ACADEME IN THE AGE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

SCHOLARLY INQUIRY AT RISK?

**ANNUAL SYMPOSIUM
DECEMBER 5-6, 2024**

**ANNENBERG SCHOOL FOR
COMMUNICATION**

CENTER FOR
MEDIA @RISK

Annenberg
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UNIVERSITY of PENNSYLVANIA

CDCS

Center for Media at Risk

We are in uncharted waters. Intimidation threatens media practitioners worldwide, and disinformation campaigns destabilize public trust. The Center for Media at Risk offers the chance to strategize in response to the multiple risks facing media practitioners globally. Knowing how media practitioners work under the uneven power dynamics posed by authoritarian, racist, misogynist, homophobic, classist and settler-colonialist regimes can help free/defend/empower/protect/save the media.

Director: Barbie Zelizer
Director of Research and Outreach: Sophie Maddocks
Program Coordinator: Madison Miller
Visit: ascmediarisk.org
Connect: @ascmediarisk.bsky.social

Center on Digital Culture and Society

Founded in July 2019, the Center on Digital Culture and Society (CDCS) at the University of Pennsylvania's Annenberg School for Communication supports critical, interdisciplinary scholarship and dialogue on digital culture, technology and society. CDCS aims to create collaborative spaces for discussion and debate among academics, citizensand activists; develop critical approaches to the study of digital culture and technology; help train new generations of digital researchers at the University of Pennsylvania and beyond; build global networks of researchers; advocate for socially just design, production, and use of digital technologies; and explore and foster new visions of digital futures through scholarship and public communication.

Director: Guobin Yang
**Administrative Coordinator:** Trang Dang
Visit: asc.upenn.edu/center-on-digital-culture-and-society
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ACADEME IN THE AGE OF SOCIAL MEDIA: SCHOLARLY INQUIRY AT RISK?

Social media and academe have had an entangled and ambivalent relationship. On the one hand, social media open new horizons for scholarship and research. They can be powerful instruments of research and make it easier to bring scholarship and expertise to the public. On the other hand, the penetration of social media into everyday life and academic institutions exposes the academic environment to outside scrutiny and the influences of commercial and political interests, posing new challenges to the principles of academic freedom and the integrity of academic communities.

In times of global crisis, the entangled relationship between social media and academia becomes even more complicated. This symposium brings together scholars and practitioners to analyze the multiple dimensions and consequences of what we call the "social media-tization" of academe. Such analyses are essentialfor understanding the ongoing transformations in the academy and their broader and longer-term ramifications.
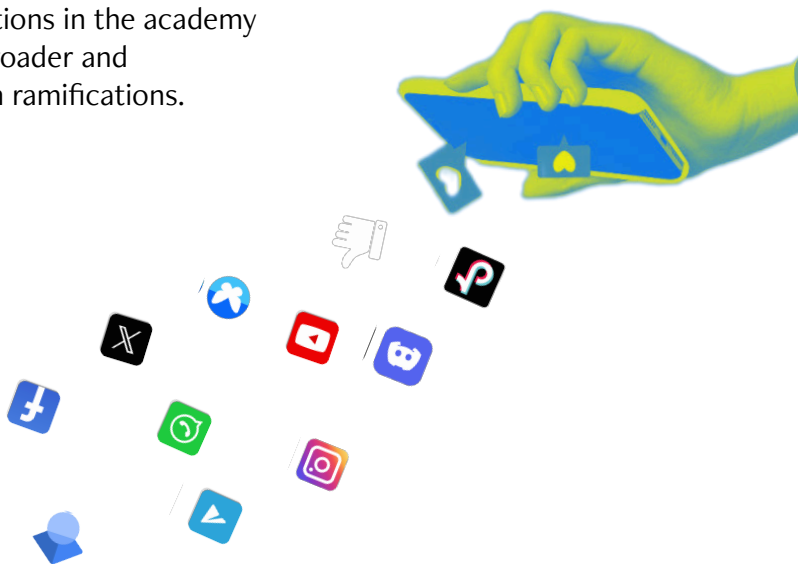
SYMPOSIUM PROGRAM

THURSDAY, DECEMBER 5

5:00-5:30 pm   **LIGHT RECEPTION**

5:30-5:45 pm   **WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION**

Barbie Zelizer
Director, Center for Media at Risk, Annenberg School for Communication

5:45-7:15 pm   **KEYNOTE CONVERSATION**

Rebekah Tromble
Associate Professor, School of Media & Public Affairs, George Washington University, Director of the Institute for Data, Democracy & Politics

Todd Wolfson
Associate Professor of Journalism and Media Studies, Rutgers - Newbrunswick, Co-Director of the MIC Center

Moderator: Jenny Lee

7:15-8:30 pm   **RECEPTION**

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 6

9:30-10:00 am   **BREAKFAST**

10:00-10:15 am   **INTRODUCTION**

Sarah Banet-Weiser
Walter H. Annenberg Dean, Annenberg School for Communication

Barbie Zelizer
Director, Center for Media at Risk, Annenberg School for Communication

10:15-11:45 am   **PANEL ONE**

PAST(S) & PRESENT
Academia has long shaped and been shaped by the risks associated with visibility and surveillance. Where do we see these dynamics today? How have they evolved over time, and what historical precedents inform today's challenges? With the ubiquity of social media, how do platforms intensify or mitigate the risks scholars face? Are there alternative models that resist co-optation and foster academic freedom and social justice?

Nick Couldry, *London School of Economics and Political Science*
Jayson Harsin, *American University of Paris*
Sam Lavigne, *The New School*
Guobin Yang, *Annenberg School for Communication*

Moderator: Anjali DasSarma

11:45 am-1:00 pm   **LUNCH**

1:00-2:30 pm   **PANEL TWO**

PRECARITY & POWER
Knowledge production in academia implies a fine line between opportunity and risk. How do social media complicate this balance by amplifying visibility while also introducing censorship and harassment? As digital platforms become more central to academic work, how do these dynamics shape the boundaries of academic freedom? What pressures and tensions do academics navigate to maintain a social media presence? In their use of social media, do academics face an "either/or" choice between visibility and the threat of harassment or invisibility and the threat of erasure?

Brooke Erin Duffy, *Cornell University*
Rachel Kuo, *University of Wisconsin - Madison*
Julia Sonnevend, *The New School*

Moderator: Natasha Williams

2:30-2:45 pm   **REFRESHMENTS**

2:45-4:15 pm   **PANEL THREE**

LIBERATION & FUTURES

Just as relationships of visibility and surveillance can illicit harm and inequity, they can also reclaim and give agency. Social media has the potential to amplify marginalized voices and open new possibilities for academia. How does social media create opportunities for agency, knowledge equity, and greater visibility of social causes? What role does social media play in fostering activism within academia? How might social media transform academia's relationship with free speech, knowledge circulation and public-facing scholarship?

Moya Bailey, *Northwestern University*

Cynthia Chris, *The City University of New York*

Niels G. Mede, *University of Zurich*

Arlene Stein, *Rutgers-New Brunswick*

Moderator: Valentina Proust

4:15-4:45 pm   **CLOSING REMARKS**

Guobin Yang, *Director, Center on Digital Culture and Society, Annenberg School for Communication*

4:45-6:00 pm   **RECEPTION**

Moya Bailey (she/her) is a professor at Northwestern University and Visiting Scholar at the Center for Media at Risk. Her work focuses on marginalized groups' use of digital media to promote social justice. She studies race, gender, disability and sexuality in media and medicine. She is the founder of the Digital Apothecary and co-founder of the Black Feminist Health Science Studies Collective. She is the digital alchemist for the Octavia E. Butler Legacy Network, and the Board President of Allied Media Projects, a Detroit-based movement media organization that supports an ever-growing network of activists and organizers. She is a co-author of *#HashtagActivism: Networks of Race and Gender Justice* (MIT Press, 2020) and is the author of *Misogynoir Transformed: Black Women's Digital Resistance* (New York University Press, 2021).

Sarah Banet-Weiser (she/her) is the Walter H. Annenberg Dean of the Annenberg School for Communication at the University of Pennsylvania and is Lauren Berlant Professor of Communication. In addition, she is a research professor at the University of Southern California's Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism and the founding director of the Center for Collaborative Communication at the Annenberg Schools. Her teaching and research interests include gender in the media, identity, citizenship and cultural politics, consumer culture and popular media, race and the media and intersectional feminism. Committed to intellectual and activist conversations that explore how global media politics are exercised, expressed and perpetuated in different cultural contexts, she has authored or edited eight books, including *Believability: Sexual Violence, Media, and the Politics of Doubt* (Polity Press, 2023), the award-winning *Authentic™: The Politics of Ambivalence in a Brand Culture* (NYU Press, 2012), *Empowered: Popular Feminism and Popular Misogyny* (Duke, 2018) and dozens of peer-reviewed articles, book chapters and essays.

Cynthia Chris (she/her) is Professor of Media Culture at the College of Staten Island, City University of New York. In 2024-25, she is serving as a Faculty Leadership Development Fellow in the Office of Faculty Affairs at CUNY. She is the author of several books, including *Watching Wildlife and The Indecent Screen: Regulating Television in the Twenty-First Century* and is co-editor of *Cable Visions: Television Beyond Broadcasting* (with Sarah Banet-Weiser and Anthony Freitas), and *Media Authorship* (with David Gerstner).

Nick Couldry (he/him) is a sociologist of media and culture. He is Professor of Media Communications and Social Theory at the London School of Economics and Political Science, and since 2017 a Faculty Associate at Harvard's Berkman Klein Center for Internet and Society. He is the author or editor of seventeen books including *The Mediated Construction of Reality* (with Andreas Hepp, Polity, 2016), *Media, Society, World: Social Theory and Digital Media Practice* (Polity 2012) and *MediaSpace* (Routledge 2004, co-edited with Anna McCarthy). His latest books include *The Space of the World* (Polity, October/December 2024), *Data Grab: The New Colonialism of Big Tech and How to Fight Back* (Penguin/W. H. Allen 2024, with Ulises Mejias), *Media: Why It Matters* (Polity: 2019) and *Media, Voice, Space and Power: Essays of Refraction* (Routledge 2021). Nick is also the co-founder of the Tierra Común network of scholars and activists.

Brooke Erin Duffy (she/her) is an associate professor in the Department of Communication at Cornell University, where she holds appointments in Feminist, Gender, and Sexuality Studies and Media Studies. She is the author or co-author of three books, including *(Not) Getting Paid to Do What You Love: Gender and Aspirational Labor in the Social Media Economy* (Yale University Press, 2017/2022), which *Wired* named as one of the "Top Tech Books of 2017." Duffy's work has been published in such journals as the *Journal of Communication, New Media & Society*, the *International Journal of Communication, Critical Studies in Media Communication*, the *International Journal of Cultural Studies, Social Media + Society* and *Information, Communication, and Society*. In addition to her academic publications, she has disseminated her research to a broader audience through popular writing in *The Atlantic, Vox, Salon, Business Insider, Wired* and *Quartz*, among others. Duffy's latest book project, *The Visibility Bind: Work and Resistance in the Creator Economy*, is under contract with the University of Chicago Press.

Jayson Harsin (he/him) is Professor in the Media, Communication & Culture and the History and Politics departments; and Director, Center for Media, Communication & Global Change at The American University of Paris, France. A theorist of what has been called "post-truth politics," Harsin's work has for over 20 years focused on political deception from a critical cultural perspective, emphasizing the influence of promotional and celebrity culture as well as technological political economic causes in practices of political trust-making and truth-telling. He coined the concepts "rumor bomb" (2006) and "regime of post-truth" (2015), prior to post-truth being declared word-of-the-year (2016).

Harsin has taught at Northeastern University; The New School; CUNY, Baruch College; and The American University of Paris. Most recently, he is editor of *Re-thinking Mediations of Post-truth Politics and Trust: Globality, Culture, Affect* (Routledge, 2023) and *The Critique of Infocentrism: How "Dis-misinformation" Studies Mischaracterize Communication and Persuasion* (Routledge, forthcoming 2025).

Rachel Kuo's (she/her) research focuses on race, social movements and technology. She is currently an Assistant Professor of Gender and Women's Studies and Asian American Studies at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Her writing and commentary on feminist politics and activism have been published in Social Media + Society, New Media + Society, Media, Culture and Society, and Political Communication, and featured in *Teen Vogue, CNN, Washington Post, The New Yorker* and *New York Times*. She is a founding member and current affiliate of the Center for Critical Race and Digital Studies, a co-founder of the Asian American Feminist Collective, and was a 2021-23 Fellow at the Center for Democracy and Technology. She is co-editor of the anthology *Black and Asian Feminist Solidarities* (Haymarket Books) and two special issues on Asian American Abolition Feminisms with *Frontiers: A Women's Studies Journal*. Her current book manuscript, *Movement Media: In Pursuit of Solidarity*, demonstrates how technologies enhance and foreclose possibilities for political organization across uneven racial and class difference, and she is working on a new project on disinformation and Asian diasporic politics with support from the National Endowment for the Humanities.

Sam Lavigne (he/him) is an artist and educator whose work deals with data, surveillance, cops, natural language processing and automation. He is a Creative Capital grantee, recipient of the Pioneer Works Working Artist Fellowship, and the Brown Institute's Magic Grant. He is currently an Assistant Professor of Synthetic Media and Algorithmic Justice at the Parsons School of Design.

Niels G. Mede (he/him) is a postdoctoral researcher at the Department of Communication and Media Research (IKMZ) at the University of Zurich, Switzerland. His work focuses on science and environmental communication, digital media and survey methods. Further research interests include science skepticism, populism and distrust towards science, harassment and attacks against scientists and how to address these challenges so as to achieve constructive science-society dialogue.

Mede holds a Ph.D. from the University of Zurich (2018-2022) and was a visiting scholar at the University of Wisconsin—Madison (2022), the Oxford Internet Institute (2023), and the Digital Media Research Centre at the Queensland University of Technology (2024). He is involved in the Science Barometer Switzerland project and currently co-leads the 68-country Many Labs study TISP ("Trust in Science and Science-Related Populism"). Since 2023, he is also the chair of the Science Communication section of the German Communication Association.

Julia Sonnevend (she/her) is an interdisciplinary scholar, a public intellectual and an associate professor in the sociology department of The New School. Her work foregrounds features of social and public life that are hard to define, yet they define us, such as "events," "charm" and "courage." She has been profiled in *The New Yorker* and her ideas have been featured in a wide variety of news outlets, including T*he Atlantic, BBC Newshour, Teen Vogue, Time magazine and Bloomberg News.* Sonnevend's new monograph, Charm: How Magnetic Personalities Shape Global Politics (Princeton University Press, 2024) focuses on the power of personal magnetism in contemporary politics and was named to *The New Yorker*'s "The Best Books We've Read in 2024 So Far" list. In her previous book, Stories Without Borders: The Berlin Wall and the Making of a Global Iconic Event (Oxford University Press, 2016), Sonnevend explained how storytellers create "global iconic events" that international audiences remember and "recycle" over time. Sonnevend holds a PhD from Columbia University and a Master of Laws degree from Yale Law School. She grew up in Budapest, Hungary.

Arlene Stein (she/her) is Distinguished Professor of sociology at Rutgers University. Her latest book is *Unbound: Transgender Men and the Transformation of Identity* (Pantheon, 2018). She has long been involved in cross-pollinating scholarly and non-academic publics. She is a former editor of *Contexts*, the magazine of public sociology, and a former editor of *Out/Look*, the now defunct national LGBT intellectual magazine. She co-authored *Going Public: A Guide for Social Scientists* (Chicago 2017). She has published essays and commentaries in *LitHub, Daily Beast, The Nation, Jacobin, Newsday, Huffington Post, Haaretz* and other venues. The author or editor of twelve books, her work has been recognized with awards from the American Anthropological Association, the American Sociological Association and the American Library Association.

Rebekah Tromble (she/her) is Director of the Institute for Data, Democracy & Politics and Associate Professor in the School of Media & Public Affairs at George Washington University. Her research focuses on political communication, with particular interests in political discourse on social media. Dr. Tromble leads an interdisciplinary, cross-sector project funded by the National Science Foundation to develop Expert Voices Together, a rapid response system of support for journalists and scientists facing campaigns of intimidation and harassment. She has also just launched the Researcher Support Consortium, a clearinghouse of materials for funders and institutions who want to better support researchers dealing with intimidation and harassment. Dr. Tromble regularly serves as advisor to industry, policymakersand civil society, particularly on topics of digital platform accountability, transparency and responsible data access and use. She is a member of the European Digital Media Observatory's Advisory Board and co-founder of the Coalition for Independent Technology Research.

Todd Wolfson (he/him) is associate professor in the Department of Journalism and Media Studies at Rutgers University. He is an anthropologist by training, and he has written and edited three books, *Digital Rebellion: The Birth of the Cyber Left* (2014), *The Great Refusal: Herbert Marcuse and Contemporary Social Movements* (2017) and *The Gig Economy: Workers and the Media in the Age of Convergence* (2021) along with dozens of peer-reviewed articles. Todd is also co-director of the Media, Inequality & Change Center (MIC), a partnership between the University of Pennsylvania and Rutgers University. Todd is currently president of the American Association of University Professors and for the last six years he has been in leadership of Rutgers AAUP-AFT, which represents 6000 faculty, grad workers, postdocs and counselors at Rutgers University. Prior to his work as an academic union leader, Todd worked as a community and labor organizer in Philadelphia.

Guobin Yang (he/him) is the Grace Lee Boggs Professor of Communication and Sociology at the Annenberg School for Communication and Department of Sociology at the University of Pennsylvania, where he is the Director of the Center on Digital Culture and Society, and Deputy Director of the Center for the Study of Contemporary China. His current research focuses on digital activism, pandemic storytelling and narrative and performance approaches to the study of digital culture.

Barbie Zelizer (she/her) is the Raymond Williams Professor of Communication and Director of the Center for Media at Risk at the University of Pennsylvania's Annenberg School for Communication. A former journalist, Zelizer is known for her work on journalism, crisis, culture, memory and images. She has authored/edited sixteen books and over 150 articles/essays. Recipient of multiple fellowships, book prizes and memberships in the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, the British Academy and the Academia Europaea, her work has appeared in national and global media. Coeditor of *Journalism: Theory, Practice and Criticism*, she is past President of the International Communication Association. Her most recent books are *The Journalism Manifesto* (2021, with Pablo Boczkowski and C.W. Anderson) and *How the Cold War Broke the News* (Polity, 2025).

STUDENT PLANNING COMMITTEE

This symposium was organized by the following group of doctoral students and doctoral candidates at the Annenberg School for Communication:

Anjali DasSarma (she/her) is a PhD student at the Annenberg School for Communication at the University of Pennsylvania, where she studies journalism history, race and slavery. She draws from both cultural studies and critical political economy to trace the longue durée of structures of power, resistance and memory from colonial American newspapers to the future of journalism. She is invested in projects of dismantling capitalism and colonialism alongside building structures of hope and repair. At Annenberg, she is a steering committee member at the Center for Media at Risk and a fellow at the Media, Inequality and Change Center and the Center for Advanced Research for Global Communication. Previously, she was a COMPASS fellow with Free Press and Media 2070, a media reparations project.

Liz Hallgren (she/her) is a doctoral candidate at the Annenberg School for Communication at the University of Pennsylvania, where she studies the cultural work of journalism. She is particularly interested in the kind of myth making enabled by tropes, convention and style in mainstream Western news. At Annenberg, she is a member of the Center for Media at Risk Steering Committee, and she is a doctoral fellow at the Center on Digital Culture and Society and the Media, Inequality & Change Center. Originally from Baltimore, Maryland, she earned her bachelor's degree in international studies and English literature from Macalester College in Saint Paul, Minnesota, and her master's degree from the Annenberg School for Communication at the University of Pennsylvania.

Jenny Lee (she/her) is a PhD candidate at the Annenberg School for Communication at the University of Pennsylvania, studying the intersection of labor, surveillance and identity. Her current research examines the use of doorbell cameras as a form of gendered labor, focusing on the ways that care and social reproduction guide surveillance discourses and experiences. At Penn, Lee is a fellow for the Center on Digital Culture and Society and an organizer for the graduate student union GETUP-UAW. Previously, she worked at the Center on Privacy and Technology at Georgetown Law and the International Sociotechnical Policy Lab, where she conducted research on civil liberties competencies of federal agencies, digital consent, privacy analysis in antitrust law, and employee surveillance. Her work has been published in *Information Communication & Society*, *Communication Law and Policy* and *Cornell International Law Journal.*

Valentina Proust (she/her) is a doctoral student at the Annenberg School for Communication, a steering committee member at the Center for Media at Risk and a doctoral fellow at the Center for Advanced Research in Global Communication. Her research looks at media representation and construction of collective memory, focusing on its relationship with social movements. She examines how social movements use mediatized memory to shape their discourses, with particular attention to cultural trauma, mourning and collective identity. Her work critically engages with gender issues and feminist movements in the Global South, especially in Latin America, and explores the legacies of authoritarian regimes during the latter half of the twentieth century in the region. Some of her current projects include analyzing feminist protest anthems as expressions of solidarity, digital mourning activism and the collective expressions of grief and the representation of memories from the Chilean dictatorship.

Natasha Williams (she/her) is a Fontaine Fellow and a joint doctoral student in Communication and Political Science at the University of Pennsylvania. Williams' research focuses broadly on the intersection of digital media, culture and platforms with international relations and global politics. Her work takes a particular interest in cultural narratives of war and crisis, digitally mediated witnessing and social media as a site for counter-hegemonic journalistic praxis. Williams' research also engages with critical platform governance and trust and safety online. Her work is interdisciplinary at heart, bringing critical cultural perspectives to bear on mixed qualitative and computational methodologies. At Penn, Williams is a steering committee member at the Center for Media at Risk and a doctoral fellow at the Center for Advanced Research in Global Communication. Prior to attending Penn, Williams worked in private research. She received her BA summa cum laude from New York University and her MA from the Annenberg School.

INTERLOCUTORS

Megan Genovese, *Project Archivist, Presbyterian Historical Society*

Sarah Jackson, *Presidential Associate Professor, Annenberg School for Communication*

Jessa Lingel, *Associate Professor of Communication, Annenberg School for Communication*

Juan Llamas-Rodriguez, *Assistant Professor of Communication, Annenberg School for Communication*

Toussaint Nothias, *Clinical Associate Professor, New York University*

Wazhmah Osman, *Associate Professor of Media and Communication, Temple University*

Victor Pickard, *C. Edwin Baker Professor of Media Policy and Political Economy, Annenberg School for Communication*

Aswin Punathambekar, *Professor of Communication, Annenberg School for Communication*

Adrienne Shaw, *Associate Professor of Media and Communication, Temple University*

Julia Ticona, *Assistant Professor of Communication, Annenberg School for Communication*

LaCharles Ward, *Senior Museum Curator of Photography and Film; Director, Earl W. and Amanda Stafford Center for African American Media Arts, Smithsonian's National Museum of African American History and Culture*

Hilde Van den Bulck, *Professor of Communication, Drexel University*

Asta Zelenkauskaite, *Associate Professor of Communication, Drexel University*
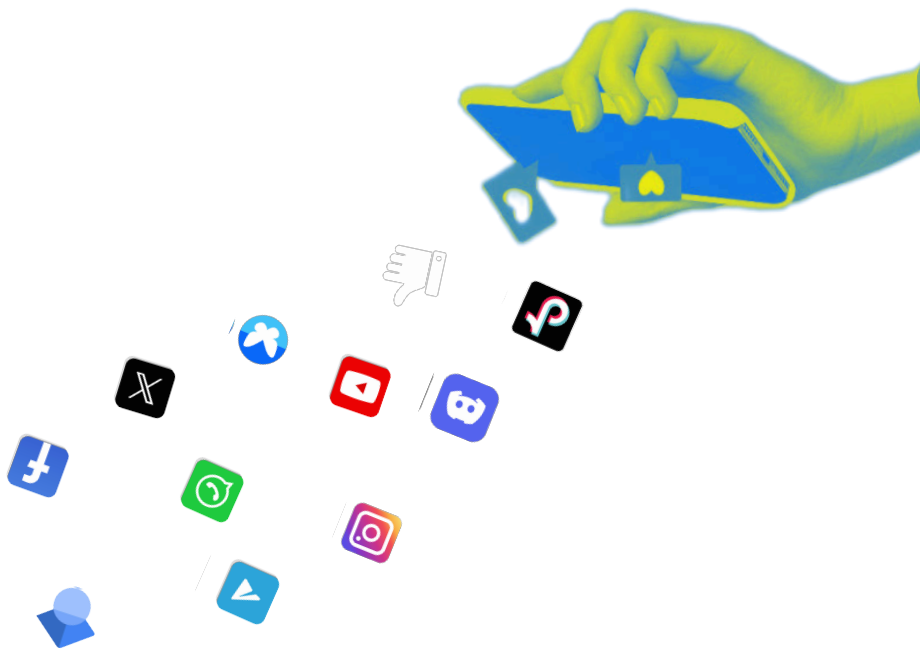
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