

Performance Crime: How Social Media Could Be Perpetuating Violence

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Digital social media. A revolution of the 21st century that would be unimaginable to almost anyone just 20 years into the previous century. The first recognized social media platform was “Six Degrees”, which launched in 1997 and allowed users to upload pictures and make friends through the platform.¹ The first platform to reach a million users was MySpace, which achieved this milestone in 2004.² The company that would go on to define social media, Facebook, launched the same year.³ In under a decade, the platform would hit the billion user milestone, with a user count over 3 billion as of this year.⁴ Since Facebook launched, numerous other companies like Reddit, YouTube, TikTok, and others have leapt into the realm of social media, each carving out their own area in the massive pool of users.⁵ While company spokesmen boast of the interconnectivity and advancement of society as a result of their platforms, there are many concerns which bubble up under the surface. In the past decade, CEOs and other executives for the various platforms, including founder of Facebook Mark Zuckerberg, have been called numerous times to testify in front of Congress, answering questions about anything from data privacy to the harm to young users.⁶ I plan to discuss how social media has fueled criminal and oftentimes violent conduct, in something sometimes referred to as “performance crime.”⁷ I write this not to condemn the concept of social media nor to point out some miracle solution seemingly ignored by the many people triumphing this issue. I am an active social media user and this, like so many other deeply rooted issues in the world, is quite a complex problem which is unlikely to have any simple solution. I hope merely to point a light at the problem and hopefully to spread awareness on an issue resulting in more violence and death across the country.

From my research, there appears to be two main facets of violence occurring due to social media.

(1) Enemy “Beef”

The first facet is actually a result of the very same thing so many companies attempt to offer on their platforms, interconnectivity. While the internet has been a wonderful place for you

¹ Esteban Ortiz-Ospina, *The Rise of Social Media*, OUR WORLD IN DATA (Sept. 18, 2019)

<https://ourworldindata.org/rise-of-social-media#:~:text=The%20first%20recognizable%20social%20media,make%20friends%20with%20other%20users.>

² *Id.*

³ Mythili Devarakonda, *'The Social Network': When was Facebook created? How long did it take to create Facebook?*, USA TODAY (July 25, 2022) <https://www.usatoday.com/story/tech/2022/07/25/when-was-facebook-created/10040883002/>.

⁴ Brian Dean, *Facebook User & Growth Statistics*, BACKLINKO (Feb. 23, 2024) <https://backlinko.com/facebook-users>.

⁵ Ortiz-Ospina, *supra* note 1.

⁶ Kari Paul, *Zuckerberg tells parents of social media victims at Senate hearing: 'I'm sorry for everything you've been through'*, THE GUARDIAN (Jan. 31, 2024) <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2024/jan/31/tiktok-meta-x-congress-hearing-child-sexual-exploitation>; *Transcript of Mark Zuckerberg's Senate Hearing*, THE WASHINGTON POST (April 10, 2018) <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-switch/wp/2018/04/10/transcript-of-mark-zuckerbergs-senate-hearing/>.

⁷ Eric Revell, *TikTok, social media fuel 'performance crime'*, FOX BUSINESS (May 23, 2023) <https://www.foxbusiness.com/economy/tiktok-social-media-fuel-performance-crime>.

to reach out and connect with friends and family, it also puts you much closer to any potential enemies. Some purport it to have begun in Chicago in the early 2010's, where users would explicitly bait "opps" or rivals.⁸ These videos lead to private messages, where users would challenge each other to "drop a pin" revealing their exact location, in order to "resolve" their conflict, else they be branded a coward.⁹ These interactions have been linked to numerous shootings and is spread across numerous platforms like Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and Snapchat.¹⁰ Famously a dispute between young Chicago rappers Chief Keef and Lil JoJo built to Lil JoJo dropping his pin on twitter, revealing his location, stating that he wanted to "do something about this beef." In under 3 hours, Lil JoJo was murdered at the very location he shared on the platform. Not limited to individuals, this kind of activity often finds itself used to fuel gang violence, in similar scenarios where rivals "call out" rival gang members, unsurprisingly leading to real shootings and real deaths.¹¹

(2) Trends

The second common area of social media violence is surrounding "trends". Trends are the constant ebb and flow that fuels social media, whether it be a particular dance, audio, or topic, whose surges fuel many social media platforms.¹² While many tend to be harmless, violence is not excluded from ending up a popular trend.

In fact, notable even back in 2013 was the concept of "fight compilations" which would show up often on websites like YouTube and World Star Hip Hop.¹³ These so-called compilations would take the form of videos composed of everyday fights from everyday people, usually taken on a poor-quality device like a phone from the time.¹⁴

Another alarming concept that takes the form of trends is known as "swatting", which is found primarily on platforms which offer live-streamed videos from content creators, but has also affected high-profile individuals like Kim Kardashian and even the White House.¹⁵ The trend involved viewers using various techniques to determine the live location of the victim, before calling the police local to said victim and purporting some false claim in order to induce a law enforcement response to the location, often under the pretense that the call requires an armed response.¹⁶ Unsurprisingly, this trend in particular has been deadly to many.

Outside of these two specific examples, there has been a vast list of trends resulting in harmful consequences. Many readers will recognize the term "Kia Boys", which refers to a group often present on social media who would record themselves stealing cars, primarily Kia, before taking them on a joyride.¹⁷ The trend spread like wildfire across digital media, and often

⁸ Alec MacGillis, *How Social Media Apps Could Be Fueling Homicides Among Young Americans*, PROPUBLICA (Aug. 8, 2023) <https://www.propublica.org/article/social-media-violence-young-americans>.

⁹ *Id.*

¹⁰ *Id.*

¹¹ Brittany Bostic, *Does Social Media Perpetuate Youth Violence*, THE MICHIGAN YOUTH VIOLENCE PREVENTION CENTER (Feb. 20, 2014) <https://yvpc.sph.umich.edu/social-media-perpetuate-youth-violence/>.

¹² Trending, BUFFER.COM <https://buffer.com/social-media-terms/trending>.

¹³ Bostic, *supra* note 11.

¹⁴ *Id.*

¹⁵ Josh Campbell & Kat Jaeger, *High-profile political figures are the targets in the latest wave of 'swatting' incidents. Why the trend is so alarming*, CNN (Jan. 15, 2024) <https://www.cnn.com/2024/01/14/us/swatting-incidents-trend-explained/index.html>.

¹⁶ *Id.*

¹⁷ Revell, *supra* note 7.

included a demonstration of a defect that allowed a somewhat simple path to breaking into the car and hotwiring it.¹⁸ In other cases teens have overdosed on medication attempting to replicate another viral trend spreading through various platforms.¹⁹

The problem with social media instigated violence is not just its mere existence on the internet, but how it can influence those viewing it. Studies have shown that youth who view violent conduct on a regular basis are “more likely to exhibit antisocial behavior, ranging from imitative violent behavior with toys to criminal violence, acceptance of violent behavior, increased feelings of hostility, and desensitization toward violent behavior.”²⁰ It has also been shown that youth who continually view this form of content in media are more likely to “result to violence to solve their problems”.²¹ This is not a particularly hard concept to imagine, the more one views certain content it follows that they would be more likely to accept and even participate in it.

This, in my opinion, is what makes the issue of such importance. While companies like Meta, which owns platforms like Facebook and Instagram, mention their code of conduct strictly prohibits this form of content, that is no small task.²² About 4.75 billion items are shared on Facebook a day.²³ Imagine the process of moderating all of that content, even just on Facebook alone. In the first quarter of 2018, 863 million posts were removed by Facebook, and 583 million fake accounts were removed.²⁴ It is a goliath of a task. While pressure continues to grow on these platforms, with even a national ban being considered for platforms like TikTok, there does not appear to be a solution in sight.²⁵

The internet in many ways is like Pandora’s box, once something is posted, it is nearly impossible for it to be completely scrubbed from the internet.²⁶ For every post removed on a platform, countless more will be posted the very instance the first is removed. In the end, the best hope we might have is to continue holding these platforms accountable and pushing for safer platforms for us to enjoy. While it may not be a task with a clear-cut answer, it does not mean we can’t continue advocating for the minimization of these violent consequences to the lowest point possible.

¹⁸ *Id.*

¹⁹ Audrey Conklin, *New Jersey teen hospitalized after TikTok Benadryl challenge: report*, FOX NEWS (April 28, 2023) <https://www.foxnews.com/us/new-jersey-teen-hospitalized-tiktok-benadryl-challenge-report>.

²⁰ Bostic, *supra* note 11.

²¹ *Id.*

²² Tracee Wilkins, et al., *Why Social Media May Be Fueling Violence Among the Young*, NBC WASHINGTON (Nov. 14, 2023) <https://www.nbcwashington.com/news/local/dc-gun-violence/why-social-media-may-be-fueling-violence-among-the-young/3470712/>.

²³ Jimit Bagadiya, *38 Facebook Statistics and Facts for Every Marketer in 2024*, SOCIALPILOT.CO (Feb. 22, 2024) <https://www.socialpilot.co/facebook-marketing/facebook-statistics#:~:text=On%20average%2C%20350%20million%20photos,by%20Facebook%20users%20each%20day.>

²⁴ Sheera Frenkel, *Facebook Says It Deleted 865 Million Posts, Mostly Spam*, NEW YORK TIMES (May 15, 2018) <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/05/15/technology/facebook-removal-posts-fake-accounts.html>.

²⁵ Kevin Freking, Halleluya Hadero, & Mary Clare Jalonick, *House Passes a Bill That Could Lead to a TikTok Ban if Chinese Owner Refuses to Sell*, AP NEWS (March 13, 2024) <https://apnews.com/article/tiktok-ban-house-vote-china-national-security-8fa7258fae1a4902d344c9d978d58a37>.

²⁶ Dave Moore, *Once on the Internet, Always on the Internet*, THE NORMAN TRANSCRIPT (March 18, 2021) https://www.normantranscript.com/news/once-on-the-internet-always-on-the-internet/article_4bb953b0-8804-11eb-9bad-c7b05bdeb4cc.html.