Proceedings of the Sixth Annual

DATA | MEDIA | DIGITAL GRADUATE SYMPOSIUM

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PREFATORY MATERIAL

ABSTRACTS

Introduction

Data|Media|Digital **[D|M|D]** is an annual research symposium hosted by the New Media and Culture Certificate **[NMCC],** an interdisciplinary certificate program housed in the Division of Graduate Studies and open to all graduate students at the University of Oregon. D|M|D is an opportunity to showcase the exciting multidisciplinary research and creative work in and adjacent to new media and digital studies being produced by graduate students across campus. Presentations can be based on work in progress or in the final stages of development.

Participants are selected by a faculty committee based on proposals submitted in response to an open call for papers. The faculty organizing committee this year consisted of Professors Mattie Burkert, Courtney Cox, and Maxwell Foxman.

Submission of revised and/or extended abstracts after the symposium is optional for all presenters. The suggested citation for individual abstracts is as follows:

> Lastname, Firstname. "Paper Title." Presented at Data|Media|Digital: The Annual Symposium of the Graduate New Media and Culture Certificate at the University of Oregon. Eugene, OR: April 2024. Retrieved from scholarsbank.uoregon.edu.

D|M|D is co-produced by NMCC in collaboration with the Digital Humanities program in the Department of English **[DH]** and the School of Journalism and Communication **[SOJC]**. This year's event was also supported by the Department of Indigenous, Race, and Ethnic Studies **[IRES]** and the UO Libraries. Gabriela Chitwood, Zoë Gamell Brown, Srithip Prime, and Jen McNutt-Bloom provided critical planning and organizational support, with additional support from staff at UO Campus Print, IT Services, and Catering.

Schedule of Presentations

As printed in conference program; note that some titles have since since changed slightly.

09:15 - 09:45 WELCOME and OPENING REMARKS

09:45 - 10:45 PANEL A: DIGITAL
Moderator: Mattie Burkert (English)
- Andrew J . Wilson (SOJC), "'God Bless the South, Brother': A Paratextual Analysis of War of Rights Steam Reviews"
- Will Arangelov (SOJC), "Developing Relationships and Self-Disclosure in the Gaming World: A Case Study on the Discord Platform"
- Intisar Alshammari (English), "Digital Medievalism in the Classroom: Beowulf as a Model"

10:55 A - 11:45 FACULTY RESEARCH SPOTLIGHT
- Courtney Cox (IRES) and Lana Lopesi (IRES)

01:15 - 02:15 PANEL B: MEDIA
Moderator: Courtney Cox (IRES)
- Emrakeb Woldearegay (SOJC), "Making Dissent Visible through Facebook Activism? The Tale of Three Ethiopians"
- Stephen Ssenkaaba (SOJC), "Challenging Mainstream Media Narrative through Podcasting: The Case of Uganda' s Youth Podcasters"
- Asher Caplan (Philosophy), "A Conduct- Based Inquiry Epistemology: John Dewey and the Educationist Response to Disinformation"

02:30 - 03:30 ABSTRACT WORKSHOP

03:30 - 04:45 PANEL C: DATA
Moderator: Maxwell Foxman (SOJC)
- Nishat Parvez (SOJC), "Examining How Data Journalists in Bangladesh Keep Reporting Honest: Transparency, Ethical Data Visualization, and Protecting Secrets in Investigative Journalism"
- Maxim Shapovalov (Geography), "Role of Surface Albedo for Explaining Differences of Modeled Greenland Ice Sheet Melt"
- Genevieve Pfeiffer (Environmental Studies, English), "What' s Language Got to Do with It? Human-Language Model Entanglement"
- Audrey Kalman (SOJC), "Denim Archive: Making Meaning of Clothing and Identity through Documentation"

Digital Medievalism in the Classroom: *Beowulf* as a Model

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Keywords

Medieval Studies, Digital Humanities, Digital Medievalism, Technology, E-Learning

Abstract

Digital medievalism, a relatively new term within digital humanities, focuses on integrating digital technology into medieval studies. Despite the recent formalization of this term, medievalists have been actively using digital tools for years, embracing software and databases to support traditional scholarship (Foys 2). This enthusiasm has led to numerous personally funded and institutionally endorsed projects. For instance, the University of Virginia's *Old English Aerobics*, the University of Oxford's *Woruldhord*, the University of Glasgow's *Historical Thesaurus of Old English*, and the digital edition of Bosworth Toller's *An Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, supported by Charles University, highlight significant institutional contributions. Specific to *Beowulf*, Araby Greene's *Resources for the Study of Beowulf* offers a comprehensive collection of links to resources and books, supported initially by the University of North Carolina and the University of Nevada. My favorite, the *Electronic Beowulf*, edited by Kevin Kiernan and programmed by Emil Iacob, provides high-resolution images of the *Beowulf* manuscript and various interactive tools to enhance understanding of the text.

These digital initiatives provide access to medieval texts, making them available to a broader range of students and scholars (Luizza 14). The drive behind these projects stems from a desire to preserve and transform medieval content through modern digital media, as Daniel T. Kline describes as maintaining the "medieval essence" in a postmedieval world (Kline 4). David J. Bolter and Richard A. Grusin further discuss this as remediating old media to create new forms of audience engagement (Kline 5). By employing multimodal projects incorporating images, movements, music, speech, and sound, we can create varying degrees of immersion, identification, and distance, essential for engaging young audiences accustomed to audiovisual stimuli from video games, films, TV shows, and social media. In educational settings, these approaches can engage more students with diverse learning styles (Kline 6).

Beowulf, written in an oral tradition, is particularly well-suited for such multimodal models. Hearing the poem allows readers to learn Old English pronunciation and appreciate its alliteration. This auditory experience brings the poem's oral aesthetic to life, enabling students to engage with the text more deeply (Drout 86). Michael Drout

emphasizes that listening to the poem allows students to become part of a continuum of speakers and hearers, fostering a deeper connection with the past (88). Furthermore, *Beowulf*'s vivid imagery and memorable encounters lend themselves well to visual and interactive adaptations. Visual elements enhance comprehension and engagement especially for young readers accustomed to digital media. Studies by Sandra Cairncross and Mike Mannion support the use of multimedia in education, highlighting its benefits in conceptualizing and contextualizing material, engaging learners actively, and promoting internal reflection (162). Visual adaptations of *Beowulf can thus significantly enhance the learning experience.*

My project aligns with these scholarly efforts, aiming to create a comprehensive digital resource for the study of *Beowulf*. As a doctoral student interested in exploring digital medievalism, I am designing a website and an online application to support students' initial reading experiences of *Beowulf*. This resource will engage students and non-students, providing a comprehensive and immersive introduction to the poem. To ensure its relevance, I have gathered feedback from undergraduate students at the University of Oregon, incorporating their perspectives into the project's design.

Research Questions
In designing a website or an online application for the study of Beowulf, what features or tools can be added to deepen the readers' understanding of the poem?

Methods
Quantitative method: conducting a survey
Qualitative method: personal interactions and observations in the classroom

Findings
Respondents believe the following tools are necessary for the study of *Beowulf* in the proposed website/online application: plot timeline, translations, scholarly work, visuals (images, sketches, animation), side by side Old English and Modern English texts, oral reading of the poem, definitions, Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) page, characters brief introductions page, genealogy and other existing online resources.

Challenges and Concerns
1. The insufficient technical skills and training for scholars in humanities.
2. The sustainability and maintenance of digital projects.
3. The reliability of the digital world in accurately representing the medieval world (i.e: AI-generated images) and maintaining it (i.e: software and hardware updates).

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Peter S. Baker, Old English Aerobics, https://www.oldenglishaerobics.net
University of Oxford, Woruldhord, http://poppy.nsms.ox.ac.uk/woruldhord/
University of Glasgow, Historical Thesaurus of Old English, https://ht.ac.uk

Developing Relationships and Self-Disclosure in the Gaming World: A Case Study on the "Discord" Platform

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Keywords
Discord, online relationships, computer-mediated communication, social networks

Abstract
Gaming is one of the most widely spread hobbies across the globe with hundreds of millions of players connecting to the virtual world daily. In the current state of gaming communication Discord is an integral part of the culture. The platform provides space for users to communicate through voice or video calls, messaging, steaming, and sharing media and files both in private settings and as part of communities. Discord remains an understudied phenomenon, but its characteristics and differences from traditional Social Networking Sites (SNS) provide an avenue for detailed research and valuable conclusions. Current research is associated with Discord's role in building communities online (Greenberg, 2019; Mock, 2019). Participating in online communication often assumes greater self-disclosure in computer-mediated communications (CMC) such as the gaming world in comparison to face-to-face (FTF) conversations (Joinson, 2003; Suler, 2004).

Literature Review
This paper aims to address the development of relationships and willingness to self-disclose important topics related to gaming and the real world established in the platform. Furthermore, the key concepts of depth and breadth of self-disclosure, part of the Social Penetration Theory (Altman & Taylor, 1973) are the main variables of interest, accounting for the range of topics and levels of intimacy to which participants are prepared to discuss. Self-disclosure is one of the most important factors in the development of intimate friendships (Barnlund 1989; Kudo & Simkin, 2003). Researchers have reported that although privacy concerns are negatively related to information disclosure, users of SNS often control the unwanted audience by manipulating profile accessibility, and not by cutting down the amount of information revealed in their profiles (Stutzman, 2011). Christofides (2009) found that disclosure was significantly predicted by the need for popularity, whereas information control was predicted by levels of trust and self-esteem, and not by privacy concerns. The theory argues that as one relational partner increases their depth of disclosures the other partner will typically reciprocate, provided it is perceived as beneficial to them to continue to maintain that particular relationship and they want to invest in developing it further (Taylor & Altman, 1975). Breath generally refers to the group of interests of the

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participants. In this case study – the Discord application is mainly related to gaming and channel specialization reduces the possibility of increasing the breadth of topics. Usage and exposure or the amount of time spent online is another major topic, with researchers finding evidence for both positive (Ebeling-Witte, 2007; Van Rooij, 2011) and negative (Arslan, 2018; Whang, 2003) effects of this process of self-disclosure.

In the affective exchange stage, the depth of interaction is increased. Sometimes it reaches deeper levels of the "onion", however, this remains inconsistent, while the topic range is small (Taylor & Altman, 1987). This stage represents the wider friend circle of someone or the courtship phase of a romantic relationship. Due to the increased intimacy and time spent developing this type of tie, the risks associated with disclosing central information can be seen as more beneficial than harmful, but there may still be hesitation to have full disclosure (Altman & Taylor, 1973).

In the stable exchange stage depth has reached the deepest level of the self-disclosure, in every topic. This is achieved very rarely, only with the closest friends or romantic partners. According to Altman and Taylor (1973) this stage of disclosure is beneficial for the relationship.

One of the assumptions of SPT is that specific types of disclosure are correlated with different stages of a relationship. Another assumption is that physical closeness is mandatory for establishing real relationships, however in this case study this is not an expected factor. Some of the participants might choose to describe relations that exist in the real world, but the predicted majority will discuss relations started and developed online. The focus of this study will be to explore the correlation suggested in SPT by Altman and Taylor (1973) with the different stages of the relationship in the case of the Discord application.

Research Questions
RQ1: *Can relationships started in the Discord application develop to a stable exchange stage?*

- H1: *Using Discord is positively related to increasing the depth of self-disclosure.*
- H2: *Using Discord is negatively related to increasing the breadth of self-disclosure.*
- H3a: *Amount of time spent in Discord will increase the depth of self-disclosure.*
- H3b: *Amount of time spent in Discord will increase the breadth of self-disclosure.*

RQ2: *Do relationships started and maintained in Discord application follow the suggested Social Penetration Theory pattern for developing relationships in face-to-face communication?*

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Ensuring Integrity: Data Journalism Ethics in Bangladesh

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Abstract
Data journalism utilizes numerical data to develop news stories, blending journalism with data science through statistical analysis and visualization tools to reveal hidden patterns and trends (Stalph, 2018; Weber et al., 2018). As a subset of investigative journalism, it aims to uncover truths on public concerns like corruption or social injustice, often focusing on broad patterns rather than individual wrongdoing (Appelgren & Nygren, 2014; Fridman et al., 2023; Emerson et al., 2018). Ethical reporting in data journalism emphasizes accuracy, impartiality, and accountability, balancing public interest with privacy rights (Ireton & Posetti, 2018; Foreman et al., 2022). This study in Bangladesh investigates strategies for upholding ethical standards, focusing on transparency, responsible data visualization, and safeguarding sensitive information, hypothesizing that prioritizing these aspects leads to trustworthy journalism.

Review of Literature
Data journalism combines investigative rigor with data science analysis, emphasizing the need for ethical standards in transparency, data visualization, and safeguarding sensitive information. Transparency involves clear communication about data sources and analysis methods to prevent misinformation and build trust (Reilley, 2024). Ethical data visualization prioritizes design choices that accurately represent data, avoiding misleading visuals (Midberry &Dahmen, 2020). Protecting confidential information, balancing privacy rights with public interest, is crucial (Kieran et al., 2000).

The theoretical framework proposed by Lewis and Westlund (2014) highlights the interplay of Epistemology, Expertise, Economics, and Ethics in data journalism. Epistemologically, journalists must handle data with awareness, focusing on its origin, analysis, and presentation to ensure truthfulness and accuracy, fostering informed public discourse. This framework challenges journalists to critically engage with data to reveal meaningful insights responsibly.

Data journalism in Bangladesh is a field marked by both its nascent emergence and its potential for profound impact on investigative reporting and public discourse. The

existing literature, although sparse due to the field's relative infancy in the region, sheds light on various dimensions of data journalism practice in the country. Studies by local scholars have noted the increasing interest among Bangladeshi journalists in harnessing the power of data to tell compelling stories (Haque et al., 2022). These works have often been referenced to draw parallels and contrast with the state of data journalism in the West, indicating a broader, more technologically driven approach to reporting that is yet to be fully adopted in Bangladesh.

The research questions are:
- RQ1: *What are the prevalent practices of transparency among data journalists in Bangladesh, and how do these practices influence audience trust?*
- RQ2: *How do data journalists in Bangladesh protect sensitive information during their investigative reporting, and what is the impact of these practices on maintaining journalistic integrity?*

The development of data journalism in Bangladesh is influenced by various factors, including the technological infrastructure, the availability of open data, and the level of journalistic training. Biswas and Talukder (2023) highlight significant challenges due to the lack of reliable data sources and comprehensive databases, which can hinder investigative journalism despite the willingness among journalists to adopt data-driven approaches. Additionally, Wright et al. (2019) stress the importance of improving data literacy among journalists to enable them to effectively handle and present complex data. This requirement for enhanced skills is part of a broader initiative to improve digital literacy in developing countries, as discussed by Weber et al. (2018), who argue that fostering data journalism capabilities is essential for the field's growth. These took us to the three hypotheses here:

- HQ1*: Data journalists in Bangladesh who engage in transparent reporting practices are likely to have higher levels of audience trust.*
- HQ2: *Employing ethical data visualization techniques correlates with greater audience perception of credibility in the news stories produced by data journalists in Bangladesh.*
- HQ3: *Data journalists in Bangladesh who implement strict measures to protect confidential information are more likely to maintain source trust and integrity in their investigative journalism practices.*

Method
To test hypotheses, a quantitative approach will be employed, utilizing a structured survey administered to journalists and media organizations in Bangladesh. The survey aims to gauge the level of transparency in reporting processes, responsible data visualization practices, and effectiveness of data security measures. Established scales will be used, such as the Ethical Journalism Scale by Lo et al. (2005) for measuring ethical practices and Data Journalism Practices scale by Beiler et al. (2020) for

visualization and topic selection. Questions will be rated on a 5-point Likert scale, assessing practices like citing data sources and avoiding misleading visual elements.

A stratified random sampling technique will ensure representation across media organizations and journalist roles, considering variables like organization size, type, location, and experience levels. This approach aims to ensure the sample's representativeness in terms of key demographic and professional characteristics. As the total number of journalists in Bangladesh is unknown, a convenient sample will be used.

The survey will be distributed through online and offline channels to maximize reach and accessibility, including social media, email, and personal communication. This approach addresses limitations seen in previous surveys where random or representative sampling was challenging due to unknown population parameters (Heravi et al., 2022).

Data will be collected over a predetermined period, allowing sufficient time for respondents to participate. Once collected, the data will be analyzed using statistical software to perform regression analysis. This will help identify the strength and nature of correlations between the ethical dimensions explored and the perceived trustworthiness and accountability of data journalism in Bangladesh. The regression analysis will also control for potential confounding variables such as the size of the media organization, the journalists' years of experience, and their formal training in data journalism.

By scrutinizing the relationship between ethical practices and journalistic integrity, this research contributes to the ongoing discourse on responsible data journalism and its role in fostering transparency, accuracy, and public trust. The findings will not only benefit data journalists and media organizations in Bangladesh but also provide insights relevant to the broader field of data journalism ethics and its implications for journalism practice worldwide.

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What's Language Got To Do With It: Human-Language Model Co-constitution

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Abstract
My research project, "What's Language Got To Do With It?," demonstrates what is at stake in this current iteration of 'the posthuman question' when entangled with large language models, specifically in the Post-Roe era. I look to the expanding use of large language models to address reproduction-related questions by both the general population as well as the implementation in clinical settings. I interrogate how models are entangled with humans so that they co-create worlds and world-systems.

Chat GPT 3.5's release to the general public was temporally proximate to the Dobbs vs. Mississippi decision, an ideological shift around abortion and birth control, and the rupture of the U.S. federal government's ability to protect pregnant bodies. How machine learning and AI might be applied to emergent reproductive needs is yet to be determined. I am interested in how the general public as well as the medical field might choose to interact with language models on the topic of reproduction. I analyze the visual display and capabilities of commercial apps available for individual download in the U.S., as well as two outstanding studies investigating ChatGPT's ability to be leveraged as a clinical tool for patients seeking medical information. Ultimately, I argue that concepts of 'human' and 'personhood' need inclusive, equitable, and yet tangible boundaries.

Research Questions
How are LLMs being used to fill scientific and general knowledge gaps and lack of information and misinformation concerning abortion and birth control in the Post-Roe era?

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Counter Hegemonic Narratives through Podcasting: The Case of Uganda's Youth Podcasters

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Abstract
Traditional media in Africa tends to reflect the voices of the elite (Aiseng & Akpojivi, 2019), sidelining the young, elderly, uneducated and other less powerful groups in society. However, with the proliferation of digital media, more ordinary people can now produce and distribute their own content. Apart from social media, many, young, urban-based youth in Africa are using podcasting to create, curate and distribute their own content (Royston, 2021; Africa Podcast, 2021). This study examines the motivations, structure and production routines of young, urban based Ugandan podcasters aged 25-35 years. Using the theory of networked counter publics, this study suggests that young Ugandans are using the networked affordances of podcasts to articulate their voice, challenge dominant mainstream media narratives, and create counterhegemonic conversations.

Research Questions
RQ1: *What are the motivations, production routines, content, and structure of Uganda's youth-produced podcasts?*

RQ2: *In what ways do these podcasting practices generate networked counter public narratives?*

Literature
Podcasts, as digitized audio platforms have been in existence especially in North America since 2004 (Berry, n.d., 2016; Royston, 2021). This has not been the case in Africa, where podcasting seems to have thrived within the last decade (Royston, 2021; Sibanda & Ndlovu, 2023). Some literature has shown that although podcasting draws on new digital platforms to produce and distribute content, it thrives on older radio formats, particularly radio (Bottomly, 2016; Nkoala, 2023). Other scholars have suggested that podcasting creatively combines the traditional oral forms of communication and the listening aural affordances enabled by audio to produce "new orality" (Royston, 2021). Others talk of this platform as disrupting traditional radio with its easily created distributable and easily accessed content (Bottomly, 2015).

In Africa podcasting has attracted keen interest from scholars, during what Royston (2021) calls the "medium's coming of age"; a time that saw several startups, individual and institutional founded podcast platforms emerge on the continent thanks to the improved access to internet and mobile devices (Royston, 2021). Some scholars have considered the growing podcasting platforms in Africa as an opportunity to challenge negative stereotypes about the continent from western media (van der Merwe, 2021). Others have explored the nexus between African orality and podcasting's storytelling format (Royston, 2021; Shoulders, 2022). Some studies (Nkoala, 2023) have examined indigenous language podcasting and shown how the radio-like format of the platform gives a voice to otherwise marginalized communities.

While the literature on podcasting in Africa explores different themes and while the podcasting platform thrives in different contexts on the continen t(Africa Podcast,2021), the overarching theme in most of the scholarship available shows some common patterns: a) that podcasting has provided an opportunity for people to be their authentic selves, b) it has given voice to many previously marginalized people, c) continues to be work in progress, without proper funding mechanisms and often plagued by inconsistent internet connections and prohibitive data costs (Africa Podcast, 2021).

There is a blind spot in much of this literature as most of scholarship in Africa has focused on podcasting in countries with superior internet connections such as Kenya, Nigeria, South Africa (Evelyn, n.d.; Royston, 2021; van der Merwe, 2021). And yet, this platform is emerging in interesting ways in less studied countries like Uganda. Apart from a qualitative study of youth podcasters and their work routines in Zimbabwe (Sibanda & Ndlovu, 2023) and a general reference to the youth as one of many groups of marginalized voices in mainstream media conversations (Royston, 2021), there is very little research on the emergence of youth produced podcasts in Africa, which is a key loophole because young people (age 25-35) are among the leading producers and users of the internet and constitute the largest consumers of podcasts in Africa(Africa podcast, 2021).

Theoretical Framework
This study examines how podcasts are being used as a platform to generate and promote networked counter public narratives by focusing on conversations that have been ignored by mainstream media. The theory of networked counter publics argues that through its networked tools, the internet provides spaces where people connect with other individuals on matters of common interest, resulting in conversations and engagements with each other and sometimes with influential individuals in society (Jackson & Foucault Welles, 2015). This concept derives from earlier uses of the term "subaltern" counter publics to refer to discursive arenas formed by marginalized members of society to express their views, participate in the exchange of ideas, and challenge the exclusions enacted by dominant voices in the public sphere (Fraser, 2023).

From this perspective, this study argues that young people whose voices are marginalized from mainstream media conversations are using the networked affordances of podcasts to voice their own stories. Because of the autonomy that comes with podcasting, the young people also use podcasting to focus on issues that have been neglected by policymakers, raising important questions about health, unemployment, safety, gender equality in ways that power infested traditional media has never been able to do. By doing so the youth are not only challenging the power of mainstream traditional media to shape important conversations, but they are also using this platform to challenge hegemonic influences in society. By prioritizing conversations pertinent to them and framing these conversations in ways meaningful to their youth demographic, young people are hence providing counternarratives to the elitist agenda that is commonplace within the media and public sphere spaces. Young podcasters also rely on the networked affordances of social media to promote, distribute, and conduct online discussions and feedback sessions with their listeners.

Methodology
This study used qualitative interviews with 12 young podcasters (aged 25-35) based in Kampala, Uganda's capital, followed by a close reading/listening of the podcasts to examine the motivations, structure, and production practices of these podcasters. This study focused on the 25-35 age group because some studies (Africa Podcast, 2021) have shown that this age group is more invested in podcasting as producers and consumers, than others. Uganda is also of interest to this study first because of the growing use of podcast by the youth in the country (Mutumba, 2023) despite the existing government sanctioned digital restrictions. Respondents were selected through purposive sampling and snowball sampling (Etikan et al., 2016; Sharma, n.d.; Taherdoost, 2016).

Preliminary findings
The findings in this study so far show that young podcasters are motivated by the desire to circumvent restrictive traditional media by discussing topics often ignored by mainstream media. I also found that these podcasters draw from the networked affordances of digital media to produce and distribute their content. This study also reveals that to navigate digital restrictions, youth rely on unconventional methods like VPN to market and share their work on blocked social media platforms like Facebook. From the data collected so far it shows that young Ugandan podcasters have found creative ways to monetize their work through branding. And that even though youth podcasts cover many areas of interest, most focus on personal wellbeing particularly mental health and financial independence.

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"God Bless the South, Brother": A Paratextual Analysis of *War of Rights* Steam Reviews

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Abstract
Scholarly conversations exploring the nexus between far-right ideology, political extremism, and gaming culture have gained traction within game studies (Condis, 2021; Kowert et al., 2022), and this interest is not unwarranted. The toxic technocultures that spawned the 2014 #Gamergate hate campaign would go on to influence the genesis of the alt-right, a digitally adept subcommunity within the political far-right that now has ties to groups like QAnon and #Pizzagate conspiracy theorists (Bezio, 2018). Academics, independent researchers, and international organizations such as the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Centre (UNCTC) have identified games as platforms where extremists communicate and coordinate offline activities. Simultaneously, game-adjacent spaces like the discussion forum Reddit—particularly those with lax content moderation—can become breeding grounds for extremist recruitment and radicalization (UNCTC, 2022).

This paper turns to the online game retailer Steam as a noteworthy game-adjacent space that accommodates potentially extremist rhetoric. Specifically, I apply critical technocultural discourse analysis (CTDA; Brock, 2018) to the first-person shooter (FPS) *War of Rights'* Steam reviews. Steam has eclipsed competing retailers and maintains a large community, making it a nexus for understanding game discourses. Players of all political backgrounds, identities, and worldviews come together there to purchase, discuss, and critique the games they find interesting (Eberhard et al., 2018). Its largely uncurated reviews have also been noted for far-right (e.g., neo-Nazi, see Vaux et al., 2021) organizing, making it relevant to this project. Set amidst the American Civil War (ACW), *War of Rights* positions the Confederate cause as defending family and an unclear "way of life." This (mis)representation of historical events may attract gamers who espouse alt-right ideology or historical revisionism, which in turn may influence players' understanding of – and participation in – contemporary political discourse.

I employ CTDA for two reasons: (1) Steam's platform allows review filtering based on recency, popularity, and reviewer-determined "helpfulness," meaning non-hegemonic views may be trivialized or silenced by the sorting algorithm; and (2) to put my findings

into conversation with earlier work on toxic technocultures (e.g., Massanari, 2017). Looking beyond *War of Rights'* review discourse to incorporate Steam's built-in sorting metrics (potentially allowing users to gamify hegemonic commentary), this considers the cultural implications of having major online retailers house and organize – unwittingly or not – extremist rhetoric.

Research Questions
The following questions are used to organize my research:
- RQ1: *How do players discuss representations of the ACW in* War of Rights*?*
- RQ2: *In what ways does contemporary political stance-taking (e.g., alt-right ideology, social justice) occur within* War of Rights*' Steam reviews?*
- RQ3: *In what ways do Steam's gamified review systems—tags, up- and down-voting, and recommend/not recommended labels—affect* War of Rights*' paratextual discourse?*

Materials & Methods
I used the "no code" data scraping service Octoparse to build this study's corpus and the qualitative analysis software Dedoose to facilitate my CTDA. After visiting *War of Rights'* Steam landing page, I inspected its customer review section and filtered posts by user-rated helpfulness; reviews were then sorted using the "lifetime" signifier (e.g., all-time) instead of by recency or a specific date range. At the time of writing, the *War of Rights* Steam page boasts over 10,000 customer reviews. As such, I employed Octoparse to scrape the top 500 reviews voted most helpful by the *War of Rights* community. Due to the time-consuming nature of manual qualitative coding, this figure was selected as a round number that would yield a healthy indication of reviews marked helpful by *War of Rights* players. After cleaning for duplicate posts, the result was a corpus of (N=426) reviews. The preliminary findings included in these proceedings amount to just under half of this corpus.

Preliminary Findings & Future Directions
Initial analysis (N=200) indicates the presence of several notable themes emerging from the *War of Rights* Steam reviews paratext. Alt-right ideological subcoding (16%) underscores the presence of bigotry, particularly along racial and ethnic lines, as well as discussions around identity politics and the so-called culture wars, which manifest in apparent opposition to "wokeism" in contemporary gaming and society more broadly. In extreme cases, the glorification of violence against modern political movements, such as Antifa supporters, despite the lack of an obvious connection to either the ACW or *War of Rights*. Direct mentions of the Confederacy (32%) as a playable faction and historical discussions around the Confederate cause overlap with nods to Lost Cause mythology (i.e., that the ACW was not a war over slavery but of dubious "states' rights") and the use of racist language, specifically anti-Black slurs. User reviews commonly operationalize humor and are tagged as "funny" (73%) while simultaneously offering gameplay critiques; those marked as "not recommended" address performance issues (28%), such as server problems and insufficient developer support. Community-based discussion and critiques (49%) routinely reference the problematics of the *War of Rights*

player base condoning racism and other identity-based prejudices. To be clear, explicit mentions of the N-word are relatively common in the review discourse, a problematic realization considering the high degree to which these reviews are earmarked as "helpful" or "funny," and there seems to be a clear divide between those who argue racism adds to gameplay and immersion versus those who rightly disagree with hate speech and espouse commitment to social justice. Finally, and perhaps most intriguingly, reviews indicate colliding engagement between the tactical FPS community, live-action role-players (LARPers), and ACW reenactors. This apparent intergroup communication suggests a need to examine the project's scope further, as implicit (or, in some cases, overt) support of historical revisionism problematizes how historical FPS gaming cultures participate in sociopolitical and historical debate.

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Making Dissent Visible through Facebook Activism: The Tale of Three Diasporan Ethiopians

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Abstract
The rise of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) has significantly impacted Ethiopia, with rapid growth in internet and mobile users. Government intervention has polarized the mainstream media, leading many Ethiopians to turn to social media for alternative information and opinions. Social media played a crucial role during the 2015-2018 political protests, leading to reforms within the Ethiopian regime.

Because the government intervened in the media, the mainstream media have become more polarized in Ethiopia (Gagliardone & Pohjonen, 2016), and there is a tendency to distinguish Ethiopian news media outlets as pro- and anti-government. While the government directly influences pro-government news media, anti-government media are influenced by the opposition political parties (Oz, 2016).

Thus, in a country with a government monopoly on telecommunication and control over mainstream media, many Ethiopians have viewed social media as a valuable and alternative source of information with relative freedom to voice and share information and opinions. The importance of such a platform cannot be discounted as the country experienced repeated government social media shutdowns between 2015-2018 when a widespread and nationwide political protest fighting for a democratic change in the country occurred (Human et al., 2016, November 15; State of Emergency Directive, art. 2, 2017).

The former government understood the internet's lack of centralized control makes censorship difficult. During the protests, some Ethiopians, both within and abroad, used ICTs strategically to engage in successful, albeit overdrawn, grassroots political movements that led to reforms within the Ethiopian regime in April 2018. Ethiopia is an ethnic federalist state divided into nine regions and administrative cities based on language use, usually associated with ethnicity (See Figure 1).
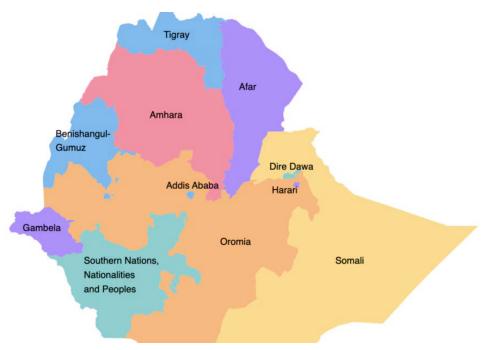
Figure 1: The National Regional States of Ethiopia. Source: VOA

Then, an all-encompassing regime reform took place with the coming to power of Dr Abiy Ahmed, the 2019 Nobel Peace Prize Winner. Though many positive changes have been implemented since Dr. Abiy came to power, including the release of all political prisoners, the unbanning of all opposition parties, the lifting of shutdowns of social media and satellite television stations in the Diaspora such as Oromo Media Network (OMN), and the Ethiopian Satellite Television and Radio (ESAT), Ethiopians have also been targets of large-scale misinformation campaigns on Facebook and Twitter. This phenomenon is all the more accurate for young, educated, and tech-savvy individuals based in Ethiopia and abroad who utilized Facebook and Twitter accounts to become political actors and grassroots activists who helped to galvanize social movements with positive and negative.

On October 23, 2019, Jawar Mohammed, a US political activist of Ethiopian origin, published a Facebook (FB) post to his over 1.76 million followers suggesting Ethiopian security forces were planning an attack against him. Immediately, supporters protested violently, and 86 Ethiopians were killed. Ethiopia's cabinet introduced a draft law against online hate speech on November 9 to restore calm.

The study employs text analysis methods to examine the Facebook Page of Jawar Mohammed, who has over 1.7 million followers in Ethiopia, an influential political activist and leader of a newly formed opposition party contesting in the May 2020 National Election. He was selected as a case study since he is believed to be influential in galvanizing his followers to action. For instance, when he published a Facebook post on October 23 suggesting security forces were planning an attack against him, his

supporters and FB followers known as "Qeerroo" (youth in Oromo language) stood outside his home in Addis Ababa in protest. His followers, incited by the repeated posts Jawar made (two to three times a day on average), took to violence, and 86 Ethiopians were killed, and many more were injured. Such negative consequences were claimed to result from the power he wielded in social media.

When it comes to the sampling design of this study, even though the individual posts were in two Ethiopian languages (Amharic and Afan Oromo) and English, the researcher, using convenience sampling, examined his posts in English. The study lasted from November 16, 2020, to December 16, 2020. The month was selected because November 16 was the day he announced he would join the race for the August 2020 National Election in Ethiopia.

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