

Making *Meaningful* Digital Content when Everyone's Exhausted

**Tools for Accessible and Sustainable
Content Creation and Strategy**



ID: A line of burnt matches on a yellow background. Only one match is not burnt.

Hello!

These materials were originally created for a Strategy Session at the 2022 Allied Media Conference In Detroit, Michigan on June 30. They have been expanded for your future use, including resources for further reading and a glossary.

Please note: there may be multiple questions for each activity. These are designed to stretch and flesh out our thinking, so please consider them springboards—feel free to dive in where it suits you. We don't have the answers but hope this can start more conversation around slow communications, community engagements, and access.

Reach out to disconetwork@umich.edu with any questions.

Warm wishes,

The DISCO Network

Created by

Veronica Thomas
Parker Miles
Jessica Hill Riggs



ID: The DISCO Network Logo. A yellow disco ball sits in the center of a black quantum computing symbol. The words 'DISCO NETWORK' in yellow form a circle around it.



RED ASTERISK DENOTES
OPPORTUNITY FOR
FURTHER READING

The resources in this workbook are in a collaborative [Are.na](#) Channel. As you do your own research, please add to this collaborative are.na.

This workbook and accompanying presentation are available for your use. Feel free to share it as a resource with likeminded stakeholders

What is DISCO?

and **why** are we asking . . .

In a media saturated pandemic world, what kind of content makes the most impact?

How can I use social media platforms to imagine a new world instead of perpetuating current harms?

What inspires action instead of numbs?

Digital Inquiry Speculation Collaboration Optimism Network

We are a research consortium across five universities taking an interdisciplinary approach to researching the cultural impact of technology.

2020

Mainstream
backlash against
tech giants and
social media
platforms

The
Guardian

Sheryl Sandberg's influence reaches all of us. But it's a troubling legacy

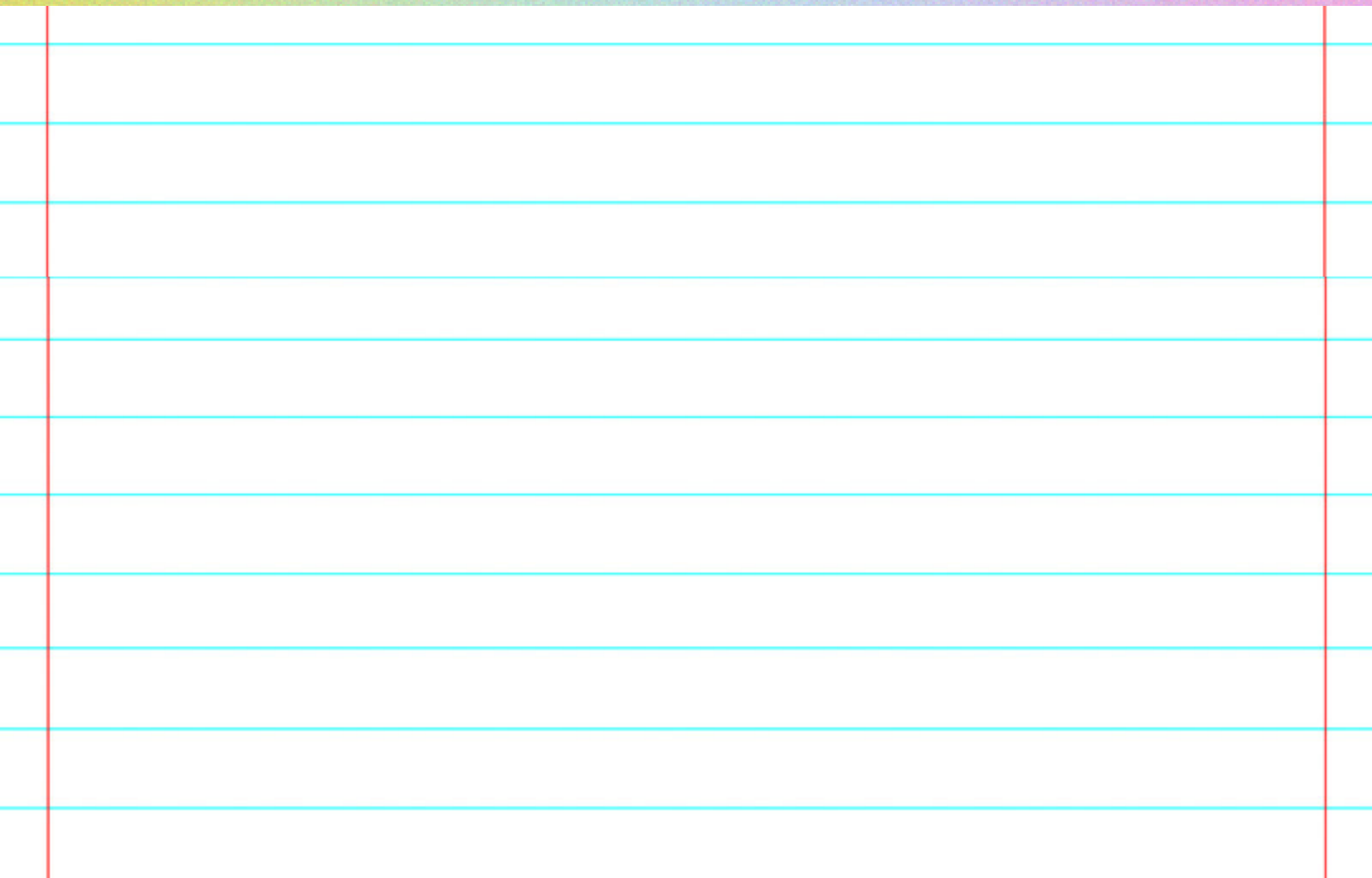


Introducing Yourself through Content

What piece of social media content would you use to introduce yourself? Maybe this is a recent piece of social media content that moved you or something old you frequently return to. If you're working with a group, try to share links or screenshots. **Do any patterns or questions emerge?**

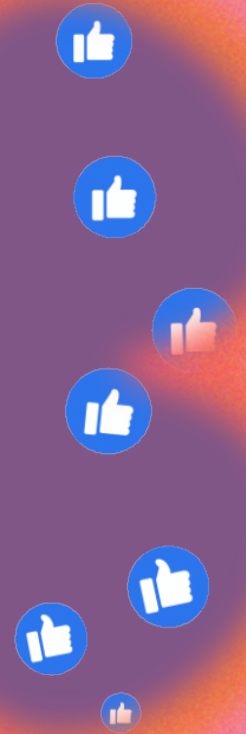
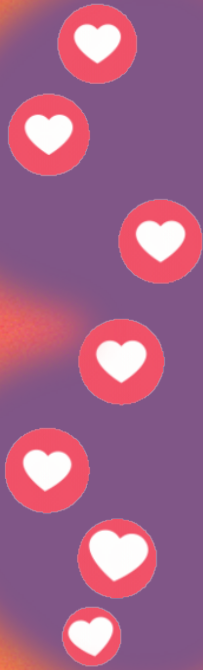
Who are you? What do you 'do'? In what ways, for what reasons do you use social media?

When are you a **creator and/or consumer** of content in your life? Who are you accountable to in these roles? When do these roles switch or merge?



A large area of lined paper for writing, with light blue horizontal lines and red vertical margin lines.

What is content?



Use these categories to start thinking about how content fits into these 'buckets.'

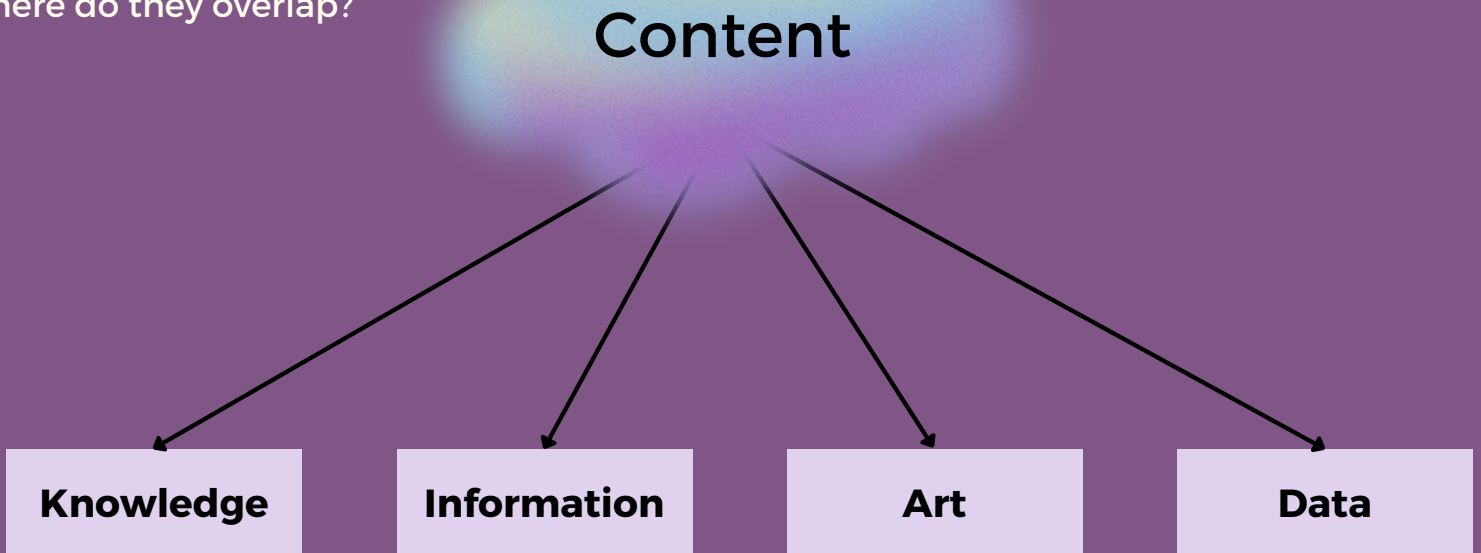
There's space on the following page to map things out.

Where do they overlap?

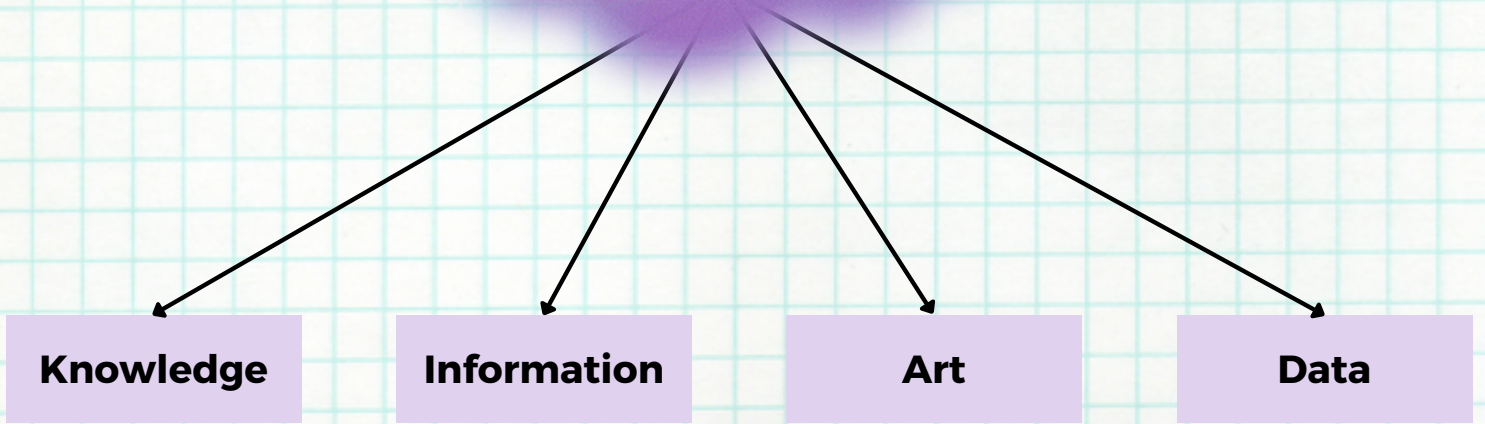
Using examples of content you shared previously, look for patterns in types of media and platforms

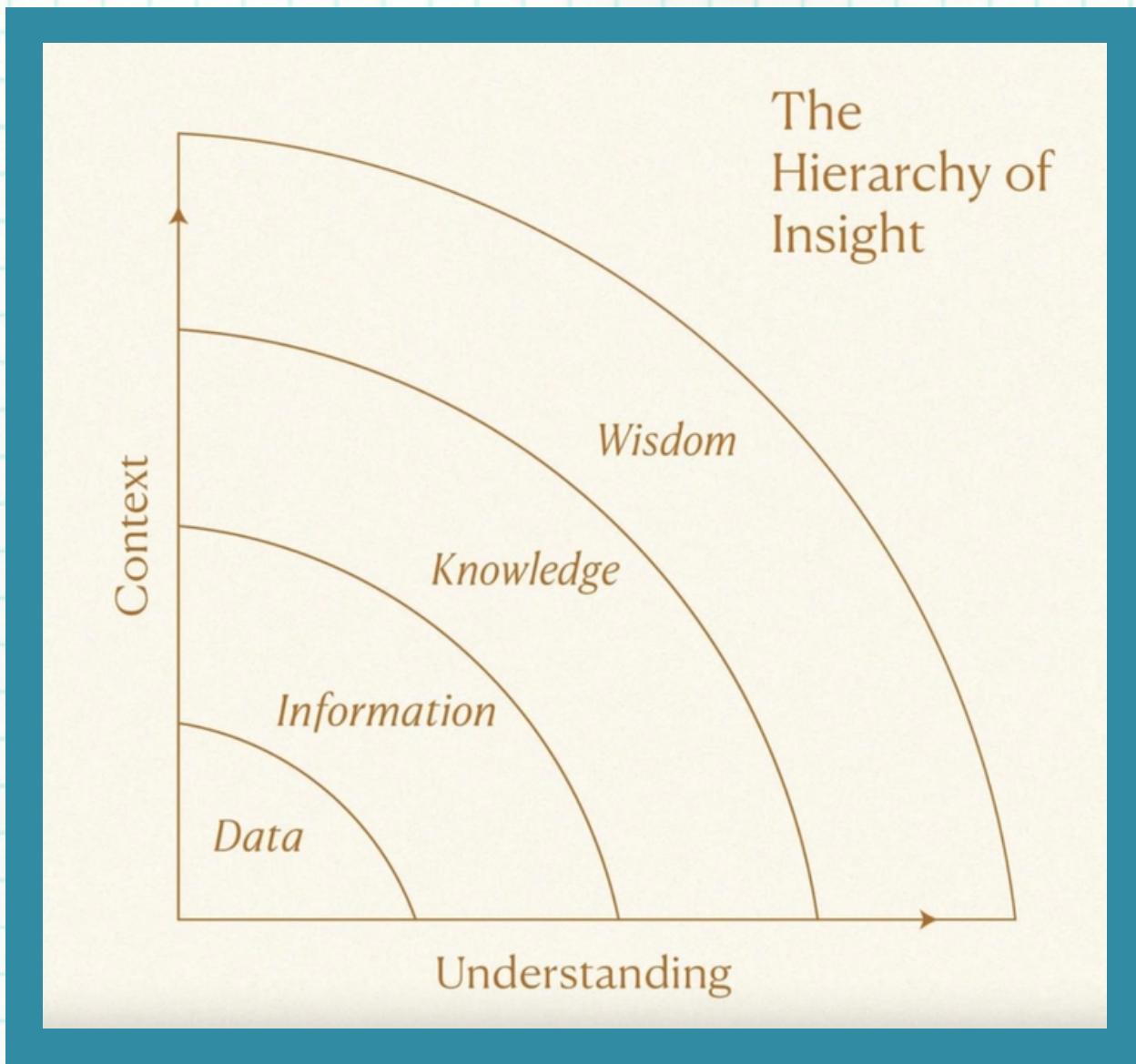
Are these categories sufficient? What would you add or adjust?

Content



What is Content?





ID: A graph with 'Context' on the Y-axis and 'Understanding' on the X-axis. Moving away from zero, concentric circles are labeled in the following order: data, information, knowledge, wisdom. The graph is named 'The Hierarchy of Insight'.

How does this chart affect how you understand these categories?

Read more about digitizing knowledge in Jennifer Wemigwans' "[A Digital Bundle](#)."*



After finishing this activity, we recommend taking a break! Stretch. Drink some water.

Part 1: The Exhaustion

T Time

Companies Are Finally Fighting Burnout During the Pandemic

For many, that means targeting burnout, a cocktail of work-related stress, exhaustion, cynicism and negativity that is surging during the...

Oct 14, 2021

"Nobody invented it [burnout].
It's been around for a long,
long time. It emerged as the
language of the people."

— Christina Maslach

Tracing the Origins of 'Burn Out'

1971 - First documented reports of workplace burnout referred to people without occupational caring responsibilities—US air traffic controllers who worked with inadequate equipment and training and had long shifts without breaks.

'Vocational burnout' is defined as "a form of exhaustion, which is manifested in a decline in quantity and quality of work production." [Read more](#).*

1974 - Herbert Freudenberger, a psychologist in New York, publishes "Staff Burn-Out" after his own struggle with burnout working 10+ hours a day.

He wrote: "But it is precisely because we are dedicated that we walk into a burn-out trap. We work too long and too intensely. We feel a pressure from within to work and help and we feel a pressure from the outside to give."

Tracing the Origins of 'Burn Out'

1974 (cont.) - Christina Maslach, not coincidentally, wrote about burnout at the same time through studying human services.

She wrote, “if the detachment becomes too extreme, the service professional experiences ‘burn-out,’ a phrase which is used by poverty lawyers to describe the loss of any human feeling for their clients.”

Since 1974, labor productivity has kept increasing, but wages have not. Maslach went on to develop a theory of burnout’s institutional causes.

1980 - Freudenberger attributed burnout to the fast pace of social and economic change, from the sexual revolution to consumerism. “At the same time,” he wrote, “TV has exposed us to alluring pictures of people leading the ‘good life.’”

2019 - Burnout classified as a “syndrome,” in the International Classification of Diseases. It is not classified as a disorder in the American Psychiatric Association’s Diagnostic and Statistical Manual. [Read more.](#)

Maslach's Indicators of Burnout

	Workload	→	Too many demands, too little resources.
	Control	→	Autonomy and flexibility
	Reward	→	Salary, benefits, perks, appreciation
	Community	→	Supportive work relationships
	Fairness	→	Glass ceilings, discrimination
	Community	→	Why am I doing this. Why am I here? What do I care about?

Read more about Christina Maslach's work [here](#).*

Hypothetical: Your job is balanced according to each of the previous indicators. You still want to quit.

What isn't accounted for in Maslach's categories?

Burnout is the result of consistently overriding who you are and what you need.



@andrearanaej

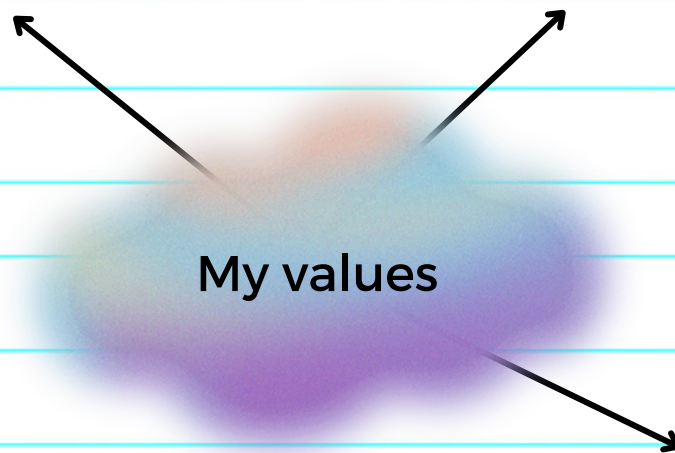
Attention x Needs

In the space below, describe some of the content on social media that grabs your attention. How does it meet your needs?

Gets my attention	Meets my needs

Attention x Needs

Now, zoom out and reflect: what are my values? What is most important to me?



What is the connection between our **needs** and our **attention**?

Does your attention flow in alignment with your **values**, or your organization's?

When do your needs conflict with your values or organization's values?

The headlines below were pulled from local and national news sites from 2019-2022. Take a moment to read them. What do you notice? What surprises you? Who do these headlines suggest is responsible for the fatigue? Who must endure/overcome the fatigue?

SCIENCEINSIDER | HEALTH

For scientists studying 'disaster fatigue,' this has been a year like no other

COVID-19 and repeated storms and wildfires have shaped how people perceive risks

6 Ways to Combat Pandemic Compassion Fatigue

As the pandemic drags on, we need empathy more than ever.

<https://www.drussanjamieson.com> > health > attention-f... ⋮

Nature Exposure Helps Attention Fatigue - Dr. Susan Jamieson

Oct 21, 2019 — Directed attention fatigue (DAF) is a condition that results from over-use of your brain's inhibitory attention mechanisms, the "filters" ...

Stanford researchers identify four causes for 'Zoom fatigue' and their simple fixes

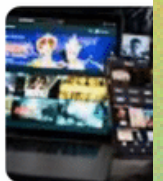
It's not just Zoom. Popular video chat platforms have design flaws that exhaust the human mind and body. But there are easy ways to mitigate their effects.

 The Globe and Mail

Streaming services face 'subscription fatigue' after pandemic

...

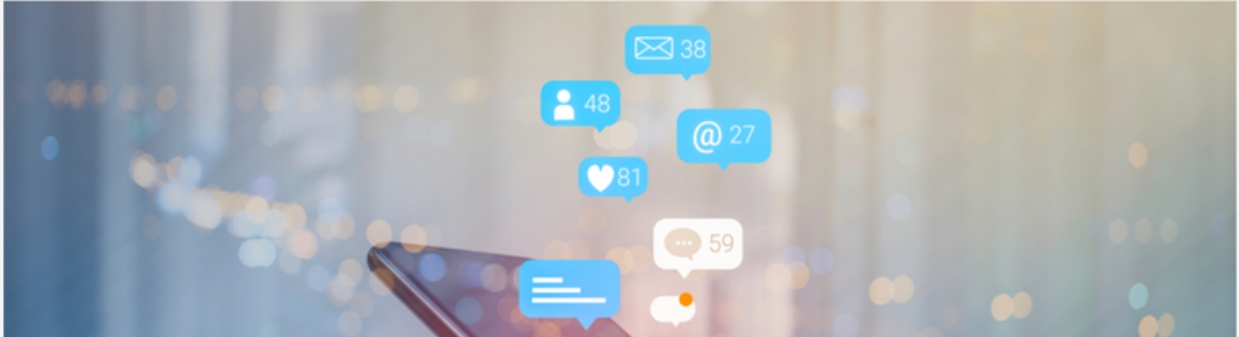
... who pay for streaming content have three or more services – “however, at that third service mark, streamers hit subscription fatigue,...



Content Fatigue

How to Beat Content Fatigue: Tips for Keeping Consumers Engaged

Posted May 4, 2021 by [Neha Wanikar](#) in [Constant Content](#)



Content fatigue has been a growing problem over the last few years and, in 2021, it has been compounded by COVID fatigue. Consumers are constantly encountering and interacting with [new content](#), especially while in isolation. However, consuming so much content can begin to feel exhausting, and it also leaves content marketers scrambling to grab what little consumer attention is left.

“

It also leaves content marketers scrambling to grab what little consumer attention is left.

”

Digital Abundance

A human society may be regarded as a data-processing system. Information is stored in institutions, books, brains, statistical tables, computer libraries, and elsewhere. The knowledge of who knows what, or where the information is, may frequently be more valuable than deep, narrow knowledge of a few subjects themselves.

Source: 'Designing Organizations for an Information Rich World,' M. Greenberger (1971)

Contemplate



How does the infinite nature of digital space and content affect how you perceive your individual or organizational capacity to have impact?



How has the shift to storing information digitally changed how you conceptualize your agency?



“As we are becoming more entangled with our technologies, we are also becoming more entangled with each other...We can no longer understand how the world works by breaking it down into loosely-connected parts that reflect the hierarchy of physical space or deliberate design. Instead, we must watch the flows of information, ideas, energy, and matter that connect us, and the networks of communication, trust, and distribution that enable these flows.”

– The Long Now Foundation *

Attention Economy

“To me, one of the most troubling ways social media has been used in recent years is to foment waves of hysteria and fear, both by news media and by users themselves. Whipped into a permanent state of frenzy, people create and subject themselves to news cycles, complaining of anxiety at the same time that they check back ever more diligently. The logic of advertising and clicks dictates the media experience, which is exploitative by design. Media companies trying to keep up with each other create a kind of “arms race” of urgency that abuses our attention and leaves us no time to think.”

– Jenny Odell, 'How to Do Nothing'*

Social Media's Unique Advertising Advantages

- **Artificial Intelligence:** No other media draws on massive supercomputers to predict what it could show to perfectly keep you scrolling, swiping, or sharing.
- **24/7 Influence:** No other media steers two billion people's thoughts 24/7 – spending over 150 minutes on social media a day – from the moment we wake up until we fall asleep.
- **Social Control:** No other media redefines the terms of our social lives: self-esteem, when we believe we are missing out, and the perception that others agree with us.
- **Personalization:** No other media uses a precise, personalized profile of everything we've said, shared, clicked, and watched to influence our behavior at this scale.

Source: Center for Humane Technology*

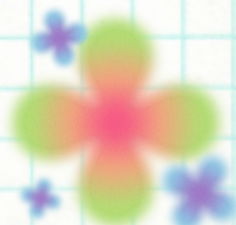
We experience the externalities of the attention economy in little drips, so we tend to describe them with words of mild bemusement like “annoying” or “distracting.” But this is a grave misreading of their nature. In the short term, distractions can keep us from doing the things we want to do. In the longer term, however, they can accumulate and keep us from living the lives we want to live, or, even worse, undermine our capacities for reflection and self-regulation, making it harder, in the words of Harry Frankfurt, to “want what we want to want.” Thus there are deep ethical implications lurking here for freedom, wellbeing, and even the integrity of the self.²²



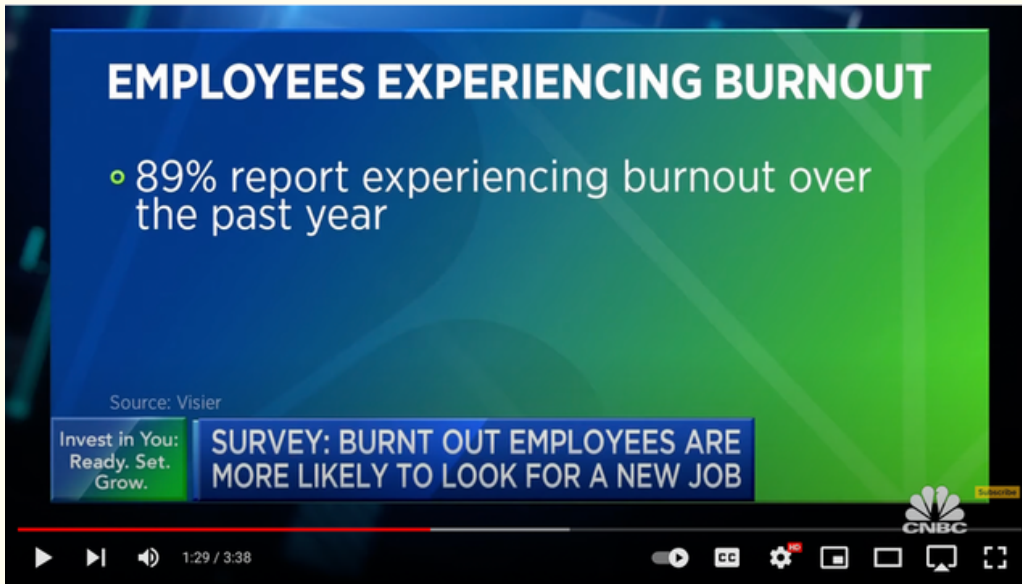
How do you know what you want?

Do you feel it in your body?

Do you talk things through with friends?



Capitalization of Mindfulness



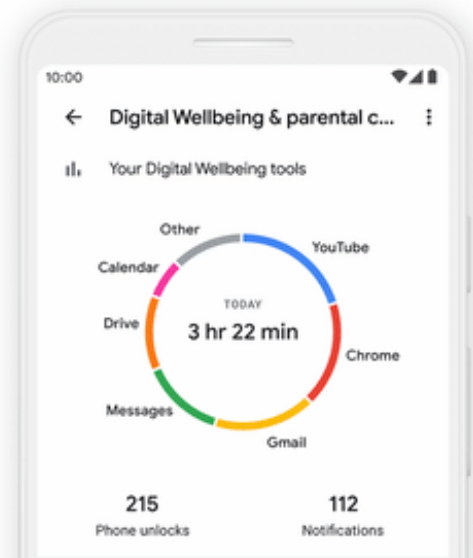
Watch the [YouTube](#) video.

ID: A screenshot of a news clip on youtube that reads, "Employees experiencing burnout - 89% report experiencing burnout over the last year."

Digital Mindfulness

Responsibility is placed solely on **the user**.

"There is a tendency to point the finger and say, 'What is wrong with you?' And so, burnout becomes the individual's problem and weakness," Christina Maslach said. "I just want to make clear that the stereotype that mental illness is an individual failing is still strong. The question is, how do we change that?"



Source: Google's Digital Wellbeing Initiative




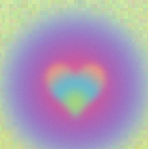
ID: A screenshot of Google's 'Digital Wellbeing and parental controls window on an iPhone with a colored pie chart of how time was spent on you phone, how many times the phone was unlocked, and the number of notifications

“Abstaining from social media is presently not the most accessible solution for marginalized people who rely on these platforms for community and resources.”

– Neema Githere,
#DivestfromInstagram

Resources on Data Healing*

 Data Healing, Are.na Channel by Neema Githere

 "Data Healing: Digital Doulas Take Restorative Justice to Cyberspace" by Yaa Adae

 Data Healing Recovery Clinic by Neema Githere

Creativity x Attention

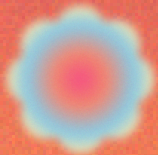
The Creative Independent *
has great resources for navigating
your creative practice.

ID: A phone with two images on it. The image on top is a black and white illustration of a person with flowers emerging from the space between their hands. Above the person, it reads: Creativity can be defined as any time we consciously collaborate with the universe to create new patterns that disrupt the old patterns that existed before.

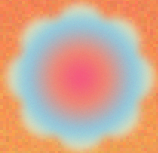
The bottom image is a meme with a cat, dog, and two roosters lined up against the window looking in, and it reads, "she's blaming herself for not feeling creative when she's trapped in an algorithm design to only give her more of what she already knows."



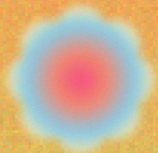
"Your data is far more valuable than the services they provide."



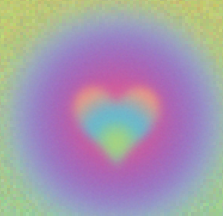
What is most valuable that social media provides?



What deserves your attention?



How do your values align or conflict with the values of social media?



Body check! Take a break. Stretch. Drink some water.

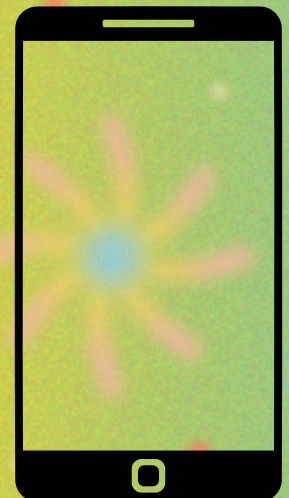
Part 2: How To

"Feel ok enough for long
enough to figure out what it is
that can be done"

— Jenny Odell, author of *How to do Nothing*

"Attention is the
rarest and purest
form of generosity."

— Simone Weil



From an organizational standpoint, what would it look like to treat our audience's time, attention, and energy as precious? How do we build trust with our audiences? How can we treat our audiences as co-creators?



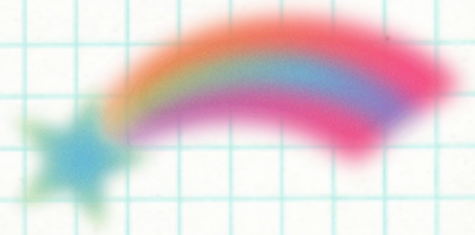
"We no longer have any narratives that provide meaning and orientation for our lives. Narratives crumble and decay into information.

What we need most are temporal structures that stabilize life. When everything is short-term, life loses all stability. Stability comes over long stretches of time: faithfulness, bonds, integrity, commitment, promises, trust. These are the social practices that hold a community together. They all have a ritual character. They all require a lot of time."

— **Byung-Chul Han** *

Brainstorm

Rituals to ground
your social media
practice



Self-care for Communicators



Defining Big Goals

“There is a widespread belief, that passes for common sense, that fighting for small goals is more practical than fighting for big ones, and it's totally and completely wrong... trying to solve one problem at a time almost always leads to betrayals and mistakes.

Anytime what we're fighting for brings us into conflict with the legitimate needs of another group of people, it's a sure sign that the picture is too small.

A big goal is like a star map, unchanged by wind and rain...we can check our positions against that reliable point of light and correct course as needed."

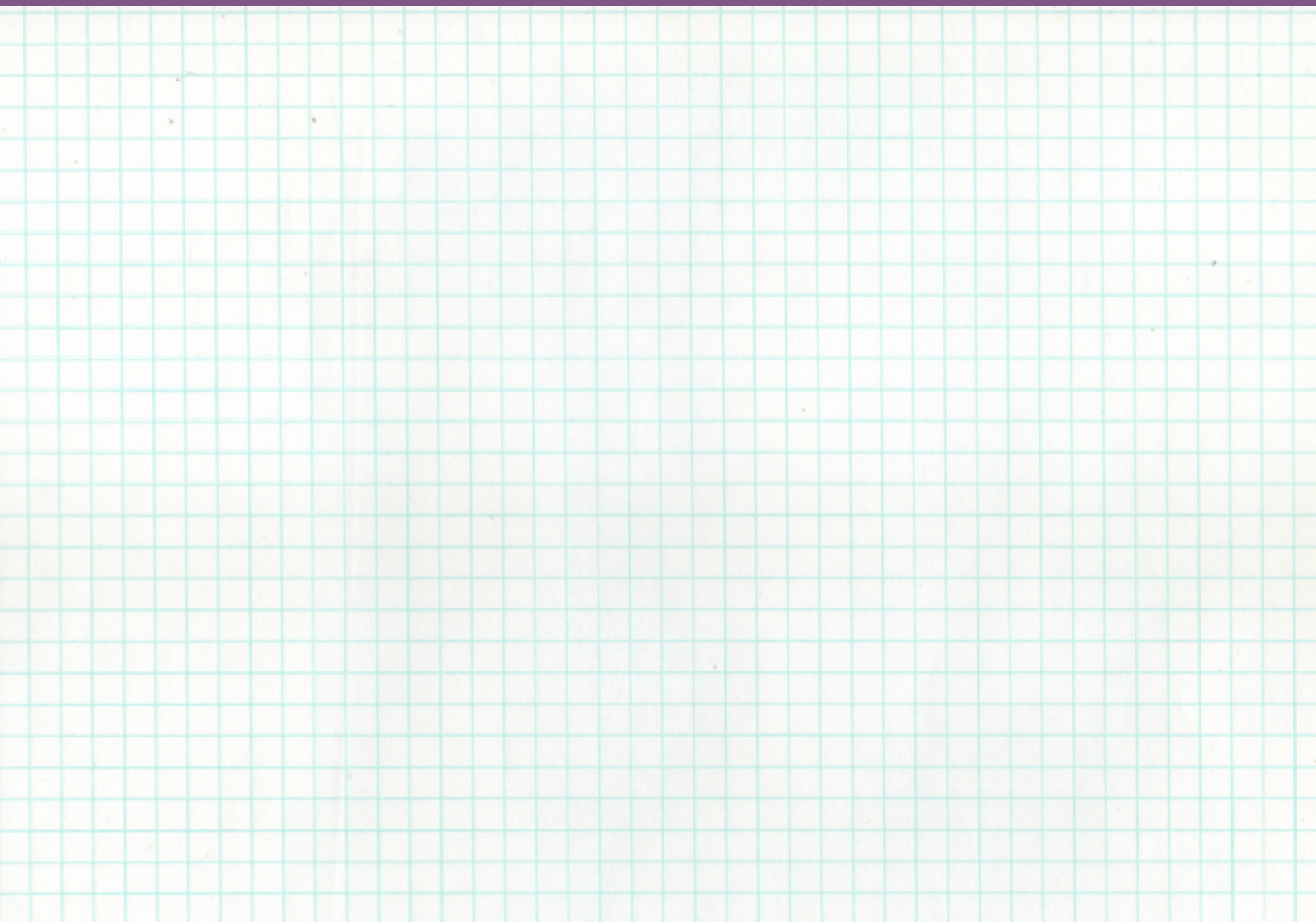
– Aurora Levins Morales,
"Medicine Stories: Essays for Radicals"✳️



What can your organization's social media content do to fight for _____?

Insert your organization's mission in the blank. Zoom out as much as possible. How big does the issue you're tackling get? (Eg., maybe your organization focuses on a smaller part of the issue, but keep zooming out.)

How does social media help and hurt the big issue?



Slow Communications

“How do we get people to do 'the work'?”

How do we translate complex issues to social media?

Plant seeds.

Hold space.



How do you measure
'meaningful' ?

You can't.



Watch the YouTube Video

What's the benefit of leaving people with
more questions than answers in your content?
Learning = non-linear, collaborative unfolding

Reclaim you distraction

What is Disability Justice?

"All bodies are unique and essential...all bodies have strengths and needs that must be met." —Patty Berne

"Disability justice recognizes the intersecting legacies of white supremacy, colonial capitalism, gendered oppression and ableism in understanding how people's bodies and minds are labelled 'deviant', 'unproductive', 'disposable' and/or 'invalid'."

Source: [Projectlets](#) *

10 Principles of Disability Justice



Intersectionality



Commitment to
Cross-Disability Solidarity



Leadership of Those
Most Impacted



Interdependence



Cross-Movement
Solidarity



Collective Access



Recognizing Wholeness



Collective Liberation



Sustainability



Anti-Capitalist Politic

Source: [Ten Principles of Disability Justice](#) *

Disability x COVID

ARTICLE FEB 9, 2022

COVID-19 Likely Resulted in 1.2 Million More Disabled People by the End of 2021 – Workplaces and Policy Will Need to Adapt

Workplaces will need to adapt to significant increases to both the disabled population and disabled workforce, and future labor market analysis must center disability.

Source: [Americanprogress.org](https://americanprogress.org)



Margaret Price @PriceMargaret · Jun 7

I'm curious about the term "brain fog." Before the pandemic, few people used it. I knew it as a term used among disabled people.

Now, many people use it--including for short-term.

I'm not sure what I think of this. How do you use the term? What are your thoughts? [#BrainFog](#)

Disability rhetoric has made its way to mainstream discourse, helping us make sense of our new COVID reality. But this language has been appropriated without mainstream culture embodying the values of disability justice. Meanwhile, COVID continues to be a mass disabling event disproportionately affecting people of color, and our media and government/workplace policies pretend we can return to a 'normal' that no longer exists.

We all have the responsibility to make our content accessible, and when we do, we reach much more people!

As an individual or organization, embracing the values of disability justice and implementing accessibility as a practice can transform your content strategy and online presence from productivity oriented to community and creativity oriented.

Accessibility gives us frameworks for reassessing what content is, what it means to share, and how we share.



Disability Justice as a Mode of Resisting the Algorithm

The Algorithm values:

Predictability

Your interests and behaviors remaining the same is profitable so marketing towards you can be consistent.

Trends dictate what you consume and post.



Disability Justice values:

Showing up authentically

The fluidity of your lived experience informs your interests and behaviors, and therefore your online presence. You engage with content that nourishes you and you're honest with yourself about the role social media plays in your life, acknowledging this will change over time.

Accessible Social Media Strategies x Resisting the Algorithm



Write alt-text for images

Writing alt-text helps you slow down and be intentional about the purpose of the images you create and share. What does this image convey?



Create audio versions of text content

When we slow down to create multiple avenues of accessing information, we resist siloing ourselves and we learn new skills!

Resources for Accessible Communications + Disability Justice

- Accessible Communications Guidelines 2022 by PRCA
- The DISCO Network's Communication's Access Plan
- Disability Justice: An Audit Toolkit written by Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha and envisioned by Stacey Park Milbern and Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha

+ more on our Are.na 

Creating New Social Media Metrics of 'Success'

Today Doing old things better	Tomorrow Doing brand new things
Project Timelines	Slowness, Collaboration
Identify your Target Audience	Inclusivity - Make content for Everyone
Chose PR Tactics/Types of Media	Quality over Quantity, Creativity, Exploration
Measure Results	Was it accessible? Did it feel authentic and meaningful to create?

Both / And



We can imagine new platforms that nourish .
protect
sustain

+



Find ways to resist algorithmic harm on current platforms.

Seize the moment

Collaboration gives us a path forward. We imagine academics as legislators and artists as technologists.

We are optimistic because we know that technology isn't exploitative in essence.

Created with new values, technology can nourish us and make our world more equitable.

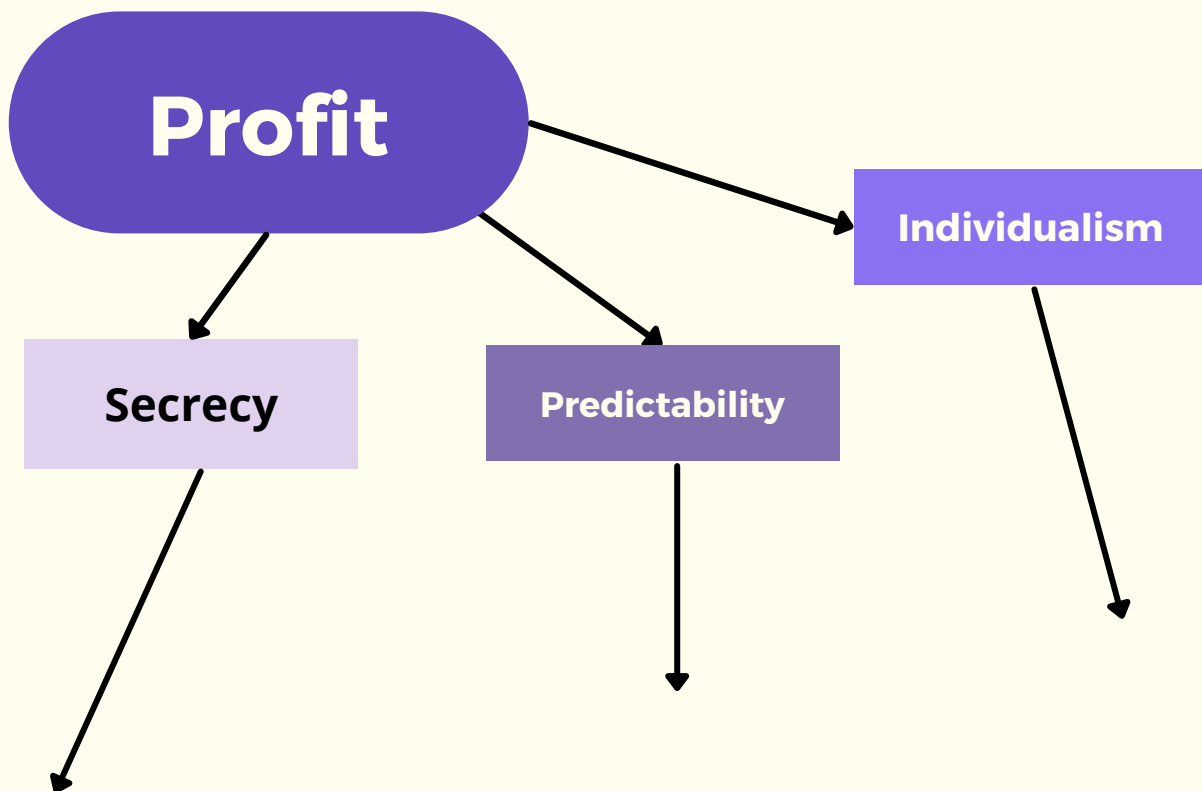


ID: The symbol for the worldwide web in green with orange fire illustrations on either side.

Speculative Digital Futures

Step 1: In small groups, pick a **platform** and a **value** they hold by identifying a **function** which demonstrates the value.

Example: Instagram values individualism, so the app's functions are structured around engaging with singular profiles.



Speculative Digital Futures

Step 2: In small groups, discuss which values you would want a social media platform to hold. Pick one of those values, and **imagine a function that operationalizes it.**

These don't need to be within the realm of possibility!

Example: To foster community on Instagram, there could be a function where you can create private groups to share photos in the classic grid layout.



[@DISCONetwork](#)

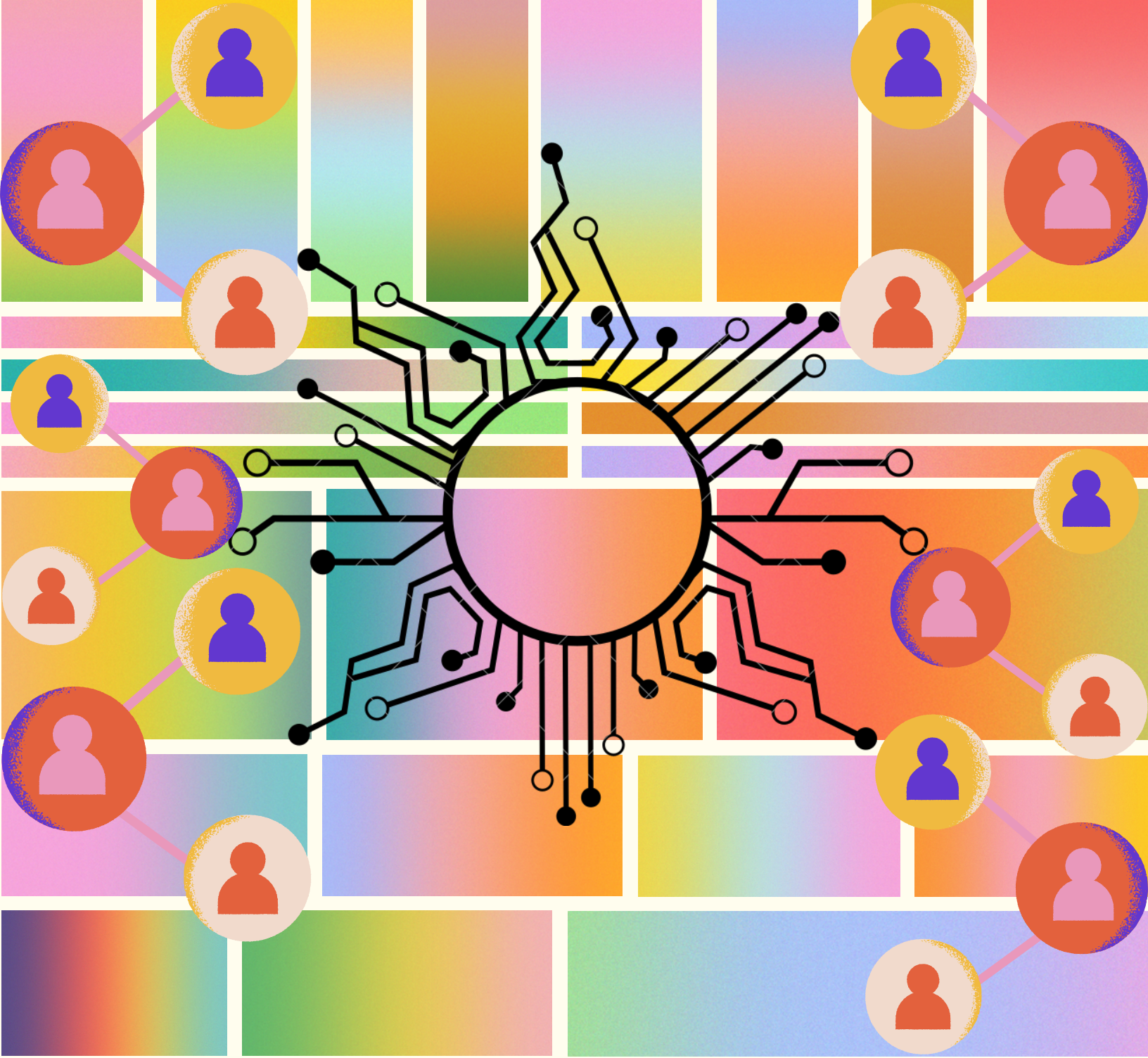


www.disconetwork.org



disconetwork@umich.edu





Thank you.

