

Fostering Dialogic Engagement: Toward an Architecture of Social Media for Social Change

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Abstract

Dialogic theory and engagement hold great potential as frameworks for thinking about how social media can facilitate public discussions about social issues. Of course, having the *potential* for dialogue is very different than finding actual instances of dialogic engagement. This article explores the philosophical and technical features of dialogue that need to be present for social media to be used dialogically. Through the metaphor of “architecture,” this article reimagines dialogic communication through social media. We introduce four design frameworks including user expectations, engagement, content curation, and sustainment that may facilitate dialogic engagement for fostering social change.

Keywords

dialogue, engagement, architecture, social change, social media

Today, so much of our communication about social issues takes place online or in hybrid contexts. We read and comment on online blogs and micro blogs, digital news stories, and social media pages. Personal preferences and unseen algorithms often mean that we get highly tailored information in our online worlds. We also talk with friends, family, and colleagues about social topics through mediated channels. Many of our mediated interactions occur around non-controversial issues such as sharing pictures of vacations, favorite foods, pets, or children. However, some interactions inevitably involve social issues where there is the potential for disagreement. People are often unprepared for discussions of social issues in online environments and political deliberation is even more difficult. As Papacharissi (2004) noted, political talk on the web (and now social media) seldom actually transforms into political action (p. 281). Many blog, web, and social media sites reflect a managerial rhetoric (Kent, 2001, 2008) that does not allow for dialogue.

Using social media to foster social change is problematic for at least four reasons. First, user preferences vary by age, gender, education, and platform used, with millennials preferring image based social media such as Instagram, Snapchat, and YouTube, while still maintaining accounts on multiple sites including Facebook and others. A millennial will go to Facebook to research an organization rather than their everyday social media (Chen, 2020). Younger users are also more likely to get their news from social media than mainstream media, as the American Press Institute (2015) explains: “On

average, [millennials] get news from more than three social media platforms—including YouTube (83 percent), and Instagram (50 percent), and places of active involvement such as Reddit” (¶13). Among older demographics, Facebook and YouTube reign supreme, but again for different reasons than among millennials or other demographics.

Second, social media metrics privilege “speaking” rather than “listening” in how they measure impact and influence (Macnamara, 2016). Organizations count likes and responses but have no real way to measure genuine engagement. Social media metrics are basically a passive tool that counts occurrences and presents data numerically. Until artificially intelligent systems come online and become widely available, social media analytic data will struggle to provide real listening data.

Third, the technical design of many social media platforms often limits our capacity to engage in healthy discussions around complex social issues (Kent, 2013). Engaging in lengthy, deliberate discussions about seemingly intractable problems—called “Wicked Problems” because of “the mischievous and even evil quality of . . . problems, where proposed ‘solutions’ often turn out to be worse than the symptoms”

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(Willis, 2016, p. 307)—such as climate change, immigration, or economic inequity is often not possible on social media platforms that have been repeatedly optimized to sell products to people or sell people and their data as products. As one pithy weblog suggested in a thought-provoking assessment of free social media platforms, “If you are not paying for it, you’re not the customer; you’re the product being sold” (cf. O’Toole, 2017), a media concept that goes back decades.

And fourth, users have different social and communication skill sets. Many are not comfortable or unable (poorly trained, reluctant) to engage in public debates or policy-based discussions. Trolls, bullying, firestorms, negative word of mouth, and stalking may make some people reluctant to participate in social discussions that can be viewed or shared with potentially millions of others.

Yet, despite all of these limitations, social media have an important role to play in societal change as liberal-minded organizations, and social movements, can use social media to structure public discussions and actions around wicked problems. This article proceeds from the belief that dialogic engagement is one foundational orientation and approach necessary for social movements to work toward a fully functioning society (Heath, 2006; Taylor, 2010). Social movements have different *raison d’être* than corporations and thus have different approaches to using social media. Many organizations, for example, that engage in corporate social responsibility (CSR) or corporate social advocacy (CSA) do so either for organizational purposes, symbolically acting to help the environment (“Greenwashing”) and using the actions as a marketing strategy, or because a CEO or organizational leader has a connection to the cause (Kent & Taylor, 2016).

Social movements, by contrast, provide a context to visualize a more prosocial, deliberative form of social media. Make no mistake, social movements have also benefited from using platforms such as Facebook and Twitter to build awareness of issues, generate media coverage, and raise money. But we argue that social movements should also visualize a new social media design that would help them foster broader and deeper discussions around social issues.

Avid social media users recognize that different social media have different design features. Some design features facilitate aspects of social discussions, but other design features may actually limit meaningful discussions (Kent, 2013). For example, marketing and advertising engagement on social media is largely driven by imagery (Monaghan, 2016). Facebook posts with pictures are more likely to be read than those with only text. Lengthy posts are uncommon across social media and there is great risk in social media when posting indiscriminately, as many people have lost their jobs, or had job offers or scholarships rescinded for inappropriate social media posts (Blue, 2013; Jaschik, 2019; Shleyner, 2018). What we see across social media platforms is a wide variance in architecture and a recognition that architecture can limit meaningful social discussions. Architecture integrates three motifs: physical structure, planned design, and themes,

and existing social media appear limited because of their design features. Design features do not allow for dialogue. We argue that the time has come to reimagine the architecture of social media for social movements so that social media can transform social discussions and facilitate both public and private deliberations. Social movements are uniquely poised to embrace an alternative architecture of social media because they have different assumptions, values, and desired outcomes than profit-seeking organizations.

To start the journey of conceptualizing a new architecture of social media capable of facilitating public discussions around social issues, the first section of the article provides a brief review of dialogic engagement. We build on Kent (2013) who argued “parallel, or alternative, social media spaces should be developed where organizational members actually communicate with individuals and not members of a collective” (p. 341). We revisit the philosophical assumptions of dialogue and communication engagement and position these concepts as frameworks that can support social movement discussions. In the second section, we situate a reimagined architecture of social media within a larger scope of dialogic engagement necessary for collaborative social action.

Conceptualizing Dialogic Engagement

Dialogue and engagement provide conceptual frameworks for thinking about ethical communication across societies (Johnston, 2014; Sommerfeldt & Yang, 2018). Dialogue and engagement have also been studied extensively. Implicit in all communication and dialogue is the concept of engagement, which, as explained below, is both an orientation and an approach. Each concept is briefly reviewed below.

Dialogic Communication

The communicative concept of dialogue can be traced back to ancient Greece and Socrates. Dialogue originally emerged as a communicative process or technique for discovering truth by subjecting ideas to deliberation and scrutiny. Fast forward a few thousand years to the work of Buber (1923/1970), Freire (1970), Gadamer (1975/2004), Habermas (1984), Bakhtin (1975/1991), and a host of other scholars, and we see dialogue revived or revisited as a communicative process or technique for interacting with texts and other people in face-to-face encounters.

Although the word dialogue is often used informally to mean “talk,” or to refer to a conversation between two or more people, the academic or scholarly concept of dialogue is more involved and based on sound theory and communication principles. When we speak of a “genuine dialogue,” or dialogic communication, we have in mind something more than just chit-chat in the line at the grocery store or postings on social media. Dialogue is informed by several dozen communicative concepts that include risk, trust, empathy,

positive regard, propinquity, and a willingness to be changed (Kent & Taylor, 2002).

Dialogue as a public relations concept goes back to Ron Pearson (1989) who identified six steps that contribute to a dialogic approach to public relations. Kent and Taylor (1998, 2002) subsequently applied the concept of dialogue to mediated public relations. Kent and Taylor (1998) discussed the concept of dialogue through the co-creational perspective and regarded dialogue as “any negotiated exchange of ideas and opinions” (p. 325). They redefined the concept of dialogue in the backdrop of the Internet era and identified five principles used through the World Wide Web and five features of dialogic communication (Kent & Taylor, 1998, 2002). In the past 20 years, scholars have applied the above two frameworks to different contexts such as advertising, activism, crisis, climate/weather, museums, universities, and CSR (cf. Briones et al., 2011; Gordon & Berhow, 2009; Kent & Taylor, 2016; Lee et al., 2018; Lee & VanDyke, 2015; McAllister, 2012; McAllister-Spooner & Kent, 2009; Neill & Lee, 2016; Pang et al., 2018; Saffer et al., 2013; Sommerfeldt & Yang, 2018; Wirtz & Zimbres, 2018).

Kent and Taylor (1998) initially only dealt with mediated communication in their treatment of dialogue. Later, Kent and Taylor (2002) provided a much richer explication of dialogic theory and tied it to organization–public relationships that go beyond web (and now social media) communication.

Dialogic theory comprises five principles: mutuality, propinquity, empathy, risk, and commitment (Kent & Taylor, 2002). *Mutuality* is characterized by an inclusion or collaborative orientation and a spirit of mutual equality. Collaboration and spirit of mutual equality are the two features of mutuality. *Dialogic propinquity* called for publics to be consulted in matters that influence stakeholders and publics, and for publics, it means that they are willing and able to articulate their demands to organizations. *Empathy* refers to the atmosphere of support and trust that must exist if dialogue is to succeed. Supportiveness, communal orientation, and confirmation are the three main features of empathy. *Risk* means parties who engage in dialogue take relational risks. Vulnerability, unanticipated consequences, and recognition of strange otherness are characterized as the features of risk. *Commitment* describes three characteristics of dialogic encounters: genuineness and authenticity, commitment to the conversation, and a commitment to interpretation (pp. 25–29).

Dialogic theory is different than the mediated dialogue that many scholars have attempted to study. Wirtz and Zimbres (2018) conducted a meta-analysis of 20 years of dialogic communication studies and concluded that one challenge is that scholars are focusing on counting and measuring the manifest features of websites and social media rather than studying true dialogue.

We believe that dialogue is both a normative and positive theory. Dialogue is normative in that it provides an idealized view of what might be possible in organization–public relationships and among individuals, groups, and publics.

Dialogue is also positive in that the theory of dialogue actually can be used to structure empowering dialogic outcomes (Isaacs, 1999; Spano, 2000). At the heart of dialogue is a commitment to communication engagement.

Communication Engagement

Engagement has become an increasingly popular organizational concept over the last decade. Johnston and Taylor’s (2018) *Handbook of Communication Engagement* speaks to the dynamism and ubiquity of engagement as a communicative framework. Johnston and Taylor (2018) defined engagement as a “dynamic multidimensional relational concept featuring psychological and behavioral attributes of connection, interaction, participation, and involvement, designed to achieve or elicit an outcome at individual, organization, or social levels” (p. 18). Many fields have embraced engagement as a framework for thinking about relationships. Scholars from marketing (Brodie et al., 2013), CSR (Devin & Lane, 2014), and advertising (Calder et al., 2009) have advocated for engagement as an organizing scheme to describe both normative and positive frameworks of activities. Engagement is “both an orientation that influences interactions and the approach that guides the process of interactions among groups” (Taylor & Kent, 2014, p. 384).

Engagement can occur at multiple levels and have many different outcomes. Johnston and Taylor (2018) identified three tiers of engagement based on the level of interaction. Tier 1 engagement is the actual activity of doing and creating initial engagement interactions. Tier 1 includes public meetings, website visits, and social and media interactions (Johnston & Taylor, 2018). Tier 2 is a higher level of behavioral engagement interactions that form connections and relationships among people, groups, and organizations. Tier 3 engagement represents the highest social level where groups such as activists, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and social movements coordinate action that has the potential to create community social capital. The outcomes of Tiers 2 and 3 are enhanced when there is dialogic engagement.

Dialogic Engagement

To achieve success at dialogic engagement requires an understanding of a somewhat sophisticated communication practice. As Lane and Kent (2018) explained, dialogic engagement consists of 11 features:

Dialogic engagement: (1) treat others as valued; (2) interactions based in dialogue and turn-taking; (3) repeated interactions; (4) relationship based; (5) trust; (6) participants given autonomy to reach a flow or engaged state; (7) activities mutually satisfying; (8) collaboration may be initiated by either party; (9) No agenda or manipulation; (10) coorientative; (11) rhetorical. (p. 64, authors’ emphasis)

In many ways, dialogic engagement bears similarity to feminist rhetoric, such as Foss and Griffin's (1995) notion of an "invitational rhetoric" based on "a commitment to the creation of relationships of equality and to the elimination of the dominance and elitism" (p. 4). Foss and Griffin suggest that in "most feminisms is a recognition of the immanent value of all living beings. The essence of this principle is that every being is a unique and necessary part of the pattern of the universe and thus has value" (p. 4). Foss and Griffin's feminist approach to rhetoric correlates nicely with the dialogic scholarship of Buber (1923/1970), Freire (1970), Laing (1961/1990), Noddings (1984), and others. The dialogue and engagement notions of "other focused interactions" (Lane & Kent, 2018) mesh harmoniously with a great deal of feminist scholarship.

Dialogic engagement is a hybrid concept bringing together the orientation *to others* from dialogue and the cognitive, affective, and behavioral components of engagement. Dialogic engagement describes a variety of technical practices that lead to a person's or organization's sense of the other and a larger sense of the world. Dialogue can be implemented by people trained in dialogic principles and understanding the "rules" for dialogue or how to be "dialogic" (cf. Kent & Taylor, 1998, 2002; Kent & Theunissen, 2016; Pearson, 1989; Taylor & Kent, 2014).

Ron Pearson (1989) provided the first procedural roadmap for the process of implementing dialogic engagement. Pearson's six rules set the ground rules for communication before any online or face-to-face interaction ever begins:

- (1) In a dialogic interaction there should be an understanding of and agreement on the rules governing the opportunity for beginning, maintaining, and ending interactions.
- (2) There should be public understanding of and agreement on the rules governing the length of time separating messages or questions from answers.
- (3) There should be public understanding of and agreement on rules governing opportunities to suggest topics and initialize topic changes.
- (4) There should be public understanding of and agreement on rules for when a response counts as a response.
- (5) There should be public understanding of and agreement on rules for channel selection for communication.
- (6) There should be public understanding of and agreement on the rules for talking about and changing the rules. (pp. 381–384)

Pearson's six rules for dialogue reflect a very organizational-centric approach that placed the responsibility for dialogue in the hands of organizations. Taylor and Kent (2014) added a seventh rule to help foster public input from groups such as social movements into the dialogic equation:

- (7) Steps should be taken by . . . [organizations] to ensure that their spokespeople and leaders be trained in dialogic engagement so that they are prepared for the risks, challenges, and opportunities created by dialogue. (p. 394)

We believe that the seven rules guiding the process of dialogue, combined with the philosophical assumptions of mediated dialogue (Kent & Taylor, 1998, 2002, 2018; Pearson, 1989) and engagement (Johnston, 2014; Johnston & Taylor, 2018; Taylor, 2018) can inform the reimagining of social media theory and research so that social media can be used by social movement organizations to facilitate public discussions about social issues. The next section of the article provides a rethinking of the architecture of social media platforms so that social media tools can be used to foster dialogic engagement.

Social Media Platforms

The question of what a social media interface might look like is a significant question if we are to visualize how to structure dialogic engagement between individuals, publics, organizations, and social movements. One of the take-away observations noted in Wirtz and Zimbres' (2018) meta-analysis about the dialogic potential of social media is that most of the research in the field of public relations has focused on describing the organizations that employ social media communication rather than analyzing and interrogating the features that underlie ethical and empowering communication envisioned in the assumptions of dialogue. The next section sets out to rectify this omission.

Design Logic and the Metaphor of Architecture

Social media are socially constructed communication tools. They are created by designers to perform specific functions. Social media are also designed around metaphors (Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, WeChat). Metaphors are a figure of speech that describe one thing in terms of something else (Lakoff & Johnson, 2008). Metaphors are valuable because they allow us to use what we know from our social experiences to understand other subjects. Social media have been described by dozens of metaphors such as a dinner party, a puppy, an office water cooler, a box of chocolates, fly fishing, the town square, the Force in *Star Wars*, or a TARDIS from *Doctor Who* (Sahakians, 2020). These are great metaphors because they capture the social, relational, and responsibility aspects of most social media. However, we believe that social media can also be used for more important purposes by activists and social movements for stimulating discussions around complex issues. To make the leap, we need to change the metaphor of social media from a dinner party to a deliberation.

A reimagining of social media needs to reflect "design thinking" (Brown, 2008). Design thinking is a problem-solving process whereby creators empathize, define problems, ideate, make prototypes, test, and retest solutions to

problems. Reflecting on design thinking, we have selected the metaphor of “architecture” to organize a reimagination of social media for substantive discussions about change.

Architecture refers to an assortment of concepts that include the *physical* features or construction of a building or structure (walls and ceiling, doors, windows), the *design* or planning of a building or structure (square footage, site placement, construction materials), and a *unifying theme*, concept, or metaphor for a building or structure (e.g., Frank Lloyd Wright’s Falling Water house in Pennsylvania, Vlado Milunić’s Dancing House in Prague, Frank Gehry’s museum of Pop Culture in Seattle, or styles such as Victorian, Classical, Art Deco, Post Modern). In other words, architecture integrates physical structure, planned design, and themes.

Social media architecture can also be described through these three concepts. First, there are the physical features or components of social media such as affordances described by Papacharissi (2009), Halpern and Gibbs (2013), and Bossetta (2018). Affordances are design features that shape conversations on social media. Second, there are also the planned features (archiving of information, facilitating social interaction, encouraging relationship building, etc.), and third, there are the thematic or metaphorical features of social media, such as a village, a water cooler, a cocktail party, a vacuum, or a tree.

Affordances as design features have been treated as “competitive advantages” in the social media marketplace. Social media platform designers need to ensure that their tools provide similar affordances as their competitors but also must distinguish their platform from others by offering unique technical features. As Rob Malda, creator of the influential website Slashdot.org, suggested,

I have a pretty good understanding of how on-line communities form, how to manage them, and better yet, how to build systems that they can use to maximize their collective gains. I think most people tend to oversimplify the problem and sort of miss the point. The first problem is to weed out the noise, and that’s actually not too hard. But after that you need to start raising the best stuff up out of the primordial soup. (Kent & Saffer, 2014, p. 574)

The architecture of social media “shape affordances and consequently, user behavior” (Bossetta, 2018, p. 474). The unique design features of social media are important once we realize that public deliberation about social issues on social media platforms is constrained by the digital architecture (Kent & Saffer, 2014; McLuhan, 1964).

There are two additional considerations that are not generally treated as part of the technical definition of architecture but have relevance when considering social media. The fourth concept of a sense of architecture may be linked to the orientation of the designer. Orientation reflects the training or education of a particular architect (i.e., what school she or he comes from or what his or her education was like will influence how s/he designs everything). People hire an architect because of their vision, their past designs, because they have been inspired to change something, or simply to achieve particular design

goals. For social media design, the orientation of the social media developers influences the affordances integrated into the design. *Change the orientation of the social media architect and you will change the technical design of the platform.*

The fifth aspect of the metaphor of architecture may be tied directly to the needs or interests of the intended social media user (the public). Most social media platforms represent advertising and marketing spaces. Although many social media platforms started as humble efforts to connect people, interface designers for the top social media platforms are no longer working for end users but work for the companies that employ them. Social media sites are trying to optimize “network structure, functionality, algorithmic filtering, and datafication” (Bossetta, 2018, pp. 472 ff) and in doing so often treat users as products.

In popular social media, the architecture is designed to collect, package, and market user data (Leetaru, 2018). The metrics used to judge the profitability of a social media design often mean that users are treated as products. The logical conclusion is: More users means more products and more sales. More interactions on a platform mean more data, and more data mean more revenue. The fact that social media are not helping to foster public discussions of social issues is not surprising. The architecture of popular social media is not designed for what most dialogic scholars have hoped for.

Reimagining Dialogic Social Media as Spaces for Social Discussions

Halpern and Gibbs (2013) noted that “although social media may not provide a forum for intensive or in-depth policy debate, it nevertheless provides a deliberative space” (p. 1166). However, we need more than just deliberative space in an age of wicked problems. Just *talking* about problems like climate change, hunger, health care, and income inequality will not solve them. Facts, data, long-term relationships, social capital, and access to a range of expertise are also needed. Willis (2016) suggests that we “create a sense of coherence amongst the stakeholders involved. HI’s [humble intelligence’s] focus on network norms associated with dependence on others, curiosity, questioning, and listening cultivate the conditions under which this coherence can emerge through dialogue” (p. 311). We agree with Willis (2016) and apply the conceptual frameworks and assumptions of dialogic engagement to articulate a new social media architecture that may help scholars, designers, social movements, and other groups envision platforms that allow for productive discussions of social issues.

Table 1 identifies what we believe is the first step toward a dialogic social media. Table 1 breaks down the orientation to others including antecedent dialogic skills and knowledge that should exist *prior to engaging in dialogic social media use*—in essence, to return to the architectural metaphor, the orientation of the architect guides his or her professional practice. The dialogic orientation is tied to dialogic principles rather than economic or competitive design principles.

Table 1. Orientation to Dialogue That Must Exist Prior to Social Media Use.

Dialogic principle	Enactment
Positive Regard	Conversational tone, politeness, cultural sensitivity.
Vulnerability	Personal self-disclosure. Answer any topics/questions.
Unanticipated Consequences	Being open to all topics. Unscripted responses. Spontaneity.
Strange Otherness	Understanding of others sought. Conversational topics/risks taken.
Mutuality	Recognizes interlocutors as colleagues, not enemies to be vanquished.
Collaboration	Intersubjectivity sought. Accepts others' views as valid. Reality is negotiated.
Empathy	Supportive, communal orientation, confirmation, sympathetic.
Confirmation	Sympathetic and empathetic. Acknowledgment of others' views and concerns. Tries to help.
Commitment	Works/struggles to understand others' views. Keep talking.
Genuineness	Honest, truthful, not deceptive. Personality comes through. Places value on relationship.
Commitment to Conversation	Noncompetitive interactions. Admit when person or organization is wrong.
Commitment to Interpretation	Authenticity. Focus on intersubjectivity and understanding. Communicators trained in dialogue. May need to employ seven rules of dialogic engagement.
Psychological Readiness	Experienced in dialogue. Values the process. Has positive regard for others.

As noted, Table 1 identifies the orientation that must be in place before *any* dialogic engagement occurs in social media. We see these dialogic principles as reflecting Macnamara's (2016) framework for listening. Macnamara (2016) noted that many opportunities for discussion among organizations and publics results in "cacophony and confusion" (p. 116). Platforms and architectures can support organizational listening (p. 4). To enhance organizational listening, Macnamara suggests four elements of the architecture of listening. First, there needs to be a *culture of openness* that seeks out input from stakeholders. Second, there must be a *willingness to listen*. Third, organizations need to *adopt policies that allow for listening*. Finally, there needs to be *structures and processes in place for large scale listening* (p. 116). As noted above, this sort of open approach would be ideal for all types of organizations, including business organizations through CSR and other forms of outreach. Yet, we also recognize that enactment may be challenging in business settings that are more focused on meeting economic objectives.

Listening includes both an open-minded consideration of comments and feedback that are gathered during meetings and online as well as genuine interpersonal listening, where one person is silent, while the other is allowed to talk. But, dialogue, listening, and conviviality are only possible when the social media interface is transcended so that the physical and design features (entertainment, marketing, advertising, etc.) are replaced by features that reward genuine interactions and deliberation.

Various dialogic orientation conditions must be present for dialogic engagement to be possible. However, end users and publics also have needs and expectations for interactions. Rather than treating users as a commodity, Table 2 identifies the dialogic social media *affordances* that serve user needs and structure public discussions in productive ways.

Many platforms incorporate a majority of these features. However, some features are uncommon or rarely seen on many sites. For example, moderators on Facebook and other

social media often remove off-topic or controversial posts with little or no explanation; user profiles are not public on many social media sites; and Patreon/YouTube sites choose to keep their financials private. We believe that with an intentional approach, social media platforms could become more dialogic.

The affordances described in Table 2 are user-centered and have been drawn from existing literature as ways to promote ethical and productive social media discussions (boyd, 2011; Kent & Theunissen, 2018; Papacharissi & Yuan, 2011). *The User Expectation Features* architecture sets the ground rules for users. Research suggests that having visible moderators or allowing members to flag inappropriate content increases the civility and politeness of posts (Naab et al., 2018). In addition, making user profiles public (or making at least part of the profiles public) provides social cues that make it "more difficult for users to divorce themselves from the social consequences of their actions" (Halpern & Gibbs, 2013, p. 1166).

The Engagement Features architecture facilitates engagement once users have agreed on the rules for interaction. The features stem from the engagement literature (Johnston & Taylor, 2018) and work by Aakhus (Aakhus, 2011; de Moor & Aakhus, 2006) on ways to construct deliberation through structured interaction. Aakhus (2011) has suggested that there are ways to structure argumentation through technologies. For instance, the design of the platform could prompt participants with questions such as "What is your solution?" or "Where do we all agree?" A response button feature might offer alternative comment options such as "agree, respect, interesting, inspiring," and "persuasive" and then provide a prompt such as "let's make this happen" or "what's next?"

The third set of architectural features are around *Content Curation* to allow platforms to organize, archive, and make facts, articles, statistics, arguments, links, and other data available to people engaging in dialogue. Information and ideas become more valuable when they are made more

Table 2. The Architectural Design Features That Facilitate Dialogic Engagement.**User expectation features**

- Reachable and known moderators.
- Moderators offer explanations for why posts are taken down.
- Explicit acknowledgment of the rules, and a requirement for people to acknowledge the rules before they can be added to a group or discussion.
- Users able to, and encouraged to, flag and label problematic posts.
- Temporarily blocking of users (“Facebook jail”) who violate the rules.
- Permanently block users who repeatedly violate the rules.
- May have an option to require group acceptance for someone to join a group.

Engagement features

- Profiles of users made public during engagement.
- Unique comment buttons such as “agree, respect, interesting, inspiring, persuasive.”
- Prompts ask questions such as “what is your solution?” or “where do you agree?”
- Structured two-way and interactive communication design.
- Options to join unique or special topic subgroups and networks.
- Users encouraged to move outside of the social media platform for enhanced face-to-face engagement, when possible.
- Convivial, interactive space within (or connected to) platform for private conversations.
- Advanced privacy settings options.
- Real time interactions, and scheduled interaction times.
- Publicized events and discussions to attract new/interested members/participants.

Content curation features

- Archived exchanges, facts, and statistics that can be linked to posts.
- Memory functions: Remind users of content from years past.
- External content, including video/audio/text may be linked.
- Both synchronous and time shifted interaction and content options.

Sustainment/rhizomatous features

- Patronage/sponsorship/support encouraged and publicized.
- Symbolic and financial ability to support activism and social movements.
- Volunteer opportunities coordinated in local community.
- External groups formed around issues or topics that continue the conversations.
- Index or historical timeline maintained of topics and discussions for newcomers and regular visitors.

readily available and searchable. Indeed, having reliable, credible information that may be new to users can be a powerful frame through which to understand a topic (Blackman, 2015; Hui, 2015). For example, a “memory” function can allow interlocutors to see prior posts, interactions, arguments, and explanations by other members (or look at their own history of participation). An index or historical timeline of topics allows for content to be searched or located down the road, or new members to learn the back story of a group’s discussion.

The last set of architectural features also helps to provide for the *Sustainment/Rhizomatousness* (Kent & Lane, 2017) of the content topics and may possibly create offline social capital. Remember that the envisioned, bespoke, social media platforms do not have economic imperatives. Data and users are not “harvested” to be sold. However, the platform and the social issues discussed on it will need both financial and symbolic support. The Sustainment architecture features provide for support made possible by monetary or volunteer contributions. The *Sustainment* features may create a rhizomatous system (underground support system that keeps expanding) to keep the deliberations going in different forms and in different formats. The four architectural

design features are not exhaustive but instead provide a starting point for rethinking what social movement dialogical engagement might look like.

Conclusion

Communication research using social media often treats social media as if the nature of the interface affordances and ontological experience have no impact on the co-creation of meaning. Social media have been studied as a communicatively neutral medium and the *messages appearing* on it have been the focus of research interest. Ultimately, fostering dialogic engagement is a more complicated process than originally believed (Theunissen & Wan Noordin, 2012). Social media may offer a viable avenue for dialogic exchanges, but only if we treat dialogue as it deserves and stop trying to reduce a complex and valuable communication process to the lowest common denominator of social media metrics. Social media platforms that are created from the very beginning to be a nexus of discussions and social change, rather than marketing or sales tools, might become the dialogic spaces that communication scholars envisioned.

Many of the features outlined in Table 2 are scattered across various social media platforms but no one platform

embodies all of the design features. We would love to see teams of social movement activists, platform designers, and communication scholars work together to co-create social media tools that embed dialogic engagement features. Bespoke social media tools for social change could move people and activist groups away from the dominant platforms that treat users as products.

In addition, social movements should also consider how social media platforms can encourage offline, face-to-face interactions for dialogue around social issues. Social media provide a pre-dialogic opportunity for social activism by bringing people together to share information and build relationships. Face-to-face interactions, meetings, forums, public protests, boycotts, and marches put a personal face on social change. Together social media that embrace dialogic engagement in addition to face-to-face interactions will amplify the impact of social movement activism.

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