

# The Subtle Conditioning of Social Media

Like most Americans, I partake in the unparalleled commitment to digital eavesdropping that is social media. Some of the key vicarious activities participation in Facebook (I'm not a Twitter user) offers are to "like" and "share" posts. That sounds harmless, right? Of course, it does; but I would argue that, in liking and sharing posts, we're actually participating in something much larger than that.

You see, in the digital playground that is Facebook, our inputs are binary. We either completely like something or we don't; we either completely share something or we don't. The problem is that we are often not in full support of anything, and those subtleties are typically detected by our counterpart(s), during real interpersonal discussion. There are granularities that are not captured by our newest and most pervasive form of communication. This essential element of conveyance, found lacking, is [destroying relationships](#), [diluting discourse](#), and promoting [hasty generalizations](#).

There are complicated algorithms that categorize users by what they like and share, and that information is also shared with our peers, in an attempt to illuminate similarities and dissimilarities between people. The deep, meaningful interaction that once was conversation has now been relegated to a bleak simplification of thought and reasoning that fails to capture an important element of humanity—our spectrums of intellectual diversity.

Whether we mean it or not, when we "like" or "share" something, to our peers, we're being immediately associated with the author's belief systems, even if we merely liked that singular post. This limitation to expression, exacerbated by the social repercussions that are likely to follow, is what's

[degrading](#) what could be the productive conversations that our country desperately needs, in [times like these](#). This binary thinking is what produces “us” and “them”, “for” and “against”, and “right” or “wrong”.

I ask the readers of this brief article to ask yourselves something: How many times have you seen something that someone has liked or shared and immediately generalized their belief systems?

Before social media, it was possible to express varying degrees of alignment with ideas. We talked to people we disagreed with, because they probably weren't in absolute opposition to our views, just partially, and their reasoning might have been well-founded. We are human beings; our lives have more inherent meaning and our belief systems are infinitely more complex than a simple binary switch. Some of our strongest-held beliefs and values mature over decades, yet we spend seconds passing judgment on others.

Don't let the social media activities of your peers place you in a moral echo chamber devoid of objectivity. If we can master this unbelievably simple form of tolerance, social media can connect more people than it disconnects.

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