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Active Curation: agency and algorithms' effect on young Australian adult's exposure to cultural commentary on social media platforms.**PARTICIPANT INFORMATION STATEMENT****(1) What is this study about?**

You are invited to take part in a research study that explores how young adults use social media to stay informed on topical issues. While many people consume news, there are other ways that they might be informed about different issues: by seeing memes about the COVID-19 pandemic, friends commenting on a celebrity's death, group chat about an upcoming protest, or a cartoon that comments on a social change movement. These are all examples of cultural commentary – any phenomenon, issue or event that might be of interest to the wider public rather than just your immediate friends and family. This research seeks to understand the extent to which individual users can control or influence how much of this kind of content is shown in their feed through the ways they interact with the social media platform itself.

You have been invited to participate in this study because you use social media, and are between 18 and 30 years of age. This Participant Information Statement tells you about the research study. Knowing what is involved will help you decide if you want to take part in the study. Please read this sheet carefully and ask questions about anything that you don't understand or want to know more about.

Participation in this research study is voluntary.

By giving consent to take part in this study you are telling us that you:

- ✓ Understand what you have read.
- ✓ Agree to take part in the research study as outlined below.
- ✓ Agree to the use of your personal information as described.

You will be given a copy of this Participant Information Statement to keep.

(2) Who is running the study?

Agata Stepnik is conducting this study as the basis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at The University of Sydney. She is being supervised by Dr Jonathon Hutchinson, Senior Lecturer Online Communication and Media.

(3) What will the study involve for me?

The study can be conducted entirely online, or a blend of online and in-person. It will start with a one to one interview. This initial interview, which will be recorded for transcription purposes only, will capture details about which social media sites you use, who you follow on these, how many people are in your personal contact lists, and how you typically use each social media platform.

At the conclusion of the interview, the researcher will join your social networks/follow your profile, and you will be invited to do the same with her personal accounts. As such, she will be able to see any content that you choose to share on these sites (dependant on your security settings) for the duration of the study. For this reason, you will be asked to make a post to your various social media accounts that you are participating in this research project, and that the researcher is in your contact/followers list. You are encouraged to tag the researcher in any content publicly shared by other accounts that you think is particularly interesting.

A series of 3 follow up 30-60 minute interviews will include “app tours” – this is where you will share your screen with the researcher as you go about your typical social media activities, sharing your thoughts on how and why you are interacting with content (or not interacting). You will also be asked about any changes to your use of these sites, such as adding or removing people from your contact list or following/unfollowing accounts.

You will also be asked to take screenshots of your activity in between follow up interviews. These screenshots are intended to act as a ‘media diary’ memory aid for your activity and the topics you saw in the lead up to the interview. If a screenshot is particularly relevant to the study, you’ll be asked to share it with the researcher. These screenshots will need to be anonymised before you send them (redacting any content that might identify an individual, including yourself). Instructions of how to do this on your device will be shared with you in the initial interview, and you will be reminded to do this during the following interviews.

A final interview will be held at the conclusion of the study, at which point the researcher will unfollow your social media accounts.

All data collection will be anonymised. At the start of the study you will be assigned a random number that will match your responses for the duration of the study, without identifying you personally in the collected data. Only the researcher (Agata Stepnik) will have access to the document matching your assigned number to your name, and this document will not be submitted as part of the PhD. This document will be destroyed at the study’s conclusion.

(4) How much of my time will the study take?

In total, it is anticipated that you will spend 2-3 hours a month, for 2 months total, participating in the full study. There will be a total of five interviews during this period, each

two weeks apart. The screenshots should take no more than a few minutes of your time, however, this will come down to how much content you are exposed to and engage with on the day.

(5) Do I have to be in the study? Can I withdraw from the study once I've started?

Being in this study is completely voluntary and you do not have to take part. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your current or future relationship with the researchers or anyone else at the University of Sydney.

You are free to stop an interview/app tour at any time. You may also refuse to answer any questions that you do not wish to answer during the interview. You can choose not to participate in the media diary data collection at any time. You can do so and withdraw from the study entirely or continue on with interviews and app tours. The decision to share this material is at your discretion – refusal to share will not impact your ongoing participation in the study.

If you decide to take part in the study and then change your mind later, you are free to withdraw at any time. You can do this by emailing the researcher at agata.stepnik@sydney.edu.au

If you decide to withdraw from the study, we will not collect any more information from you. Please let us know at the time when you withdraw what you would like us to do with the information we have collected about you up to that point. If you wish, your information will be removed from our study records and will not be included in the study results, up to the point that we have analysed and published the results.

(6) Are there any risks or costs associated with being in the study?

Normally there would be no risks or costs to you as a participant in this study, except the inconvenience of giving up your personal time to participate in the study.

Should the researcher become privy to potentially illegal activity in your social media activity during the project, they will let you know of this and conclude your participation in the study. Should the activity have the potential to cause harm either to yourself or to others, the activity will also be referred to the relevant authorities. Any data collected to that point will not be included in the final research data.

(7) Are there any benefits associated with being in the study?

We cannot guarantee that you will receive any direct benefits from being in the study.

(8) What will happen to information about me that is collected during the study?

Your information will be stored securely and your identity/information will be kept strictly confidential, except as required by law. Study findings may be published, but you will not be individually identifiable in these publications.

By providing your consent, you are agreeing to us collecting some personal information about you for the purposes of this research study. Your information will only be used for the purposes outlined in this Participant Information Statement, unless you consent otherwise.

As there is a single researcher working on this study, audio recording equipment will be used to record the interviews. This will allow the researcher to gather accurate data from each interview without interrupting participants or slowing down the pace of discussion. These recordings will not be published or distributed – they will be used for analysis by the researcher only.

When you are sharing your screen or screenshots you have taken with the researcher, no visual capture or recording will be taken. The researcher will write hand written notes only.

The results of this study will be submitted to the department of Media and Communications within the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences as part of a PhD Thesis.

For the duration of the study, participant data will be collected electronically and stored on the University's Research Data Store (RDS). Access to this data will be limited to the researcher and her supervising academic, Dr Jonathon Hutchinson, and auxiliary supervisor Dr Fiona R Martin.

Data collected for this study may be used in future research projects by the researcher. For this reason, data will be retained for a period of 10 years.

(9) Can I tell other people about the study?

Yes, you are welcome to tell other people about the study.

(10) What if I would like further information about the study?

When you have read this information, Agata Stepnik will be available to discuss it with you further and answer any questions you may have. If you would like to know more at any stage during the study, please feel free to contact Agata Stepnik, PhD Candidate at the University of Sydney, on 0410 452 174 or email agata.stepnik@sydney.edu.au

(11) Will I be told the results of the study?

You have a right to receive feedback about the overall results of this study. You can tell us that you wish to receive feedback by ticking the relevant box on the consent form. This feedback will be in the form of a one page lay summary. You will receive this feedback after the study is finished.

(12) What if I have a complaint or any concerns about the study?

Research involving humans in Australia is reviewed by an independent group of people called a Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC). The ethical aspects of this study have been approved by the HREC of the University of Sydney [protocol number 2020/625]. As part of this process, we have agreed to carry out the study according to the National Statement *on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007)*. This statement has been developed to protect people who agree to take part in research studies.

If you are concerned about the way this study is being conducted or you wish to make a complaint to someone independent from the study, please contact the university using the details outlined below. Please quote the study title and protocol number.

The Manager, Ethics Administration, University of Sydney:

- **Telephone:** +61 2 8627 8176
- **Email:** human.ethics@sydney.edu.au
- **Fax:** +61 2 8627 8177 (Facsimile)

This information sheet is for you to keep