

**PLEASE LIKE ME:
UNDERSTANDING THE WRITTEN, THE SPOKEN, AND THE SINGLE CLICK
ON Facebook**

by

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Abstract:

The Like button, a marginal but widespread tool on Facebook, is perplexing as it is significant. The goal of this work is to parse the meanings of the Like button in order to examine communication on the Internet. Using a linguistic analysis, this project examines statements about the Like button from official Facebook publications and two legal cases together with a close ethnographic reading of activity on a commercial Facebook Page. The competing meanings that appear in this analysis give rise to theoretical questions about writing and speaking, individuals and collectives, and sincerity and insincerity. Ultimately, the Like button is able to convey so many meanings because it has no basic meaning at all- it functions as a neutral container for meaning. Therefore, this button depends on minute cooperation between every member of the online community in order to operate in any kind of useful way.

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Introduction

“And just like that, I knew we were good”, she finished. My friend Maddy was recounting the most recent development of her long and complicated relationship with Jason, her high school sweetheart. They had seen each other off and on, he had grown distant, she had gotten frustrated- they sat down for drinks and talked things out, and at the end of the night they had maturely agreed to move on. After saying goodbye, she had walked away not knowing if they would ever talk again. Silence for a week. And then, he Liked one of her statuses on Facebook. With that, she knew he was fine, she knew they were on speaking terms, and most importantly, she knew that she could breathe a sigh of relief(Personal communication, September 14th, 2013).

This story is not uncommon in this day and age. In fact, it is all too common that the complexities of life and relationships are conducted and resolved online through social media. Many would argue that this is a sad story, one that showcases the millennial generation’s regression in terms of communication ability and dependence on social media. Others might argue that social media instead provides a wide new horizon of possibilities, interconnecting the world and bringing us closer together. I do argue only that these semantic forms, such as a Like on Facebook merit closer scrutiny- for much of what is dismissed as lazy forms of communication in our Internet age in fact perform incredible amounts of meaning-making, relying on a huge range of unspoken rules and codes and containing epistemic contradictions. In

searching for a case study for an examination of communication online, I avoided the dauntingly broad choices such as email conventions or abbreviations on instant chat as scholars have notably done before me (Baron 1998, Boesllstorff 2008, Cherny 1996, Li 2000, Marvin 1996, Paollilo 2001, Witmer and Katzman 1997). Instead, I chose to examine one instance of communication online: the Facebook Like button. It is an ideal entry point into questioning language on the Internet because it is so vague, because it doesn't fit neatly into any kind of category, because it is so marginal and unnoticed, yet so ubiquitous throughout the Internet, and because it begins and ends with a single click. It is a particularly situated anthropological investigation because the Like exists within a long continuum of anxiety about text and writing, the signature, and what acts of name-inscribing mean.

First, I will describe the modality of the Like button, and second, theorize the ways in which it orders space and time, creating a new type of writing and personhood. Drawing on Edward Said and Jacques Derrida, among others, the study of this is grounded in linguistic theory. My research questions here are: what does the Facebook Like button do? What does a Like mean? Is it an instance of writing or speech? Not only are these questions of theoretical import, but also they relate to a global community of people whose lives are impacted every day by the shifts in technology and as a consequence the way the order the world. Parsing out this phenomenon for all its potential implications- practical and theoretical- will help gain a vantage point perspective on the forces sculpting our everyday interactions and selves.

I investigate these questions using two categories of research materials. One category includes written material about the Like button and the second is from my ethnographic research on Facebook. The written materials include: one set of materials from the Facebook site itself

defining the utilities of the Like button to its users as well as legal transcripts of two recent court cases involving Facebook Like activity. The ethnography materials include detailed observations and examples of Likes I have culled from my research as well as selections from interviews I conducted with Facebook users. The written materials helps ground this study- getting at the meaning Like button activity through its more official descriptions. The ethnographic component rounds out my approach by giving us an inside look into the marketing tactics and everyday Like behavior on an average Facebook page.

The History of Facebook and the Like Button

Before I delve into my analysis, I want overview the way Facebook works, clarify terms within Facebook, and trace a brief history of the site. Facebook is a website, categorized as a “social media” site, whose primary purpose is to connect people online. A general description according to the Encyclopedia Britannia explains,

Access to Facebook is free of charge, and the company earns most of its money from advertisements on the Web site. New users can create profiles, upload photos, join a preexisting group, and start new groups. The site has many components, including Timeline, a space on each user’s profile page where users can post their content and friends can post messages; Status, which enables users to alert friends to their current location or situation; and News Feed, which informs users of changes to their friends’ profiles and status. Users can chat with each other and send each other private messages. [Encyclopedia 2014]

In accordance with the Encyclopedia definition, all of the content that appears in the aforementioned ‘news feed’ I will call ‘posts’. These ‘posts’ can include everything from a “status”, to a shared website (link), a photo, a message sent from one Friend to another, or marketing updates from companies. However, the only way to see content from other people is

by sending them a “Friend Request,” and having them accept. This process of “friending” people helps keep a user’s Facebook activity private.

The first version of Facebook had a brief run as a site called “facemash,” created by Mark Zuckerberg. A sophomore at Harvard University, Zuckerberg illegally accessed photos from the private “Facebooks” - photos of each student in the residential houses at Harvard. Essentially, it was a website that allowed students to rate each other’s physical desirability. Harvard immediately shut the site down and almost expelled Zuckerberg due to the infringement of privacy laws protecting the photos. Instead, he slightly modified the idea, launching a site called theFacebook.com in 2004. Early versions of the site allowed users to “list their hometown, their relationship status, contact information and educational backgrounds”. Furthermore, “users could Friend, ‘unfriend’, and block each other and write on each other’s walls”(Jenkins 2013:60). At first, only available at Harvard, this simple concept caught on among other college students before expanding to the rest of the Ivy League, and finally becoming accessible to anyone with a .edu email address. In 2006, two years after its creation, Zuckerberg changed the name to “Facebook” and opened the site to anyone over 13 years of age (Jenkins 2013:60). Facebook has grown to be a multi-billion dollar social media company, striving to update and improve its features. Ten years after its launch, Facebook has undergone countless aesthetic tweaks. It has added and removed of a variety of utilities, endlessly expanded its user base, and continued to connect and synthesize the Internet(Encyclopedia 2014). Here’s where the Like button comes in.

The Like button was first introduced to Facebook in 2009(Jenkins 2013:61). It was almost identical to a feature on FriendFeed, an outmoded social media site, and had an even older predecessor on Reddit- an option called “up-voting”. Facebook, however, was the first site

that popularized and recently universalized this feature. Older versions of the button have had a white thumbs-up icon(See Figure 1 in Appendix). Today, the small, blue, and rectangular button has the word Like written out in white letters and Facebook’s trademark “f” symbol(See Figure 2 in Appendix). On the Facebook site itself, the Like button sits beneath the content together with “Comment” and “Share,” buttons(See Figure 3 in Appendix).

At the same time that Facebook first unveiled the Like button feature in 2009, it also announced a larger plan going forward which Facebook called the “Open Graph API”. This was the overall plan to enable the entire Internet to utilize Facebook features and have them automatically link back to Facebook itself (Siegler 2009). As part of this plan, the Like button became publicly available for developers to integrate in their website, offering the coding instructions on the “Facebook Developers API”(application programming interface) website. The Like button was then ubiquitous- its became hard to find a website that did not offer a Facebook Like button somewhere on its page. Put simply, Facebook explains on the developers API page, “A single click on the Like button will Like pieces of content on the web and share them on Facebook.”¹ This in effect made the entire Internet equipped to automatically cull information and connections for Facebook’s use and display, instead of getting its data solely from activity within the site itself.

Literature Review

Having reviewed approach, methods, and a brief description of Facebook, I trace out the general terrain of other approaches to studies on communication and technology, whether anthropological or linguistic. The purpose of this review is to identify some of the holes in the

¹ Like Button, Facebook <https://developers.Facebook.com/docs/plugins/like-button/>(last visited January 26th, 2014

literature, specifically in approach, to demonstrate what kinds of unanswered research questions this analysis of the Like button answers. In general, the linguistic approaches tackle language with a highly statistical, formal methodology. The anthropologists dealing with questions of the Internet, concern themselves predominately with questions of community. The forums they analyze are frequently compared to “real” communities in the world, and the question of whether these communities are valid anxiously predominates in the background. Sparse among these various literatures is a questioning of notions of personhood or a theoretical questioning of the forms of communication made possible through Internet forums.

The following projects use a highly statistical, linguistic approach to define language on the Internet. The presupposition inherent to this method is that to understand the type of language emerging from the use of this new medium, one must compile data about the majority and then make inferences about them with little to no ethnographic support. The numerical majority counts as the authoritative factor. For instance, in *Language variation on Internet relay chat: a social network approach*, J. Paollilo(2001) explores linguistic variations as indexes of the social hierarchy within a certain Internet relay chat² community made up of mostly ex-patriate, Indian nationals. In his studies of relay chat, his methods include counting the number of instances of communication, since every time a user hits the return button, it shows up as a new line of text. Thus, counting individual entries gives an approximate amount of time spent talking. He can track the relationships between two or more users by tallying up the number of messages. He assumes that the more time spent talking the greater the bond. His hypothesis is that the higher-status, non-“newbies” in the chat forum use more “vernacular” and chat-specific

² Internet relay chat: an Internet system that facilitates instant messaging that works on a server model. It allows for both one-on-one and group messaging.

language, while the “newbies” will use more “standard” language. In his investigation, he seeks statistical correlation between certain types of word usage and how well they know each other, which he asserts he can directly measure by counting the number of messages exchanged. In his analysis, he principally relies on the theory of social ties used by those who conduct social network studies of language variation. The social ties theory purports that linguistic usage of things like mutual naming, where each user calls each other by name, “are effective in identifying relationships based in solidarity and locality, or ‘strong ties’”(Paollilo 2001:186). Weak ties are fluid, non-local, and “weak” connections and relationships. He presumes that frequency of contact measures the degree of intimacy between individuals, which in turn differentiates between strong and weak ties. This is a primarily statistical inquiry into an Internet community, lacking a richer anthropological interpretation of the information.

Baron’s *Letters by Phone or Speech by Other Means: The Linguistics of Email*(1998), attempts instead to unite formally linguistic approaches with a more anthropological approach to writing and speech, offering a middle ground. He analyzes the advent of “computer-mediated technology” particularly as evidenced by email, as a new form of written communication. He explores the ways in which written and oral communication have been studied as dichotomous, and proposes a new spectral way of looking at these forms of communication arising from new technology. On the spectrum between “traditional writing” and “face-to-face speech” there is a wide grey area where things like leaving a voicemail fall, which involves the speech component, but not the response component. Dividing up voicemails on a “spectrum of intent,” Baron categorizes a voicemail left when the caller wanted to get voicemail and not talk to the person as closer to the traditional writing end of the spectrum than a voicemail left when the caller hoped

to speak with the person. He explores the logistical difficulties of analyzing one-to-one communication due to the record being privately stored on the individual's computer. As a result, his and most other analyses of Internet communication are of one-to-many interactions. His analysis includes a breakdown of possible linguistic features inherent in any email exchange and then assigns them to a modality, or a place on the spectrum between writing and speech. This is one of the better attempts within the literature to unite two different analytics and link a study of the Internet with a much longer discourse of the differences between writing and speech.

Another linguistic approach to technology can be found in David Crystal's book, *Language and the Internet*, which uses statistics to categorize different types of "netspeak." (2006:32) He defines features of language on the Internet such as graphic, orthographic, grammatical, lexical, discourse, phonetic, phonological, and synchronous and asynchronous. His driving question is "Will all users of the Internet present themselves, through their messages, contributions, and pages, with the same kind of graphic, orthographic, grammatical, lexical, and discourse features?" He explores these factors in the seven "contexts" he had identified on the Internet by the year 2006, including e-mail, chat rooms, virtual worlds, world wide web, instant messaging, and blogging. His final research question is whether the establishment of and participation in a new kind of language—"Net-speak"—is necessary to be a part of the global community online (Crystal 2006:63). For the most part, Crystal uses his own experience and collections of emails, chats, etc. for the research involved. Most of his claims and analysis of this data are based on his own intuitions on the matter.

Finally, on the other end of the spectrum of research approach, we come to Boellstorff's essential exploration of virtual worlds, *Coming of Age in Second Life: An Anthropologist*

Explores the Virtually Human. Boellstorff conducts a compelling observation of the trends, realities, and rules within the “virtual” world of “Second Life”. While discussing notions of selfhood, travel, visuality, embodiment, language, friendship, sexuality, love and economy within Second Life, both through long-term participant-observation and interviews conducted within the forums provided by Second Life, his main stance is that the “virtual” is abstracted from life in that it is created social but that it is not more “artificial” than any other social construct (Boellstorff 2008). He spends a good deal of time describing the rules and basic procedures within Second Life, which begin with a thick description of an average session within the world, in which his avatar buys clothing, travels, and is invited to and attends a wedding of a Friend of his avatar. He provides transcripts of each conversation his avatar had through group and individual chats during the session. He also includes screenshots of each interface and menu option—defining terms as he goes along. In many ways, this book provides an ideal framework for how to conduct ethnographic analysis online. Boellstorff chose to conduct all interviews and data collection through the virtual world itself, keeping his research very focused and contained within his sessions. His development of a theory of community within Second Life directly stems from his interviews and participant-observation. He does not collect statistics of user info and linguistic data. In addition to his model of classical anthropological immersion, he also uses an analytical tone which avoids the moralizing tone of many other researchers who seek whether or not the Internet is hurting or helping language and society. Instead, he draws many parallels between the virtual world and the physical, demonstrating how our world has been virtual long before the advent of the Internet. His approach is by far the most classical anthropological approach I have encountered.

So far, the works I have selected for review cover a variety of terrain within the Anthropology of the Internet as well as Linguistic Anthropology. Each combines certain approaches and presumptions about the material at hand, namely the Internet and language, which play out throughout the course of their analysis. Some consider language as the sum of its occurrences, not stopping to delve beneath the impulses and trends by deeper contact with the people using these phrases and occurrences. Some view the Internet as a terrain to defend against claims made against it, protecting its validity as a community and a legitimate social space. Some espouse a more self-reported understanding of Internet identity and language, choosing to use interviews and interactions with participants rather than the data they produce.

Borrowing many of the methods from these esteemed studies of language and identity on the Internet, I also add to this analysis a philological approach, which primarily consists of an analysis of the rules and boundaries of the Like button's use. It is an approach modeled by Edward Said (2004). He advocates for a reprisal of the antiquated study of Philology, which is typically regarded as a painstaking process of analyzing ancient languages. It was outmoded in the twentieth century in favor of more rich humanistic study, however Said calls for a reclamation of the field. He says,

A true philological reading is active; it involves getting inside the process of language already going on in words and making it disclose what may be hidden or incomplete or masked or distorted in any text we may have before us. In this view of language, then, words are not passive markers or signifiers standing in unassumingly for a higher reality; they are, instead, an integral formative part of the reality itself. [Said, 2004:59]

It is this approach I use to analyze the Like button, using a philological mindset to understand how it is not just a “signifier”, but how its form functions as part of its meaning.

The Official Facebook Definition of a Like

The published descriptions on Facebook of what the Like button is provide a useful guideline for the intended and normative uses and meanings of the button. "The Like button is the quickest way for people to share content with their friends."³ This is the most generalized description available, highlighting the sharing of content. It is interesting that sharing is actually more important than what Liking actually means about the content. It is viewed as merely a mechanism to spread the content to other people's News Feeds . They explain how this mechanism works when a Facebook user Likes a page or advertisement.

When you click Like on a Facebook Page, in an advertisement, or on content off of Facebook, you are making a connection. A story about your like will appear on your Timeline and may also appear in your News Feed. You may be displayed on the Page you connected to, in advertisements about that Page or in social plugins next to the content you like. You may see updates to in your feeds and the feeds of your friends from Pages you like. You may also receive messages. Your connection to the page may also be shared with apps on the Facebook Platform.⁴

This mechanism that immediately spreads the content someone Liked to all the people they are connected to is a streamlined, self-perpetuating system. It is so seamless it is hardly noticeable, since there is a feedback loop between the things the user Likes and the content that begins to surround them in advertisements and through their News Feeds . The mechanics of the Like are less obvious than message conveyed by the Like. Facebooks defines these mechanics as follows.

Clicking **Like** under something you or a Friend posts on Facebook is an easy way to let someone know that you enjoy it, without leaving a comment. Just like a comment though, the fact that you liked it is noted beneath the item. For example, if you click a Like link beneath a friend's video: It'll be noted beneath the video that you liked it, a story will be

³ [https:// developers.facebook.com/docs/plugins/like-button/](https://developers.facebook.com/docs/plugins/like-button/) (Last visited Nov. 25, 2013)

⁴ <https://www.facebook.com/help/131263873618748>, (Last visited November 29, 2013)

posted to your Timeline that you liked your friend's video and your Friend will get a notification that you liked his or her video.⁵

To review, a Like can do all the following things: create a story about your Like, display you on the page you connected to, provide you with updates in your News Feed from that page in the future, and will send you messages from the page itself. It may also be shared with apps, so other applications used in the Facebook platform will know what you liked. In addition, it works to let someone know you enjoy it: you don't have to leave a comment, the fact that you liked it is noted beneath the item, and a story will be made about your like which will appear in your and your friends' News Feeds. In sum, a very small part of the meaning derived from a Like is the actual act itself—a huge portion of the significance of the Like is the subsequent refraction throughout Facebook's many pages and connections.

Liking gets broadcast in all kinds of ways to everyone's News Feeds. It is never a private action, shared between the person and the content they like. The Like is advertised by the page you like, it is advertised on all of the person's friends' new feeds, it is displayed on the person's own page, and their name appears permanently underneath the content they Liked. Facebook speaks about all the people involved in the third person, using their full Facebook username.

Karin Barber says in *Anthropology, Publics, and Texts* :

Texts are constructed to be detachable from the flow of conversation, so that they can be repeated, quoted, commented upon- they are forms of language, that is, whether written or oral, are accorded a kind of independence and privileged existence. At the same time, however, all texts, including written ones are forms of action, speech acts embedded in the context of their emissions and reception[Barber 2007:3].

⁵ <https://www.Facebook.com/help/452446998120360> (Last visited Nov 20, 2013)

This definition of texts is crucial to an understanding of Like as a language, a text, and a both a context-dependent and independent social form. The technology of Facebook, and the social production of its content through the networks created by ‘friending’, constructs the Like button to be a particularly textual form of writing, because of its detachability from its context.

Linguistically, it is interesting what kinds of words are being used by Facebook and in these trials to describe and explain the Like button. We see words like, “click”, “easy”, “fact”, “noted”, “share”, “connection”, “interact”, and “information”. These words indicate the emphasis on the record being made. They also suggest the link between the person and the content, or to the person behind the content which is being forged, maintained, and recorded. It’s reciprocal nature and its significance to all those who see it are to essential to its purported functions. However, the hard-and-fast significance of the like button remains elusive. In Facebook’s definitions, a Like is simply defined as denoting “enjoyment” of the content. But it gets more complex when Facebook notes that when a Like is on a page, it is a “connection” as well, since the Like will allow that page to show up on your News Feed from that moment onwards. In other words, it communicates a desire to receive updates from that page on a practical level, as well as showing enjoyment. There is a dual and somewhat competing function of the Like button, since it has a private and public aspect when someone shows their enjoyment and it connects them to the content in the future. This is a tension in its use and meaning from the official definition itself.⁶ Moving to legal ramifications of a single Like, it becomes evident how many more functions and meanings it can have.

⁶ “What does it mean to Like something?” <https://www.Facebook.com/help/452446998120360>, Last visited Nov 20, 2013.

Facebook and the Law

Increasingly, actions on the Internet require legal investment in order to help us value the world of Internet personhood and interaction. I will examine the ways in which two court cases declare their own definitions of the Like button and what these definitions can show about the perceived functions of both Facebook as a whole, and the Like button in particular. The Fourth Circuit Federal Court of Appeals dealt with a claim that a public employee's Facebook Like should be protected by the First Amendment. Several employees of Hampton, Virginia's sheriff's office were fired for politically supporting their bosses' opponent, Adams, on Facebook. In one of these cases, the "support" was merely a Like on 'Adam's campaign Page. The district court had ruled against this saying that "The district court concluded that "merely Liking a Facebook page is insufficient speech to merit constitutional protection."⁷ But when it was appealed, the court ruled that, "Once one understands the nature of what Carter did by liking the Campaign Page, it becomes apparent that his conduct qualifies as speech."⁸ This is truly remarkable- the Like button is officially considered a speech act by the Federal Court. They continue, "On the most basic level, clicking on the Like button literally causes to be published the statement that the User Likes something, which is itself a substantive statement. In the context of a political campaign's Facebook page, the meaning that the user approves of the candidacy whose page is being liked is unmistakable. That a user may use a single mouse click to produce that message that he likes the page instead of typing the same message with several

⁷ 857 F. Supp. 2d at 603." Blan;Carter,Jr; Dixon; Mccoy; Sandhofer; Woodward vs Roberts, Scribd. No12-1671, Doc 59, Filed 09/18/2013 (4th Cir. 2013)

⁸ Blan;Carter,Jr; Dixon; Mccoy; Sandhofer; Woodward vs Roberts, Scribd. No12-1671,Doc 59, Filed 09/18/2013 (4th Cir. 2013)

individual key strokes is of no constitutional significance.”⁹ Not only are they saying that any comment supporting a political cause on Facebook is considered approval of candidacy, an important point for Internet communications in general, but they go so far as to address that it does not matter that a Like is achieved with a single click. It is still a political and public statement, and as such is protected as speech.

Here we see an attempt on the part of the legal system to apply the traditional frames of writing as protected under the First Amendment as “freedom of speech”, to an act which is technically neither writing nor speech as we traditionally know it. When a person Likes something, they use the mouse to click an icon with the word “Like”(See Figure 4 in Appendix). After the click, their full name appears beneath the Like button, in blue letters, together with the words “likes this”. That is the beginning and the end of the action. The technology transforms the click into the sentence: “You like this”(See Figure 5 in Appendix). In that action, there is a linguistic gap between the word Like to the words, “You like this”. The Like is arguably translatable to “Hey you there, Like this!”- an appeal beneath all content on Facebook. This is instantly converted to the “You like this” statement that is displayed after that. The action transforms an appeal or demand into a record of sentiment. On other peoples News Feeds it will show up as “*name* likes this.”.The more a person Likes things on Facebook, the more accustomed they become to the instant conversion of their action into a report about them in the world. This series of removals from the person’s own action, makes up the stages and ideological process of a signature. Arguably, this is why the legal system can categorize this Internet -based action in terms of writing and political allegiance.

⁹ *Blan; Carter, Jr; Dixon; Mccoy; Sandhofer; Woodward vs Roberts*, Scribd. No12-1671, Doc 59, Filed 09/18/2013, pg 39-40 (4th Cir. 2013)

This is very interesting when viewed considering Plato's *Phaedrus*(1994), depicting Socrates' dislike and distrust of writing. In the dialogue, Socrates maintains that only speech can convey full and complete meaning. Writing on a page strips it of so many factors of person and voice and heart. He committed all his orations to memory because of this. It is interesting to grapple with Socrates' clear distinction between his orality and writing when a Facebook Like is being given the status of both in a legal court. What does this mean for Socrates' dichotomies? Part of his love of orality was the way it could echo: a speech could be memorized by someone else and regurgitated with the same tone and implied meanings.. The Like button strangely mimics this echo effect by virtue of the way it is reported over and over. These echoes throughout Facebook are what make it such an important feature for a court of law to discuss, since it is so public. Of course this is not the same kind of echoing as Socrates', however theoretically, the Internet and ways that it works to combine many of the definitions of writing speech and echoes. The contextual richness surrounding any given Like, which happens through its decontextualization and dispersal throughout the Facebook site are mainly what gives it so much power and arguably, voice.

Ethnography of a Facebook Page

Let us turn to examples of individual Likes and one particular Facebook community. I have actively followed several Pages on Facebook, conducting an ethnography of Likes. One of these Pages I found as I was looking for different marketing strategies on Facebook was the Domino's Pizza page. It is interesting for many reasons. First of all, it offers a space on Facebook where I would encounter no Friends of mine- I made sure that no one I knew had Liked the Page when I started following it. Second, it is a page I only Liked when I started conducting an

ethnography- so I had not had any prior experience with the community. Third, because it is a company's Page, and the company sells a simple food product, it offered a window into several things: marketing practices on Facebook, a community of people with no significant commonality, and had nine million Likes. Therefore on this one Page I had access to the source of the content and information that was displayed on over nine million people's News Feeds .

I conducted my ethnographic investigation with much the same methods as Tom Boellstorff(2008) in his brilliant book, *Coming of Age in Second Life*. He created a false username and "avatar", which I did not, and he actively participated in the world of Second Life, which I did not, but there the divergences end. He limited his ethnographic research to within the virtual world, he recorded information and ethnographic anecdotes and vignettes he observed. He did not seek to analyze the sub-groups and cultures within the purview of Second Life, but sought to instead approach a description of the overall world. In essence, Tom Boellstorff deemed it most valuable to take an inside-out approach, viewing the virtual world from within it. I apply the same premise to my observation and methods. I record all the interactions I cite with a screenshot¹⁰ in order to preserve the spatial and graphic integrity of the information as well as the salient data details. I observed this 'page' regularly for four months, and screenshotted every notable or representative piece of data, storing all the resulting photographs in a file on my computer. I never participate in the comment chain or Liked anything on the Page. The only thing I Liked was the Page itself, so that my News Feed would start to display some of the Domino's 'posts'. Therefore, the two ways that I would see content from this page was when I

¹⁰ Screenshot- a photo taken by your computer of the screen itself. It is an excellent way to photograph and preserve the exact appearance of something on your computer. To screenshot something you press shift+command+4 and then drag the cursor around the content you wish to photograph; when you release the cursor it will take the photo and save to your desktop.

was scrolling through my personal News Feed, or if I decided to visit the page and scroll through the recent content. I also conducted several long session of scrolling through the entire Page and screenshotting anything I found interesting in order to have a more comprehensive sampling.

The Domino's Pizza Page had a surprising amount of discussion, comments, and, most importantly, Likes given that a pizza brand is one of the least controversial or discussion-inspiring topics on Facebook. In addition, the tone of the posts on the Dominos Page are relatively unchanging. It was remarkable how much the advertisements elicited response from all the Facebook users who follow the page. One example is the alerts about special pizza sales. One example of an average advertisement shows a photo of a pizza with pepperoni and green peppers. Above the photo it says, "Taste the difference passion makes/Order a Medium 2-Topping Handmade Pan Pizza for only \$7.99" and underneath it there is the link to the Domino's website. Written on the photo itself it says, "Without our handiwork this would be just ingredients. Medium 2-Topping Handmade Pan Pizzas for &7.00 each."¹¹ On the Facebook page there are hundreds of these types of ads, offering two for one specials, or reduced prices on one type of pizza. This particular advertisement got seven hundred and eighty Likes. Most of the Domino's posts get somewhere between a couple hundred Likes and over a thousand.

In order to get a full picture of the daily interactions, I recorded comments and Likes. To give a fuller picture of this typical post and the types of responses they get, there are a couple of quotes from the comment thread on this particular post. In my ethnography of Facebook, I had to decide whether or not to include the names of the Facebook users. This is a particularly tense subject, because Facebook has encountered so many privacy issues managing the vast amount of

¹¹ See, Dominos Pizza, Facebook <https://www.Facebook.com/Dominos?fref=ts> , date posted February 5th, last visited February 6th

personal information they have access to. Facebook's founding principal was exclusivity and control over one's social group. By having it limited to the Ivy League and then to universities only, the attempt was to limit its social circle- dictating that the friendships would be largely school friendships. Even when it opened up to the general public, the privacy settings are within the user's control. Users can control what friends can see of their profile and information, and what non-friends see. It is an essential factor of Facebook that you have complete control over who sees your information. However, things get complicated by the fact that peoples' usernames on Facebook, unlike most other social media and networking sites, are usually their real names. This helps when looking people up, since one doesn't need to already know their username; Facebook has been particularly useful as a site for reuniting old friends and acquaintances. However, when visiting a page, like the Dominos' Pizza page for instance, anyone has access to the names of the people who comment and post and Like things on the page. If one clicks on the username, it redirects to their profile, which is on limited view for non-friends. What this means is that as an ethnographer, I can see the names and activities of strangers and use them as data. Including those publicly-accessible names in this paper was an deliberate research choice. These names are considered a public record; as mentioned, they are brought in as legitimate evidence in legal trials. The record of a comment or a Like is increasingly seen as an action and a speech act for which the person is accountable. Because these names are publicly accessible and because, by making a Facebook account, users are consenting to have their names displayed, I decided to include Facebook names in this work, both as a matter of transparency in my ethnographic method and for clarity in explanation. I do not view this as a breach of privacy or disrespect of human subjects.

On the Domino's post described earlier, there were many 'comments'. One Facebook user, named Randy Rayvon Robbins wrote, "It's really good." Another man named Luis Rodriguez wrote, "What you guys ain't doing the two for 5.99 anymore???", a woman named Mala Kurniawan wrote "Like this," and another woman named Crystal Miller wrote, "That's what I had for lunch."¹² These were four of nineteen comments on this post, and reflect the typical range of responses. Many complain, like Luis Rodriguez did, either about the sale price itself, or that it didn't actually work for them when they tried to order it, or that the delivery took too long to get to their house. Many others, like Randy Rayvon Robbins, simply corroborate the great taste of Domino's or express their love of pizza in general. Mala Kurniawan's comment is interesting because she went out of her way to write the words "Like this". This fits into an interesting category of comment, which I will further explore, in which Facebook users write comments mentioning or altering or amending Likes. And finally Crystal Miller's 'comment' is an excellent example of many, many 'comments' which connect to the content, sharing a personal story or experience about pizza. It is very interesting to note that none of these four commenters were among the seven hundred and eighty people who had liked the 'post' itself. This, after searching through countless 'posts', seems to be a consistent norm- people who comment on 'posts' on the page rarely also Like the post itself. They sometimes Like some other comment, but it usually has to be in direct conversation with their comment for that to occur. All of these four particular 'comments'; were Liked once, all by the same Facebook user. His name is Phillip Le. In my study of this Facebook Page, it was quickly evident that this user had Liked almost every single post and comment on the entire Domino's Pizza Page. This behavior was

¹² See, Dominos Pizza, Facebook <https://www.Facebook.com/Dominos?fref=ts>, date posted February 5th, last visited February 6th

skewing any sort of substantive conclusion of Like behavior on Facebook, so I visited his Profile. His Profile has an animated character as a 'profile picture' and a blank grey 'cover photo'. It says he is from Sydney Australia and he has around fifteen hundred friends. However, every single 'post' he has made on his wall are promotions for iPhone 5 sales and other Apple products.

His Profile and Like activity are very unusual- it seems that his entire Facebook is devoted to promotions of the Apple and Domino's companies. I did some research and discovered that here is a burgeoning market out there for "fake likes", in which people get paid for Liking content on Facebook by companies who guarantee the owners of that content real likes. The BBC set up a fake company on Facebook called VirtualBagel and paid a minimal amount to Facebook for advertising to the right demographics. A couple hours after it was created on Facebook it had attracted thousands of Likes, most of them from Indonesia, India, Egypt and the Philippines . They concluded that there was a significant percentage of Facebook profiles which were fake, created and used by people in order to get paid for Liking content everywhere on Facebook(Dumenco 2012).

I cannot be sure, but "Philip Le's" account seems like a perfect example of this phenomenon. This is a very interesting development within Facebook- the sheer quantity of Likes a Page or 'post' has, has increased in value to such an extent that people have begun to pay people to generate Likes for them. Often this process seems to happen indirectly, through some intermediary. The logic is interesting- the Like originally had value, and seemingly still does, because it is purportedly an endorsement from real people by their own free will. The number of Likes beneath a companies page should in fact represent the exact number of individuals who

wanted to connect to that product and company, support them publicly, and see more of their content. That premise is why companies are willing to pay for advertising on Facebook, in order to reach more people to attract Likes, and also to advertise to people's Friends what their Friends Liked, hoping for it to inspire their Friends to Like it too. However, if people are signing up to Like things in exchange for money, because the value of a Like has gone up, that will naturally force down the value, as people decreasingly trust Likes to be real anymore.

Crucially, these fake likes are still being generated by real people. They are still bodies sitting at a computer scrolling through Facebook as quickly as possible, manually clicking the Like button. If there were computers randomly generating Likes the devaluation would be too much to overcome. But due to the nature of the paid likers being real people calls our attention to the anxiety of the insincere Like. Somehow, if someone is receiving money for the action, it loses a big part of its value. Arguably, the number still stands as a valid number, but the knowledge that a percentage of that total number is insincere and motivated by profit quickly highlights the importance of the individual intent in the collective total. Somehow, though the number itself truly seems to be the coveted goal for most Pages and companies on Facebook, enough that they are willing to pay to raise that number, it remains important what the number consists of.

In many ways, after the first few Likes the identity of the person who Liked it becomes irrelevant since there is only enough room below each post to display two or three names before it converts to a number, saying "You and x others like this"(See Figure 6 in Appendix). After about two or three, what is required is not identity but quantity of persons. It seems it is important that it is a real body liking the items, a whole person with intention and their own

name. In other words, it is important that each number corresponds to our governing notions of the discrete self, but that discrete self almost instantly becomes lost in a sea of names which are all represented by one number. The number's importance is much more related to its mass than to the discrete individuality of each member. Of course, we have little way of conceptualizing a unit other than the self which we have assigned a name, but it is essential to identify these notions of selfhood enacted in the valuation of a Like and the quantity of Likes.

Facebook and Marketing

I conducted several interviews with peer Facebook users to provide personal accounts of additional ethnographic materials. These interviews were all with students between eighteen and twenty-five years of age, targeting the millennial generation. One student at Barnard College, Christina, worked at a start-up from 2012 to 2013. She explains the kind of pressure everybody at the start-up was under at the beginning to try and get all their friends to Like the start-up's page. When asked if she ever Liked content just to support her friends, she answers,

Oh yes definitely. Especially since I worked at a fashion start-up and I realized how important it was to me that people like our page. If people ever ask me to like a page for a place they work for or something I pretty much always do it... Employers put so much importance on that so it's hard when your friends just wont do it, because it reflects badly on you at work. When I first started they asked us to get as many of our friends to like it as possible so other people would see it and be more willing to like it... It makes it clear that it's a well-known and established company.[Personal communication, February 7th, 2013]

First of all, she hits on a common phenomenon- that many of her daily Likes are purely supportive and have nothing to do with actually liking the post/company/event. Christina went on to describe thermometer charts they would use at the company to chart weekly Like quota goals. She continues "once you get that base of 'fake' likes, the real likes start coming in. And so when we had major publicity, people would visit the page and be like 'oh wow this has 3,000

likes already' and then they might like it, but if you see it on the news or something but the page has like 100 likes you're probably going to think the company isn't legitimate or isn't really trying or something"(Personal communication, February 7th, 2013).

This idea of a base number of Likes is crucial to an understanding of Likes as a new sort of currency. Christina's explanation of a New York City start-up's approach to their social media presence is very illuminating. It was a web-based company, so they already had a definitive online presence, but they deem it necessary to have an intensive social media push as well. Between her account of how important it was for a company to garner Likes on Facebook, and the emerging industry that buys Likes from people paid to click through Facebook as quickly as possible, it is clear how much the token like is valued. The value comes from its claim to stand for a whole constellation of sentiments. It makes sense why companies would seize on this gesture, a click of a Like button, since prior to social media and especially prior to the Internet, there were very few ways for the general consumers to show this kind of free-willed support of a company or product. The number of Likes on a product's Facebook page is not directly equivalent to sales numbers or reviews. It is a number of individuals who, out of sheer enthusiasm for the company, decided to click a button which links the page to their profile, which shows their unmitigated support for the company, and which will encourage more updates from that page in their news feed. That is a commitment, whether conscious or unconsciously made, that the companies find incredibly valuable. Those three factors are very important to the companies, but the single most important aspect about the Likes on their page is that they are public. That number of Likes alone, as Christina explained, does a lot to uphold the name of the

company, prove its popularity, legitimacy, and tuned-in-ness. Not only that, but other potential customers see that number and are inspired to Like it as well.

We all have a sense for what a Like means, and what many Likes mean—they obviously carry some kind of weight. However, it remains the most detachable, unexplained, unfettered instantiation of sentiment possible. The verb “to like” naming it, which does carry meaning and a positive connotation, has become neutral by virtue of Like being the only option given. The Like button has lost its real link with the sentiment of Liking. Arguably, it takes as much effort to Like something on Facebook as a cough or twitch- it is not seen as a highly deliberative, forceful action, but rather a passing fancy or simple acknowledgment of having seen it- despite the fact that, as we just explore, companies see it very differently. If the effort expended to click the button is negligible, then why, when multiplied by many does it buttress its subject with so much weight and power? Does this suggest that the number alone is the significant aspect of the Like currency? If this is so, then it would have the same effect if instead of requiring an action, the number was accumulated merely by people having “seen” the content. If it merely said “Seen by x number of people” would the same effect be evoked however? Is it the conceptualization and gesturing to a record of a multiplicity of people which gives it gravity? Is the energy and intention and agency behind the click integral to its weight?

Social media prioritizes collectivity over the individual. One way to see this is how quickly even a famous name gets lost in the shuffle of the collective on Facebook. Famous individuals are one of the extreme examples of the notion of individualization in our culture- a system, which enables one person to stand out from the rest. One well-known person can pull much more weight and power than the average citizen. However, Facebook requires users to

only own one account and to represent yourself in an attempt to recreate the social world virtually, instead of offering the opportunity to create avatars and such. Most famous people though, use their personal Facebook pages as advertising, and therefore let social media managers control their Facebook actions and presence. A Like from one of these famous people, arguably, doesn't really represent their full weight in identity, and often gets lost in the huge list of Likes. Facebook does not prioritize certain Likes over others in any way, and therefore makes a implicit valuation of quantity of Likes over the specific names on the list. A celebrity's Like is as important as a building block as any other Like. Facebook essentially requires individuated personhood as the primary mode of using the site, while valuing the collective and mass numbers more simply by virtue of its infrastructure. It is especially clear on Facebook how quickly a person becomes a number in the accumulation of Likes.

There is growing concern legally and socially about the individual encounter between the self and content on Facebook—the concern centering around the worry about what the Like really expresses. The button is a sort of interface between the Facebook content and the variety of effects it produces in the individual psyche. The variety of these effects are boiled down and represented by the one-note gesture of the Like. We are left guessing and debating at the constellation of intentions, calculations, and messages intended behind the Like- particularly when it is of legal concern. Yet it is its neutrality, and very ability to take on many meanings which makes it a quintessential signifier(Saussure 1916). It would lose all value if Facebook invented differentiations of sentiment to uncomplicate the question of “what does a Like mean?”. It is very important that it is the only interface offered to connect with the content. Of course, there is the area to write a comment, but the Like is the only preconceived, standardized,

clickable way to interact with the content. Because of this, it gets neutralized in meaning since it is the only option. Therefore, the Like becomes deployed for a whole host of meanings. Here we are at the root of the language problem- in order to have enough universality to be a useful concept, a word must therefore forfeit its specificity and particularity.

Facebook and the Legal Signature

The contradictory meanings of the Like button which are both collective and individual cannot both be fully accommodated within our legal system because it is predicated on a very specific, liberal understanding of personhood. This personhood ties each body to a name, and lets that name act in the world as the body's proxy. The body is held accountable for all that the name does and stands for. The William and Mary Law Review states that

The liberal conception of privacy overlaps considerably with the liberal conception of private property. We associate privacy with certain places and things we believe we own, such as our homes, diaries, letters, names, reputations, and body parts. At the core of the liberal conception of privacy is the notion of inaccessibility. Privacy obtains where persons and personal information are, to a degree, inaccessible to others.[Allen 1999:724]

Both privacy and property are at stake in the Facebook Like. Social media is inextricably tied to privacy issues because it is based on sharing personal information with a community, but (Garfinkle 2000). This is importantly linked to the history of the signature as a marker of authenticity and unique bodily representation of the individual, and through it, property.

According to the Gale Encyclopedia of American Law,

The term *signature* is generally understood to mean the signing of a written document with one's own hand. However, it is not critical that a signature actually be written by hand for it to be legally valid. It may, for example, be typewritten, engraved, or stamped. The purpose of a signature is to authenticate a writing, or provide notice of its source, and to bind the individual signing the writing by the provisions contained in the document[Batten 2011:202]

Here we get a general overview of the legal definition of a signature. It sounds much like the uses of the Like button-authentication, providing notice of the source, and binding the individual to the content. Of course, there is no binding contract in most of the content users Like on Facebook, but indeed the addition of one's name to any given post does bind that person to the content and represents some sort of complicity and support of that content, as shown in the legal case examined earlier. The notions of the body and the representation of the body through and by name are also very much at play when considering the history of the signature, and they get complicated when applied to a single click.

A signature can be written by the hand of the purported signer, either through the signer's unaided efforts or with the aid of another individual who guides the signer's pen or pencil. In cases when the maker's hand is guided or steadied, the signature is the maker's act, not the act of the assisting individual.[Batten 2011:203]

Here, the hand of the signer is of utmost relevance, the body made part of the act of authorization. It is so important, that even if ill or unable in any way, a guided hand is preferable to someone else signing as proxy. The act of authorization and of binding oneself to contract is considered a physical act here, and the hand is the executor of that act. The distinction between the hand that it physically touching the pen as the valid executor, and the hand guiding that hand as merely assisting is paramount. There is a certain sort of belief of contiguity at work here, where the body, and through the body, the will, is equated with the act when in physical proximity with the writing instrument. How does that apply when it is a "click" instead of a hand guiding a pen? Of course we saw how even a click is deemed as grave an act as a signature on a petition in terms of weight of support in the legal case. However, this theorization is complicated by this further description, which offers a way out of even a hand-guided signature.

A signature can generally be made by one individual for another in his presence and at his direction, or with his assent, unless prohibited by statute. A signature that is made in this manner is valid, and the individual writing the name is regarded merely as an instrument through which the party whose signature is written exercises personal discretion and acts for himself. [Batten 2011:203]

In this case, the law is placing more import on the intention to write the signature, specified here as exercising “personal discretion,” than the hand writing. The hand here becomes “the instrument”, much like a pen is considered a writing instrument, for the sheer will of the person wishing to sign the document. This is an interesting allowance, and brings us back to our discussion about whether the ‘click’ is really the essential thing, or if merely reading or opening or seeing the content would have the same effect. In many ways, deeming someone else to sign a document for you requires a fair amount of volition, which is not comparable to the kind of passive complicity involved in merely looking or opening something. But in both cases the bodily act is removed. This also applies in the case of the celebrity Facebook account, where celebrities endow someone else the authority to use their name online for them- acting as mere executors of their image and name. In many ways, the rules governing Facebook, and the way that the law has come to view acts on Facebook, heavily looks to laws governing signature as its precedent. If someone’s account did something on Facebook, it would be very difficult to prove whether or not the actual person committed the act, but their name was on the act and therefore they are deemed legally responsible.

The Like Button as Derrida’s Trace

As we have seen, there is a strong push legally, commercially, personally, and even in the instructions written by Facebook itself, to put a finger on what a Like means. To locate that

presence of an enduring, core meaning, is becoming more and more vital as the Like gains traction as a form a currency. Increasingly, it is becoming a sort of currency of sentiment- a type of net sum of receptivity toward a certain product or content on Facebook. This type of numerical figure has long been sought after in capitalist ventures, particularly product-driven companies, hoping for representative feedback from clients. Seemingly, they have found all they wished for in the vague, non-presuming gesture of the Like. But with the rise of the “fake” like, it becomes more and more necessary to codify its meaning, even constitutionally, and the struggle to pinpoint a real meaning highlights the interesting tensions which are essential to its success and value. This brings us to the application of linguistic theory to the functions of the Like to analyze whether a core meaning can really be found.

Here is where Jaques Derrida(1967) comes in. *Of Grammatology* conceives of writing in general as a site of absence in a world obsessed with presence. Instead of writing standing for and representing, or in other words, making present, the body which is not there, Derrida argues that writing is the trace left behind by an event, and body that has passed, therefore representing the “no-longer-present”, and the “always-already absent present”, and highlighting absence. As part of his Deconstructionist project, Derrida sought to tease out the internal contractions in language itself, fighting against the structuralist dualism of signifier and signified He concluded that in the contradictions there is an eternal loop, and in that tension and loop a multiplicity of meanings. This deconstructionist strategy undoes the binds of language and finds the trace which refers beyond itself.

To use a deconstructionist approach towards the Like button is to quickly find that this button, this lowest-common-denominator of response, could be considered one of the most quintessential words according to Derrida. There was once a ‘dislike’ button, but it was quickly phased out, and now Facebook only offers the option to Like something or to abstain from Liking it. Those are the only modes of interaction other than commenting on the content; importantly, there is no opposite to a Like. The Like could be said to record presence, to bring in the identity and in some ways gesture to the body of someone, and therefore be a marker of presence. In many other ways, the Like could be seen as a simple record or trace of an action, an event, an interaction that passed between the individual and the content. In this case it bears witness to a past event, and marks the absence of the body, the person. For Derrida(1967), his terms of the “presence of absence” refers to the presence or lack of the true meaning of language. I wish to apply the “presence of absence” tension not merely to the meaning or lack thereof of a Like, but use the tension to describe the presence of personhood being gestured to and brought in by the Like. The Like button is both a time-dependent action that occurs and then is recorded, and also a complex referent system involving personhood and representation. The Like button’s power is seen when it takes the form of a large collective of Likes, but it is still an individual choice for each constituent of that collective. The Like button can be thought of as a bucket with no inherent meaning in it, essentially as the signifier with no signified. And like an empty bucket, if enough people use the bucket, it carries weight, and starts to be speculated about its contents. However, Derrida(1967) would argue that all words are essentially empty, and gain “trace” when actually deployed by many. In this respect, the Like button is the primordial word. Here we have

arrived at the boiled down, zero-sum work that the Like button does- it is a essentially meaningless container, deployed and meaning-filled by many, and thus the ultimate social tool.

Conclusion

This deconstruction of the Like button has primarily involved understanding it through language *about* it. This includes legal texts about the Like button, Facebook users' descriptions of the button, Facebook's explanations of how to use the button, and ethnography through close reading of the Likes and comments on a commercial Facebook page. Retracing the analytical steps of this paper, we began with Facebook's self-reports about the uses of the Like button. These explanations provided the intended meanings of the button, giving us a foundation to understand how the button works. These uses were two-fold. One was to show enjoyment and general appreciation of the post you are Liking. The other was to connect the person to more posts of that nature, because a Like generates more updates from that source in the future. These two simple functions capture the two operative realms of the Like button: one of sentiment, the other of the automated connections Facebook programs into its site. Within these two realms, the possible uses of the the button are still endless- sentiment behind a Like is always elusive and given to interpretation, and the ways in which users strategically or ignorantly connect to content can have a million different manifestations.

To up the stakes of this argument, we examined two law cases about Like incidents. The fact that a Like can become the incriminating evidence for a court case shows how relevant and powerful social media activity is becoming today. More importantly, these transcripts from the court cases provided word-for-word legal descriptions of what Facebook is, what Likes are, and

how Likes were legally classified for the purposes of those cases and all future cases. When pushed to make a classification, the law ruled that from now on, a single Like was the equivalent of a speech act, and as such, fully protected by the first amendment. This weighty description of a single click, transformed all interactions on Facebook and around the Internet into potential liabilities. These expressions of sentiment and ways of connecting to more content are also now part of a person's public identity and allegiance in the world. People are now held accountable for their Likes.

Once a foundation was established of the intended meanings and uses of the Like button and its growing importance, an ethnographic exploration of Facebook helped parse real-life and commercial uses and patterns of the button. The ethnography was specifically focused on a commercial page to investigate Likes from a marketing perspective. The surprising encounter with fake Likes brought to light a perfect contrast of what Likes are not supposed to mean. The existence of purchased sentiment delimits the boundary of meaning of a Like. It both exemplifies that what a real Like is supposed to represent is sincerity and free will. But it also brings up the importance of the number of Likes as more powerful than the individual sincerity of each one. The fake Likes power stems from a need for mass numbers of Likes, overlooking the reason that Likes are valuable in the first place. The paradox between the individual-who-Likes and the importance of collective is crucial to the Like button's power. It is also crucial to why it is so hard for it to be appraised legally, or in fact in any way. The legal status of the signature was a way into seeing the framework with which the Like button was approached. It also provided a nice comparison to the Like, since both involve a name and a certain accountability- the Like

button in many ways is a modernized signature. The paradox of its meaning- especially not interpersonal meaning, but from a government or commercial perspective- still exists.

This paradox is one of many contradictions implicit in the Like buttons operations. These included tensions between individuality and collectivity, speech and writing, act and impulse, and individual and collective. Somehow within the tiny button, a tremendous scope of meaning can be enacted. This gestures to how much global interconnectivity adds weight to seemingly tiny tools. When a technological tool is available and translatable to such a wide population, its meaning, local and global becomes deeply significant as both a meaning-maker and as symbol of the emptiness of pure communication. Locating the core meaning of the Like button is becoming vital as it gains traction on the Internet. It is becoming a currency of sentiment- a type of net sum of receptivity toward a certain product or content. This type of numerical figure has long been sought after in capitalist ventures, particularly product-driven companies, hoping for representative feedback from clients. Seemingly, they have found all they wished for in the vague gesture of the Like. The struggle to pinpoint a real meaning highlights the interesting tensions within it which are essential to its success and value. The examination of these tensions, and the way they affect Facebook users personally, legally, and economically reveal the competing structures of meaning within which the Like button is operating. These competing structures are part of a changing system and world. The struggle to define the 'Like button is emblematic of the gap between communication systems and the structures of meaning that lag behind. The logic of social media, and its collectivity is fundamentally at odds with the type of deference we pay to individuality in the pre-established structures within our culture.

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Appendix

Fig. 1



Fig. 2



Fig. 3

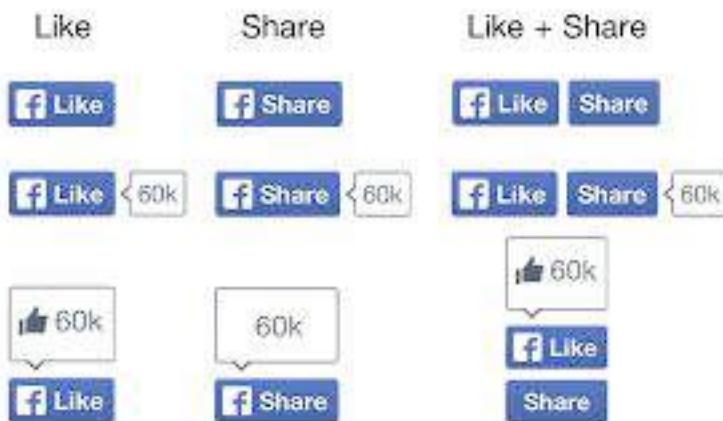


Fig. 4

Like ·

Fig. 5

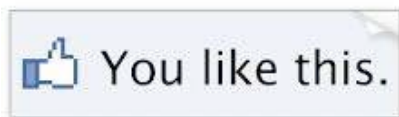


Fig. 6

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