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Tell Your Social Media Story

How can your social media story drive change?

OBJECTIVE

Use storytelling to understand the landscape of your social media usage, and learn how to share your story to help make change.

PART

1

Why is storytelling important to the movement for humane technology?

"I remember one night specifically that was probably when I was at my peak of using that app when I just caught myself using it for a couple of hours without stopping…"
–Siri, 13, Cary

"I began to be aware that I was believing things that…didn't exist."
–Jasper, 24, Cape Town

"The cake recipes sandwiched in between crash diets and messages to love yourself were disorienting."
—Clare, 17, Dayton

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> *"Tik Tok had started recommending weight loss videos and 'what I eat in a day' videos to my 'For You' page."*
>
> —Anonymous, 13, Orange County

Take a look at these stories from [#MySocialTruth](#), a platform for young people to bring their voices to the movement for humane technology. These are powerful examples of experiences young people are having on social media platforms built to capture our attention and change our behavior.

Social media has become dominant in our lives and our world. Understanding the harms it creates can feel overwhelming, which is why it is important to zoom in on our individual experiences.

When we tell our stories, it can help us better understand what we're going through. By taking an intentional look at our experiences, we can notice new things and uncover deeper truths.

PART

2

What role does social media play in your life?

We often go through our day-to-day experiences without reflecting on what's happening to us. This is especially true on social media. These platforms are designed to keep us mindlessly clicking, scrolling, and posting. To find out what your social media story is, it's helpful to pull back and reflect on the impact that social media has had on your life.

CONSIDER YOUR EXPERIENCE:

Take a look at the following questions. Free write your answers to them without thinking about it too much. The more you focus on just writing, the more you'll learn about your experience.

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Take inventory of your how you use social media:

1. How many hours a day do you spend on social media?

2. What apps do you use? Which do you use the most?

3. What do you post on social media?

4. What do you read and look at on social media?

Then, be honest with yourself about what you're experiencing on a daily basis.[1]

5. What do you observe on social media?

6. How does it make you feel?

7. Are there certain themes that come up across your use of social media?

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[1] You may want to refer to the activity at the end of the Social Media and the Brain issue guide that asks you to keep track of your experience over time.

8. How do you think social media impacts your life for the better?

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9. How do you think social media impacts your life for the worse?

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Some of our individual experiences may be positive: we may feel connected to a friend, feel validated when people love something we've created, or we might just have fun seeing what people are up to online. But these positive experiences can also lead to something darker: struggles with isolation and mental health, a feeling that we need to constantly perform, or the feeling that we can't log off even when we want to.

That's because the technology we use every day is shaped by a race for our attention to keep us engaged and change our behavior. This technology's dominance in our world has disastrous effects on our mental health and unleashes countless harms on our society.

When you look at your answers to the above questions within the context of these issues, reflect on which of these harms of social media show up in your life and which show up in the lives of people you care about.

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REFLECT ON YOUR EXPERIENCE:

1. What does your experience tell you about how social media is designed?

2. What does your relationship with social media tell you about yourself?

3. Has taking a closer look at your experience inspired you to change how you use social media? To take action in different ways? If so, how?

PART

3

How can I change the system with my story?

Now that you've taken the time to be thoughtful about your experience on social media, you have the opportunity to home in on a story that can help you connect with others experiencing the same things as you and to be heard by the leaders in Silicon Valley and Washington DC who are responsible for these platforms.

WRITE YOUR STORY:

The movement for humane technology needs stories that can illuminate the harmful effects of persuasive technology, the way lives can improve when you change the way you use social media, and how we might reimagine these platforms to awaken authentic human connection.

Stories with the deepest impact do the following:

1. They tell a story or share anecdote(s) with a beginning, middle, and closing.

    ➔ E.g. Here's when I started using the platform...here's the impact it had... here's what I'm struggling with about it now

    ➔ E.g. "Here's when I started using a platform...here's the impact it had...here's what I'm doing about it."

2. They include details that are personal to you.

3. They focus on your experiences more than your opinions.

    ➔ While opinions are great, they should be shared in a way that's connected to experience.

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IF YOU'RE STUCK:

If you're stuck or can't think of a specific story, read other stories on [MySocialTruth](#), or consider these prompts:

➔ Has there been a time where social media created resentment and communication challenges with your friends or family?

➔ How has social media influenced the way you relate to dating, sex, love, and relationships?

➔ How has social media influenced the way you think of yourself?

➔ Think about posts you've made online that made you feel good. Think about posts online that you wish you could take back. What was the difference between these posts?

➔ What would you tell your younger self before you started using social media?

➔ Have you seen or had experiences online with things that aren't true?

➔ Have you taken a break from, quit, or changed the way you use social media? Why or why not?

➔ Have you ever been a victim of cyberbullying? Have you been a cyberbully yourself?

Whatever your story, write it clearly with vivid details. Revise your story until you're sure it is communicating what you mean for it to.

Use the next page to write your story.

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MY SOCIAL MEDIA STORY:

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Sharing these stories can have a real impact. Around the world millions of people are struggling to have healthy relationships with technology, and reading stories about that struggle can help people feel less alone and ashamed. People in power are also watching: employees advocating for change in social media companies have been eager to read stories on MySocialTruth, as have members of Congress. Stories are at the core of how we connect, and for that reason stories
have power.

SHARE YOUR STORY:

➔ When you are finished, you can share your story through a platform like MySocialTruth, which is gathering stories to push for change in Silicon Valley and Washington DC, or by getting involved in advocacy conversations through a group like [Log Off](Log Off), which is bringing together teens to rethink social media.

➔ As important as it is to share your story through these forums, sharing stories out loud with others in our classrooms, with friends, and in other group settings is just as valuable. When we share our stories with each other, it can help us build power by understanding what's at stake and the urgency of the need for change.

Remember that sharing stories requires bravery and vulnerability on the part of the storyteller and great listening from everyone else.

PART

4

What's next?

Our stories show the complexities of the attention economy and the specifics of our experiences. To make sense of the frightening statistics about the impact of social media we must understand the human stories behind them.
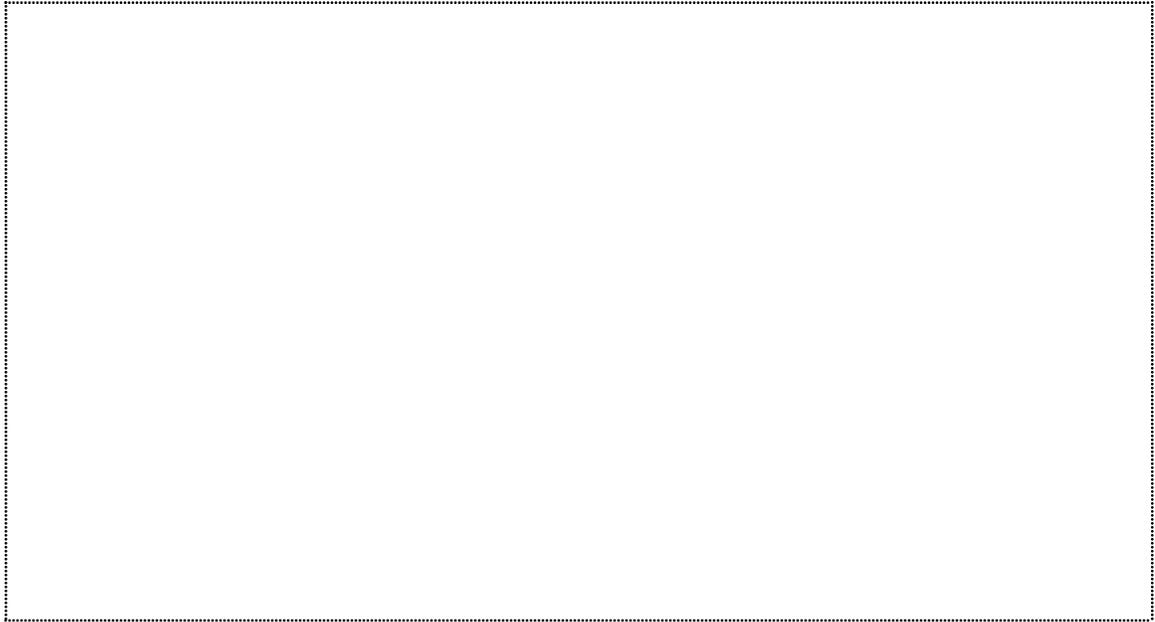
THINK ABOUT THE BIG PICTURE:

Once you've shared your story and listened to the stories of others, take a step back and consider your experience. (*If you're working in a group, it may be helpful to answer these questions together*):
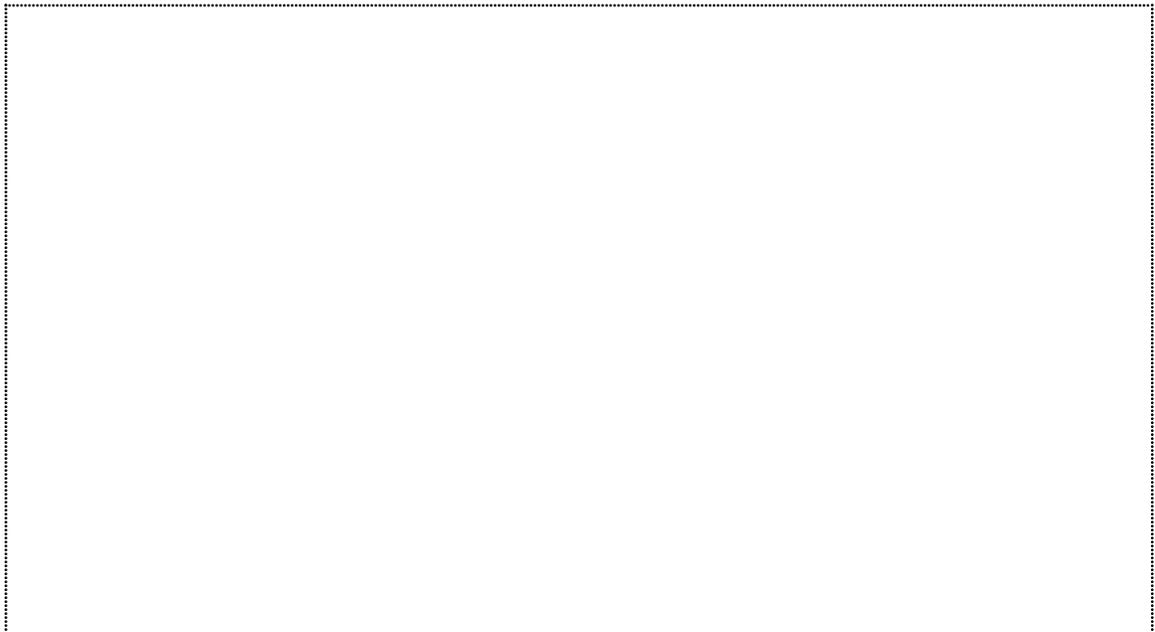
1. What trends do you notice across the stories that are being shared?
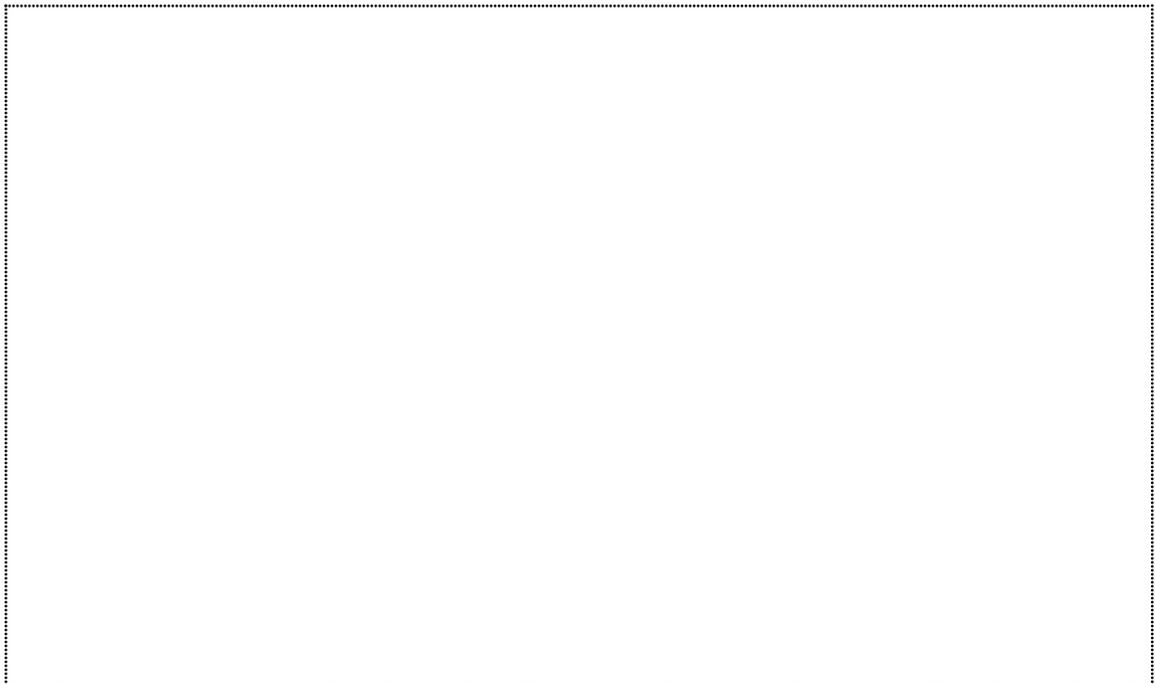
2. What surprises you or stands out?

3. In what way do these stories represent experiences everywhere? In what ways do they not?

4. What do these stories tell us about the future of technology? What do they tell us about the future of our society?

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As long as hacking our attention is profitable, companies will continue to find more powerful ways to do it and these harms will continue to emerge. To change the system, we need to make our voices heard and understand that we're not alone.

If sharing your story has inspired you to take action, you can:

➔ **Shift Your Tech Use:** Make a successful change in how you use technology by setting goals and working with others.

➔ **Envision Humane Technology:** Imagine the possibilities for humane technology by envisioning solutions that advance systemic change.