**Jonathan Hutchinson – Look what you made me do: Taylor Swift and (un)social media**

>> Welcome to the podcast series of "Raising the Bar Sydney," raising the bar in 2017, so 20 University of Sydney academics take their research out of the lecture theatre and into bars across Sydney, all on one night. In this podcast you'll hear Jonathan Hutchinson's talk, "Look What you Made Me Do," Taylor Swift, and unsocial media. Enjoy the talk.

>> Excellent. Thanks very much. That's such a warm welcome. So hi, everyone, welcome down to Ginger's. Thanks to everyone for putting on the special event for us tonight. And I'm pleased that University of Sydney got my tech writer to make everything red. So hopefully it helps everyone gel into the mood tonight. So as we just heard, I'm talking about social media. So that's my area of expertise. But there's no one that does social media better, I think, than Taylor Swift. And so there's a sprinkle of Tay Tay through the presentation this evening. I'm looking out there amongst the people who are out in the audience, and I'm guessing that there's a few Taylor Swift fans amongst us. Couple are, "No; no, don't like her at all." But there are other people who are into that sort of space. So hopefully there's a little bit of something for everyone in here, perhaps a little bit of, you know, thought provocation as well. So in 2007, I was living in South Korea, and I was given an invite by a fellow traveller at that time to connect with him on this thing called "Facebook." And I really had no idea of what Facebook was. This is kind of an era when, you know, we've just gone through Friendster, we'd just gone through MySpace. You know, we were sort of following everyone around in these kind of platform spaces, you know, just following our friends to hang out where they were. And here comes this new one, Facebook. So I accepted his request and, you know, thus started my life on Facebook. But in that time, I think I was -- I just had enough foresight to not give myself my full name, and give myself a little bit of an alias to kind of just slightly distance myself from this, you know, social media platform. And this was good, I think, because it kind of -- you know, it got me way in that space, but it sort of distanced me from those people like, you know, those old-school folk that I didn't necessarily want to, you know, be associated with anymore. I'm sure there are a few people in here who had a similar sort of situation when Facebook emerged, you know, you had the friends from school that you didn't really get along with, but suddenly they wanted to be your friend on this new space. And it was an interesting kind of hangover from, you know, the gaming era I guess where, you know, you still had that concept of privacy quite close to your online persona. So I think, you know, it's an interesting space to work within. And I've kept a reasonably keen eye on privacy while I've been, you know, playing on Facebook. Who's the -- there's normally one person in the crowd who's read the Facebook terms and conditions. Where's that person -- yes, there you are. Yes, anyone else? Right, excellent. So, you know, it's a pretty typical kind of response when you're talking about, you know, rules and regulations, and terms and conditions. There's not that many people that, you know, really go through the whole kind of space. So I think out of all the platforms, Facebook's been one of those ones that's really challenged our understanding of this thing called privacy, from what we kind of think of, you know, when we're being in a private space, you know, no one comes in here. And suddenly we're on Facebook and we've had this constant kind of slow but ever-evolving push to change what we know as our private selves within that space. So that's what I want to talk about tonight, what's the concept of privacy on social media, and how has it shifted over the past ten years? What's the one thing that we're labelling these days as "on social media" is kind of the interesting term that's being bantered around a little bit. But what I really, really want to try and delve into tonight is this concept of being able to delete our memories. You know, we have this right to be forgotten. And often this isn't the case within social media. So that's where I really want to take this presentation tonight, and of course, you know, keep it lively with a little bit of Taylor Swift at points here and there. So just by show of hands, who are the Swifty fans in here? Oh, we've got two hands out in the back, the dedicated fan. Excellent, good. I kind of know who I'm talking to here. That's really great to see. So one of the things that really attracted me to choosing Taylor Swift to talk about her tonight was a lyric in one of her latest songs, which I'll read the quote it's, "I'm sorry, the old Taylor can't come to the phone right now. Why; oh, because she's dead." It's like, "What?" Okay; so that's the lyric from one of her latest songs, which is called, "Look What You Made Me Do." So I think it's an interesting indicator -- if not a good lyric, it's a really interesting indicator about how she's trying to signal something to us, you know, like is this the new Taylor Swift? Is this a shift from who she is? And I think in some respects, you know, it is. This is the -- well I guess, you know, the clumsy schoolgirl has gone by the wayside, you know, the girl next door, those kinds of personas that she's done so well for so many years has sort of slipped by the wayside. And now she's more of a -- you know, she's sort of rebranded herself as quite a mature kind of person, or a glamorous kind of girl, maybe a bit sexy, it's kind of -- maybe that's the term you use there. [Laughter] I don't know. Maybe the Tay Tay fans can fill me in on -- because it's a bit of a split I hear within the Taylor community with this whole new image. So but what's really interesting about this is that on August 17 this year give, or take a few days, but around about that time, all of her social media sites went blank. So all of her Twitter conversations disappeared; her website didn't have any content on it anymore. And to the shock and the horror of her fans, the Instagram account was just completely deleted. So the account is still there, but the material was all gone. So if you're a fan, then I guess that was a pretty significant kind of moment that was happening amongst that community of people. So I guess it kind of -- you know, it begged a few questions to be asked amongst the Taylor Swift community, you know, something like, "What the hell is she doing," or, "Is she doing a Britney? Is this her time to be the Britney Spears?" Or, you know, just as I was reading Teen Vogue yesterday they said, "Is she taking 'Blank Space' literally?" [Laughter] And I'm pleased that people got the -- as I was reading Teen Vogue reference yesterday in that one. So I guess you can kind of look at it that way. But really [inaudible] it's probably more of a marketing ploy that she's implying. It kind of engaged us; we wanted to know what's going on. It's like, "Oh my well what's happening with Taylor Swift? She's done it again," or, you know, "She's --" you know, "What's happening? Is she turned off?" But really she secretly, you know, she reinvented that Instagram space and started posting material which was referencing her new album, and her new song, and her new shows. So, you know, it's really just marketing points in many ways. But something else has happened with this as well, and that she's shifted up. It's not just about the image, there's a content change within the space as well. So this is not just about social media where she's suddenly cutting off from her fans, she's really going back to what could be a traditional media type of response, where this is a one too many kind of thing. It's, "This is my message; you will consume it," as opposed to this very sort of I guess two-way conversation which is prevalent to social media. So you might kind of ask yourself, you know, "Why; why is she doing this to her social kind of media space? Why is she turning it in an unsocial media? You know, why is she making it broadcast only?" So it's an interesting moment for Taylor Swift. But more so it's an interesting moment for social media broadly, I think. So I think to try and understand this semantic shift of social media, I think we need to go back and just kind of reflect on this thing that we use day in and day out that we don't really take onboard what the mechanics involved are. So if we go back -- I'm not going to go way back to, you know, the dawn of time. But I will go back to about 1960 where there was a thing that was born; it was called the Internet. And then on that a fellow called Tim Berners-Lee created this thing called "The Worldwide Web," which I'm sure many of you have heard of, you've probably used quite frequently. And the basic kind of idea of that is that it's a distributed network. So there's points, there's nodes where there's things that are stored. And then there's information which is shared around those nodes. And the whole idea that Tim Berners-Lee was trying to get to was that, you know, we could all contribute to this thing. You know, you know something, I know something; some people at the back, they know a bit more. So collectively we can all put this knowledge together, and we could, you know, know more, do more things, be more efficient in what we do on a daily basis. So this starts to build a little bit of momentum. And then we get to the 1990s and advertisers and marketing people get into it. And they start to, you know, really push it. But they use it in this odd broadcasting kind of way where they're just yelling messages at us in some kind of way. And does anyone remember those really terrible web pages in the '90s where it was flashy neon colours and, you know, you'd load it and the sound would start, and you'd be like, "Oh, gee, what's going on?" You know, so this was kind of -- this was all that 1990s era. People were investing in it, lots of money go into that space. And then those investors wanted their money back. And suddenly there was no money there. And so we got that what was called the dot com crash of the '90s. Now, all of that's kind of, you know, so-so, but what it is is a really strong indicator of the birth of a new type of new communication era. And Tim O'Reilly coined it with "Web 2.0," which I'm sure a lot of people have heard, and has been criticised in many, many ways since its or birth, I should say. And what I think what's important to take from this is that it's a concept -- it's a switch, it's a semantic shift from being a broadcast communication technology, to very much a social -- like a two-way, a one to many, a many to many type of communication protocol. And so then, you know, technology sort of starts to advance. We head into the mid-2000s. We get to this era of convergence where, you know, we start to see fans, fan communities emerging. Any fandom people in the room? There's "Buffy the Vampire Slayer," "Harry Potter," that kind of -- there's one, [laughs] one fan in the room. Okay, good. So, you know, these sorts of communities start to emerge where we're obsessed with these large media industries. You know, your "Star Wars" franchises, for example. And then the fans take it on, and they start creating content that's, you know, in their interest space. And we start to see this, you know, kind of -- there's a bit of a pushback to begin with when the media industry is going, "Hang on, this is our space. We don't need you people in here." But eventually it kind of comes around where there's a lovely kind of flow between fan communities and the larger media industries. And it's kind of settled down now and we, you know, understand how this environment works. And so this leads us to the environment that we're all very familiar with now. So I imagine everybody in here is on social media, otherwise you probably wouldn't be at this talk. And this is very much where we're engaging in that many to many kind of communication model. But what's interesting about that is how we are within these social media spaces. And I just want everyone to think about this for a minute on how they present themselves in online media spaces. So what's your profile picture like on Facebook maybe; or what's your -- how do you describe yourself on Twitter? What's your sort of content updates that you do? Do you do, I don't know, pictures of your children? Where are the dog people; it's probably that side of the room, yes, and this is the cat people over on here; is that -- no? You know, so we've got these certain ways that we describe ourselves within these -- the content that we produce. And essentially, what we're doing there from the very first moment we're on these social media platforms, we're creating and we're performing our identity. So each piece of text that we publish, that we create, that we put within these spaces, we push it out to a network and we're very much performing it in a way that we see ourselves, and how we want to be seen within these social media spaces. So that leads us to the next kind of era within this whole -- the concept of performing our identities. We're consistently changing, we're always performing a new kind of person who we are. But often our social media platforms, they don't keep up with how we develop as people. So I guess I've got about, you know, maybe ten to 15 years' experience on social media platforms now. A lot of people in here may have that same sort of time on these spaces, maybe a little bit less. But over that period from when you first emerged into the social media space, you changed, and you've developed, and you've grown; and so has the world around you. But the platform has remained the same. So this concept of how social media, you know, has really shifted and changed over the time is an interesting one that we have I think embraced, but the platforms itself hasn't really embraced. So you could think about this in a number of ways. And a way that I always like to kind of present it to people is what's the difference between your personal platforms and your professional platforms? And has anyone in here ever had that awkward moment where there's been that collision of here's my private life with my professional -- you know, when you've done that sort of -- I don't know, maybe you've rung up sick for work, and then you've posted the selfie down at the beach, and you kind of didn't really think that one through. And it's a really great example of how, you know, our online worlds are constantly changing and shifting. And social media platforms obviously don't really -- they don't really keep up with that kind of environment. But then we have developed. We understand how to communicate in these spaces, and change who we are. But then there's this new group of users that emerged into this space, and we call them "social influencers." So do many people in here know what a social influencer is? There's one person, one, two, three -- three, four, five. There's a handful of people. All right; so we'll step through a little bit of history on social media influencers. So a really nice way to sort of frame a social influencer is someone like "FunForLouis." So he's a user on YouTube, he's a YouTuber where he goes and tours the world and does travel to exotic locations. He gets paid to do that. British airways often puts him in first-class flights to go and do that. And then he goes, creates a video, posts it, and, you know, everyone sort of watches it. Zoella; any Zoella fans in here? Ah, that's so interesting. So Taylor Swift and Zoella don't play well together. So she does things like shopping malls. So she'll go out and do a -- you know, buy all of her stuff in this shopping experience, put it in a bag, take it home, and then unveil it on the video for everyone to see, and kind of describe -- you know, obviously their branded content, it's all branded content that she's getting, you know, paid to endorse in some way. Well, then someone like Katie Nestor [phonetic], who's a New Yorker. Anyone know Katie, is there; couple of people, great. So he's that skateboarding kind of character who, you know, travels around the boroughs of New York and meets people, talks a lot about running, tech startups, all that kind of thing. But in each of these cases, they're people who have amassed large audiences on social media platforms.

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>> So can I just get everyone in the room by a show of hands to let me know if you've got an Instagram account. Okay; so there's quite a few of us. Now, keep your hand up if you've got over 500 followers. Ah, gee, you thinned out pretty quick there. [Laughs] Right; so we've got a few people, okay, over a thousand? Now, if you'd like I'd be an auction [inaudible]. [Laughter] Who's got over 2,000? Oh, this guy, okay, three, four, five, ten, 20, 50; 20, okay, that's -- yes, and how many have you got?

>> Fifty four.

>> Fifth four thousand; so you're an influencer. You should probably be up on the stage right here. [Laughter] Do you want to do a selfie now, so, okay good, good. So, you know, these -- it's kind of -- it's the combination of these potential what we would consider to be ordinary folk operating in these social media spaces, you know, who are essentially kind of selling brands and products in some ways. And digital agencies, they caught onto this really quickly and started designing social media campaigns, which bring, you know, brands and services to these social influencers, who then bring these mass audiences together. So in this space, it was all working really well. We had a great ecosystem which was happening. And then Asenir O'Neil [phonetic] happened. And a few of may know Asenir O'Neil. So she was this person who in 2015 released this YouTube video. She was a social influencer. And she released this YouTube video which was kind of distressing; so she had no makeup on, she looked quite dishevelled, she was crying the whole time. And she was revealing what was going on in this social media influencer space. So she was talking about how it's, you know, constant pressure in these environments, and you're always on, every aspect of your life is on social media. And at the same time, you know, they're being flown around the world, getting caught up in the money. So I mean, you kind of had to read it with a you know, bit of a critical perspective. But what she was doing was sort of unveiling this mask of social influencers, and how their concept of privacy had just completely disappeared. And so these people are on social media all the time from the moment they wake up until the moment they go to bed. And they might do something like -- you know, "Here's the perfect Instagram photo." But then there's the B-roll, which appears on YouTube, which is how they then created that Instagram image. You know, there's all the tweets about coming up to that particular time or, you know, "I'm at the shoot and here's the thing, here's the people," et cetera, et cetera. So every aspect of this life was really heavily documented, and published. And a lot of people see this material constantly. So she kind of really blew the lid on that. And then [inaudible] happened, which I won't get into in this environment, but I can hear there's a few snickers out there so we all know what was going on there. So this brings us to this concept of privacy. And I could be that guy that comes into -- an academic walked into a bar and he talked about policy, and it probably didn't go down so well. So I'm not going to do that. But I do want to talk about the concept of privacy through the lens of social influencers. So, you know, these people are -- they're pretty much -- they covered every life -- every aspect of their life is being covered on these social media websites. But it's really interesting to see how this then evolves into something like us as ordinary folk. So for example, you know, Taylor Swift deleting all of her content is a pretty serious statement in many ways that the content that we publish on these social media sites, it's there. It remains all the time. And if we try and delete it, we often can't for a number of reasons, including the fact that if I wanted to delete all of the posts that maybe I put on Facebook, sure I could delete the content; I could go in and just delete, delete, delete. But that's also being stored on a Facebook server, which is probably in Iceland, which is probably then being backed up by the other server in South America somewhere, which is being backed up -- you know, so you kind of get where I'm going with this. So the way to get rid of this content is to delete it, yes, off the platform, and then grab a sledgehammer and go onto all of these different server rooms around the world and -- you know, so it's impossible for this content to be deleted from its existence. So as someone like Asenir O'Neil comes out and, you know, kind of lifts the veil on this kind of, you know, questionable industry. And then we also have people now like popular cultural icons like Taylor Swift who's now deleting all of her content, I think that's saying something about who we are within the social media space, and how we have lost control of our histories, or our right to be deleted in these spaces. So I think social media is only one aspect of it. But what about things like sensor data? So how many Wi-Fi systems know that you people are in here tonight, probably quite a few. What about all the content that's being produced in here tonight that's gone online. You know, all of these things are just constantly producing such a large amount of data on us. And we kind of -- we've lost control over a lot of it. And this comes back to my point from before about, you know, we've changed. So that one time that you -- you know, now you post something on your social media accounts around same-sex marriage, you're okay with it; you want it to go ahead, and that's great. You have demonstrated that you've evolved and you're a part of a progressive society. And this is fantastic. But then there was that one time that you were not so cool with it, and you posted that comment, say, ten years ago, and that's still on your social media account. You might try and delete that, but it's probably not going to be gone forever. And now the problem with this is you have evolved as a human, but someone in the future might come back to that content, and they might misrepresent you in some particular way. So there are serious cognitive repercussions for the content that we can't delete on social media channels. I really want you to think about that, and that's a takeaway point that I want you to keep with you as you walk away from this talk tonight. So I think as we kind of reflect on that, we've seen a lot of communication technologies evolve, we've evolved with them, but I don't think the social media platforms have necessarily evolved to suit how we have as societies, as individuals, as communities of people. And so the final question that I want to leave you with tonight is, you know, "Should you delete your content?" And I'm not entirely sure that deleting content is the solution. But I think you should question yourself, "Should I delete my content, or should I be producing and publishing none on social media content?" Thanks very much.

[ Applause ]

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