

## Isabell Prophet: Social Media

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### Social Media

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ENGLISH SAMPLE TRANSLATION

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**Who are we without social media?**

If you want to get to know us people of the 21st century really well, you have to look at the internet. Everything is there: Hobbies, wishes, desires. Friendship, love, family. Goals. Fears. The perplexity of everyday life, the hopes, the ideals. Anyone who wants to explore society is well supplied with data and stories online.

But what will remain when the internet is no longer there? Let's think 2000 years into the future. How will we be remembered? Maybe it will be a new age. Let us imagine the following: Our society is destroyed sometime between now and this day in the future, perhaps by war, perhaps by the weather or a pandemic. (Of course there are a handful of survivors, otherwise this story wouldn't work).

Nobody maintains the nuclear power plants any more; they eventually destroy themselves. No one controls the power lines, so the renewables don't help. For a while, it will still be blinking in the data centres of this world. But the batteries are getting empty. At some point, DVDs disintegrate. Hard disks lose their storage power, USB- Sticks as well. Water penetrates. What was once the memory of our everyday life begins to rust.

Soon there will be nothing left. And when our civilisation has collapsed, the survivors will start again.

So what will their descendants of the future find of us? With a lot of luck, they will discover preserved books, notebooks, dumbbells. They might find skateboards, bicycles, cars, motorbikes. There are stickers with Instagram names on e-scooters. In the books there is something about "Chat messages". On the notebook they may find a sticker with the hashtag #yolo. Maybe at some point they will come across a cellar where they discover smart phones. Maybe they will even manage to make the old devices readable.

But they won't find any data. No TikTok stories, no WhatsApp chats. All digital evidence of our culture is lost forever. We won't leave any of it behind.

**SOCIAL MEDIA****Social Media**

978-3-551-32143-5, June 2023

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Who are we without our data? Without chats and videos and selfies and voice messages? The science of the future will perhaps work with similar methods to those of the present: using buildings, objects, skeletons and documents, they want to find out how we lived. And documents are crucial in this. Tablets with cuneiform writing have been found from the Sumerians. The Egyptians left behind written characters chiselled into the walls of the tombs of their mighty men. The oldest known characters were discovered in what is now Bulgaria; they are probably around 5000 years old.

Mostly, such records only show trade data or the not quite realistically portrayed lives of the masters. Manuscripts are considered more authentic evidence. We know very little about Mayan culture, for example; Western conquerors destroyed all but four of the manuscripts 500 years ago. What remains are stone carvings in temples. But what do they tell us about everyday life? Practically nothing.

If you want to get to know us people of the 21st century really well, you have to look at the internet. Everything is there: Hobbies, wishes, desires. Friendship, love, family. Goals. Fears. The perplexity of everyday life, the hopes, the ideals. Anyone who wants to explore society is well supplied with data and stories online.

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Soon there will be nothing left. And when our civilisation has collapsed, the survivors will start again. So what will their descendants of the future find of us? With a lot of luck, they will discover preserved books, notebooks, dumbbells. They might find skateboards, bicycles, cars, motorbikes. There are stickers with Instagram names on e-scooters. In the books there is something about "Chat messages". On the notebook they may find a sticker with the hashtag #yolo. Maybe at some point they will come across a cellar where they discover smart phones.

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We know very little about Mayan culture, for example; Western conquerors destroyed all but four of the manuscripts 500 years ago. What remains are stone carvings in temples. But what do they tell us about everyday life?

Basically nothing.

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And us? We will be like the Maya: we will be an enigma. Every society is defined by its communication. How we communicate determines how we live together. It determines what we learn about the people around us and to whom and how many others we can say what we have to say. We are different without social networks. This also applies to those who consciously reject them, because social media shapes our culture. Who are we without social media?

If you want to understand people, you have to look at what they write to each other on WhatsApp, which pictures they mark with a heart on Instagram and which TikTok clips they dance to. Social networks know their users better than their closest friends know them. With "Like" votes, with scrolling, even with a long look, users reveal to the apps what they have sometimes not even revealed to themselves. Social networks are the defining medium of our time. Before, mass communication was something that was only possible for those with power: journalism, politics, business, sport, art and culture - whoever was successful here, was heard. Through social media, we now know that we are not alone. Whatever a person is dealing with at the moment, he or she can find others on the internet who feel the same way. They find support. They find solutions or moral support and they experience: What I am feeling right now, others are feeling too. All of this was completely unthinkable just a generation ago. Anyone who was a teenager until the turn of the millennium was comparatively alone with his most secret worries. Hardly anyone listened to young people, women and minorities. How a teenager in India or a mother in Latin America experienced her life, no one in our country heard. Police violence against black people was discussed locally, if at all. There was no worldwide out cry. And if a woman defended herself against sexual harassment, it was usually men who decided whether the public heard about it and how the story was told. Again and again, women were held partly to blame. Only since women started to

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stand up together against it has the perception changed. Traditional journalistic media are therefore also called "gatekeepers". In an ideal world, this would not be a bad thing: If media differ in their attitudes and if people with different backgrounds and experiences work in an editorial office, then many perspectives are also taken into account. In the meantime, editorial offices are striving to become as diverse as this. But they are not yet. Social media can do this better: in the #metoo movement, for example, many more women were able to express themselves. Actress Alyssa Milano made the hashtag popular on Twitter; soon many media reported. The European Parliament met because there were also allegations against members. Internationally, several politicians resigned, actors lost their roles in series. In the past, it was true that those who were powerful reached many. Now it is always the case that he who reaches many has power.

Today we could understand social media as the democratisation of mass communication: All power to the people. The networks are the technology that gives everyone the chance to be heard and to change the world. There might even be a news event right now that is shaped by social networks: an election, protests in the Arab world or perhaps an action to draw attention to the needs of minorities, to injustices or to ideas for a better life. So social media is big, in every possible sense of the word. What happens on the net, what we post and tell, what we watch, shapes our society and it shapes each and every one of us. All this sounds fantastic. But there are darker sides: Hate and violence, self-doubt, envy, loneliness – modern mass communication also promotes these things. At the same time, social media is basically voluntary. But for many, abstinence means that they are excluded from debates. They miss out if they are not online. There is a certain pressure to be there.

This book explains various aspects of social media. It is about what makes the companies behind the apps tick and what interests they pursue. It explains what

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the use of social media does to the psyche. It deals with bullying and cyber crime. And it shows how people use social media instead of letting themselves be used. Technical terms and concepts are included in the text, for example from economics and psychology. At the very back you will also find an overview with important terms and explanations.

"Klartext: Social Media" gives the background knowledge to communicate confidently in social media. It helps to understand what forces are at work when someone feels bad about others' postings or their reactions. And it tells about people who use social media for their ideals. We all want to live self-determined and free lives, and that's exactly how we want to be on the net. If you know which mechanisms shape social media, you can create a way to live this ideal.

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## 1. The basics

Social networks connect people. We share stories and pictures from our everyday lives, make appointments, send information or express our feelings. They are apps that we open on our smartphones - and there is almost always a surprise waiting inside. The first chapter explains what exactly social networks are, which platforms are currently popular, who is active on them, how and for what they are used and how many people are active. It concludes with a timeline of the platforms, starting with the first precursors in the 1980s and ending (for the time being) with TikTok.

### **Everyday Social Media: How we live and communicate today**

Friendship is online. Social networks tell us something new about the people around us every day. Unlock the display, tap the app - and there's someone there who has something to say, who likes to listen or who offers a distraction from everyday life. Social networks are a lubricant of life. And they promise that we never really have to be alone. Anyone who wants to can still find someone who lives on the other side of the planet. We can learn about the lives of others and approach life forms that arouse our curiosity. Social media brings us together and separates us again: We arrange to meet. Or we cancel the meeting after a long day - and then we prefer to chat, send each other voice messages, pictures or videos, sometimes taken by ourselves, sometimes shared by others. We dance in reels or TikTok clips, we show what we can do and we tell what moves us. Social media is a very lively part of our everyday culture.

***Social media can be all of that:*** chat apps, chats & forums in online games, video apps, picture communities, forums, bookmarks platforms, virtual worlds, learning platforms, dating apps, networks in companies or associations, news

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boards, comment columns, blogs... and generally all places on the internet where people communicate

***You may know:*** Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, BeReal, Yodel, YouTube, Snapchat, WhatsApp, Signal... and what else is part of it for you?

### ***Social media***

"Social media" is usually translated as "social networks". But this term does not say much. A more direct translation would be "interpersonal means of communication." This sounds unwieldy, but reveals more: here we are talking about platforms that allow communication between people. The term "platforms" has become established for social networks because they are often used as playgrounds, for example in journalism or by influencers and companies. A "medium" is a "mediating element." It can be the platform itself or the individual contribution: text messages, videos, pictures and voice messages are common. By social media we usually mean apps or websites where we can reach one or more people. They are therefore a modern form of mass communication: a post gets created once, many people can see it or listen to it.

Communication is therefore possible at any time. No one has to leave the house and go to the neighbour's anymore. Calls without warning are no longer necessary, many even consider them rude. In the past, people felt an inner hurdle of perhaps disturbing others. This hurdle has not completely disappeared, but it has become significantly smaller. Communication via text or voice messages is only a request from the perspective of the person sending. Social media is asynchronous: one does not communicate immediately and necessarily in real time, but can participate in it at different times. For many people, this feels relieving because they have time to think about an answer. Others feel pressured because requests can come at any time. Social media thus removes the

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conditions that time and space had placed on friendships. We don't have to be in one place to be close to each other. We don't have to have time to listen to each other at the same time. Where there is a will, there is only the internet missing. Friendship and closeness become easier because social media is a tool for connectedness.

With the rise of social networks, language has changed. It started in text messages, which used to be limited to 160 characters. LYSM stood for "Love you so much", ILY for "I love you", CU for "see you". Soon emojis were added, first typed as :), later as a small picture. Today, GIFs are also normal, i.e. a sequence of images that combine to form a moving clip. Some people create memes, which are sometimes shared countless times.

### ***The history of memes***

Memes are images or GIFs, sometimes with short texts, that are posted as running gags on the internet. They have been appearing on the internet since the mid-1990s. At that time, they were mainly spread via forums. With the rise of Facebook and Twitter, memes became suitable for the masses. Meme generators emerged on the net, i.e. websites where users could combine images and texts themselves. Well-known examples are the "jealous girlfriend meme", in which a man looks after a woman while his girlfriend looks indignant, or the "disaster girl": a little girl who has gazes swearingly into the camera, while behind her a house is on fire. Zoë Roth - the girl in the picture - later sold the original of the picture for the equivalent of around 460000 euros. For this she used the NFT - Non-fungible Token. They are a kind of digital title deed. Incidentally, Roth will receive a ten percent share in future sales. The so-called "thanks memes" are currently popular. They often show poor image quality. In the text, they are either so pointed that their statement is understood ironically or seems nonsensical. Public figures also become memes time and again, for example in 2021, when the politicians Annalena Baerbock and Robert Habeck met with

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Christian Lindner and Volker Wissing for initial talks about cooperation after the Bundestagelections. Markus Söder, the Prime Minister of Bavaria, is also a popular motif for memes. People often use the funny pictures to generate reach for a political statement.

Smartphones are just devices, apps are just software. But they are the connection to the people who are close to our hearts. So they accompany us emotionally through everyday life. Inspiration in videos and photos, music and texts, personal news or information from the world is available at any time.

With this promise, the apps have become a habit: Anyone sitting on the toilet automatically looks at the display. If you are working on something, be it homework or a professional project, you reach for your phone again and again. The devices and the installed apps catch the idle thoughts.

This works so well because mobile internet is fast enough for this in most places in Germany. A fast internet connection is therefore not a luxury, but the basis for people to be able to communicate with other people, stay informed about the news situation and communicate themselves. Communication technology is a crucial instrument of democracy - and of the entertainment industry. That is why it is constantly being developed to keep up with the demands of society. And that is why rural areas are fighting so hard to get access to fast connections. It is their only chance to participate in the networked everyday life.

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## All there? Almost: Facts and figures about social media



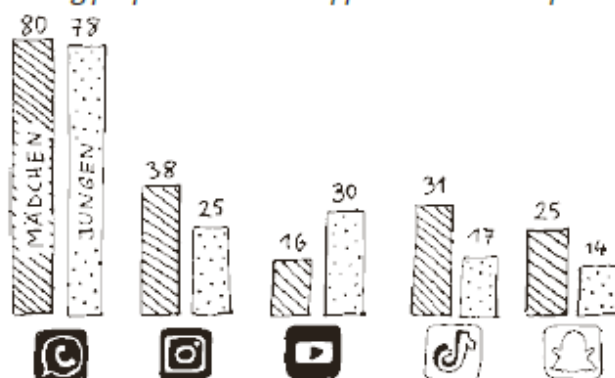
96 percent of 12 to 19-year-olds in Germany have a smartphone  
73 per cent have a computer or laptop (girls 71, boys 75\*)



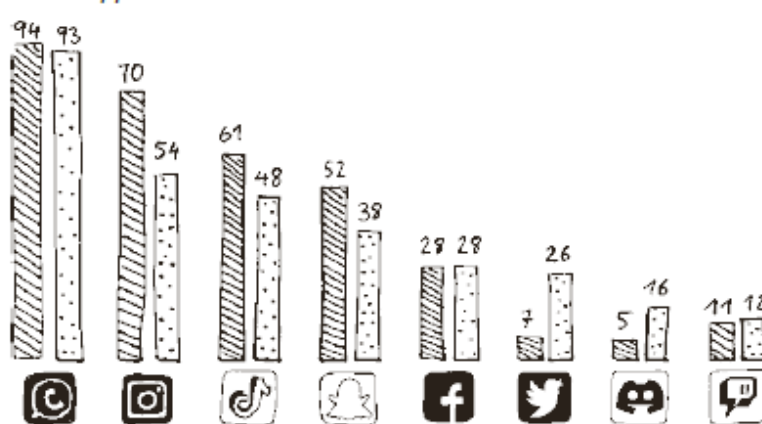
Minutes online per day: 204

\* The source of the data so far assumes a purely binary gender model.

Young people name these apps as the most important:



These apps are used:



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***Learn more?***

If you find the statistics on internet and social media use exciting, then take a look at the JIM study: Under the title "Jugend, Internet, Medien" (Youth, Internet, Media), researchers from the Medienpädagogischer Forschungsverbund Südwest (MPFS) (Media Education Research Network Southwest) investigate how young people move around on the internet, which devices and platforms they use, how they inform themselves and how they communicate. The study is published every year in late autumn with new data.

**Question:** Do you sometimes feel like you're missing out because you're not active on a certain network?

**The apps and who is behind them**

When we tap on an app, we don't notice much of what's happening in the background. We see posts from friends. We see posts from editors or companies and brands that we follow. And we see advertisements. These advertisements are the first sign that there is even more behind the app. For a gigantic number of people, social media is a profession. Some programme the apps, others define strategies to keep the platforms attractive or to grow an account.

At the centre are the corporations behind the social networks. For a long time, there was a misunderstanding that people were the customers. From an entrepreneurial point of view, however, this is not true. The attention of the users is the commodity they offer. That's how the corporations earn their money:

1. People spend as much time as possible on their platforms.
2. In the process, they see advertisements
3. and click on them. This is how the platform earns money.
4. Then they buy a product or service. This is how the advertising company earns money.

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