites where long-form videos can be published (YouTube, Vimeo, Daily Motion). Most popular social media platforms allow short-form videos (Twitter, Facebook, Insta-Stories).

Livestreaming: record as you post online

This is when a user records an event or an activity, and shares it as they are recording it. Some livestreaming sites (Bambuser, YouTube Live, Twitch) allow for longer streaming time. Platforms like Instagram Live, Facebook Live and Periscope (owned by Twitter) allow for shorter streaming time. Some livestreaming platforms like Instagram Live and SnapChat delete the streamed videos within a given period of time.

This section will tackle the safety consideration in both types of online video sharing.

Learning objectives

This section focuses on the ways in which videos are created and shared online. By the end of this section, it is expected that the storyteller will:

- Have an appreciation of the safety concerns in publishing videos on online platforms
- Have an understanding of how to better select video sharing platforms

Safety issues in sharing digital stories online

There are three areas of safety issues: ownership over the digital stories, what do digital storytelling platforms know about the storytellers, and safety responses of digital storytelling platforms.

First things, first: Who owns the stories?

The storyteller owns the stories -- a simple enough answer.

But when it is a digital story that they create, the answer is not that simple.

The nature of ¨digital¨ means that a storyteller has to concede some control over the ownership of their stories. Digital content can easily be copied or downloaded into individual computers or mobile phones, and then shared on other platforms.

There are software and browser plug-ins that allow people to download YouTube videos into their own machines, allowing them the ability to be able to edit videos. In that case, who then owns the story? If the user, who downloaded a video, edits it in a way that the original storyteller did not intend, is there a recourse for the storyteller?

For example, Instagram Live stories are supposed to be temporary, they are not permanent. By default, an Instagram Live video will remain on the user´s page for one month, then it is deleted. But nothing stops followers of that user from downloading those temporary Instagram Live feeds, and then sharing them on other social platforms or private online conversations -- without the knowledge and consent of the person who originally posted that story.

When a storyteller uses a commercial platform like Facebook, Instagram (which Facebook owns), YouTube (Google) or Twitter, then it becomes more complex.

They have to share ownership with these platforms. All of these platforms, in their End User License Agreements, state that they reserve the right to use all content for their marketing and advertising purposes. They also have the right to delete whatever is published on their platforms, whether or not the creator of that content agrees. When using these platforms, a storyteller will have to cede control over the ownership of their stories.

According to Facebook´s license agreement, they lose ownership of content when the user deletes it. However, they clearly state that they cannot do anything about other accounts that have shared that content. In essence, because Facebook shares ownership of content with its users, they still own that deleted content which could still sit on their servers.

Secondly, what do these platforms know about the storyteller?

More than that, these platforms collect and own other data in relation to the storyteller and their stories. They also own the connections between those different data sets, and are able to share them with Third Party companies for marketing and advertising purposes. These platforms have also reported that they get approached by States for information about their users and their activities on these platforms, usually for criminal investigation[1]. Facebook, in fact, produces its own report on government requests for user data[2].

These considerations also apply for when an user stores or backs-up their data on the cloud (for example, Google Drive and Dropbox). A storyteller might not be using video-sharing platforms to publish their stories, but they might be using internet platforms to store the raw materials for their digital stories (the images, the script, the audio recordings).

While over the years, these platforms have developed guidelines about government requests, they retain the right to change these guidelines and not inform their users about changes. More than that, this shows that these internet companies hold a lot of data, connections among data sets that provide accurate profile of users not only in terms of identity, but likes, preferences, social network and activities, and information about their users.

There are ways to obscure identity on the internet, to make connections between stories and the identities of their storytellers less obvious. Depending on how the storyteller foresees the impact of their stories, then they can take steps in protecting themselves before they share their stories on this platforms.

Thirdly, what do these platforms do when a storyteller is harassed on their platforms?

Online gender-based violence has been a growing trend on the internet for over a decade. It has escalated in a way where it is commonplace for women, queer and non-binary identities on the internet are attacked for their sexuality, appearance, opinions and even when they share lived experiences. These platforms do the minimum in response to this kind of harassment. In their End User License Agreement, they hold no liability for any harm caused over their platforms.

In simple terms, if a storyteller is harassed for their story in any of those platforms, they are on their own. At most, they can report incidents and block specific accounts, but how it gets addressed beyond that is at the platform´s discretion.

Sometimes because of the lack of knowledge of local contexts, the politics of those who own Facebook and their understanding of the exercise of freedom of speech, the common response is to tell you, the harassed victim, to block the abuser or to make your posts private. However, this only means that you are being abused in spaces where you are not privy to assess the extent of harm done against you.

Given the gaps in platform response to online harassment, it is also important to note that many feminists and women´s rights activists have found other ways to respond to the abuse and harassment they and other women and LGBTQI identities have experienced. Very often, these activists rally around someone who is being harassed online, either to report the harassers or directly respond to them. A storyteller, if they are harassed online for their stories, can reach out to feminists and activists for support.

Safety considerations in choosing platforms for video sharing

General digital security considerations

- Does the platform allow users to maintain strong passwords (more than 12 character passwords)? Better, does it tell the user that the passwords that they are using are not secure?

- Does the platform use HTTPS throughout its site? HTTPS is an encryption protocol that protects information as it travels through the internet.

Platform-specific considerations

- Will the platform allow users to control who can see their videos?

- Does the platform have a privacy setting for video content?

- Does the platform allow a user to control who can comment on their videos?

- Does the platform allow for downloading or copying of users videos without their consent?

- Does the platform allow the user to delete their videos from the platform? And would this mean that if it was shared or posted elsewhere (through the same platform) that the videos would automatically be deleted as well?

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1 See for example: https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2013/aug/27/facebook-government-user-requests; https://techcrunch.com/2017/12/18/government-requests-for-facebook-user-data-continue-to-increase-worldwide/; and https://techcrunch.com/2019/11/13/facebook-says-government-demands-for-user-data-are-at-a-record-high/

2 See https://govtrequests.facebook.com/government-data-requests

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