

July 15, 2022

Welcome back to the Unfinished newsletter, where we explore the intersection of tech, ethics, and social impact.

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What we're thinking about

Terms and conditions.

We were struck by a [recent Wired article](#) by the tech lawyer Pia Owens detailing how much control typical social media platforms have over the content you publish there. Here's a quick excerpt:

...from a legal perspective, social media sites do have broad rights to use any information you provide. "You own your Content," promises the [Twitter Terms of Service](#), followed by a long paragraph granting Twitter the rights to use, adapt, share, and distribute your content worldwide. [TikTok](#), likewise, claims "an unconditional irrevocable, non-exclusive, royalty-free, fully transferable, perpetual worldwide license" to your content. [Instagram](#) claims not only a broad license to your content, but also permission to show your username, photo, likes, and relationships in connection with third-party ads.

Social media sites like YouTube and TikTok could also, without violating any laws or their own terms of service, charge users to access your video. Or screen your video at their exclusive film festival. Or publish a book containing your status updates. Or set up an art gallery to display your photos. Imagine Twitter University, where users pay to access curated content from (uncompensated) experts. It could offer courses in art history or screenwriting or user interface design simply by collecting existing commentary, links, videos, and photos without user permission or compensation. You might not even know your content was included. And it would all be perfectly legal.

In [recent newsletters](#), we've focused quite a lot on data privacy. But the *Wired* story is a reminder that data *governance* is the bigger issue to contend with. Our relationships with tech companies are not symmetrical: Most online platforms we engage with set the terms for how our information is protected, distributed, monetized, and so much else. As Owens explores, there's plenty of room for more legal and ethical oversight to better empower consumers in this dynamic.

There's another story from this week that demonstrates how expansive this topic really is. *Politico*'s Alfred Ng [reported](#) that Amazon has given police surveillance footage captured by Ring doorbells — without owners' permission. If you buy a Ring device (and [maybe you shouldn't](#)), you're not just setting up a security camera for your own needs: you're opting yourself and your surrounding community into generating audio and visual data that is largely controlled by Amazon, and subject to its terms and conditions.

Many folks are comfortable with this arrangement. Even so, the ethical framework governing this technology hasn't come from empowered communities or concerned individuals — it's come from Amazon, much as the policies that give social media platforms the leeway to exploit your content come from TikTok, YouTube, Instagram, and Twitter.

We're exploring issues like these through the [McCourt Institute](#), which aims to ensure that digital governance is prioritized in the development of new technology and embedded in the next generation of the web. And of course, we keep them top of mind in developing [Project Liberty](#), an initiative to build a more equitable civic architecture for the digital world.

This is why as part of Project Liberty, we built a protocol — [DSNP](#) — to decentralize social networking and shift the control of personal data from companies to individuals. As [our colleague Braxton Woodham wrote](#), “This new infrastructure has the potential to free the entire web of human online social activity from private company control and unlock a path for vibrant innovation from diverse contributors.”

If you want to participate in this movement, we invite you once again to [join us at Unfinished Live this September](#). We've just announced an amazing slate of [new speakers](#) — including Cory Doctorow, Julie Owono, Jonathan Haidt, Safiya Noble, Iddris Sandu, Shirin Ghaffary, and many more.

♥ We'd like to thank you for subscribing to this newsletter by offering a discount if you register for Unfinished Live in the next week: **just use the code NEWSLETTER100**.



Other notable headlines

🍬 In *Protocol*, [Issie Lapowsky reports](#) that a popular online resource for abortion pills “contains trackers that transmit information to Facebook and Google, including visitors’ IP addresses, the URLs they’re browsing — which can contain the state in which they’re seeking abortions — and unique identifiers that are then used to optimize and retarget ads later on.” Disclosures about this are buried in a privacy policy, underscoring the urgency of our discussion above.

📰 Casey Newton, the independent tech journalist behind *Platformer*, [wrote that abortion is “tech’s next big reputational risk,”](#) noting, “If Google and its peers aren’t going to stop cooperating with law enforcement, they need to start collecting less data.”

🌐 Shanghai’s municipal government plans to incorporate blockchain and metaverse technology for economic development over the next five years, per [a report from David Attlee](#) in *CoinTelegraph*. It’s an indication that China is taking web3 seriously, despite a [national ban on crypto mining](#).

📖 [Claire Atkinson, Lucia Moses, and Lara O'Reilly at Business Insider report](#) that advertisers are abandoning Meta as the company, which is behind Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, and others, struggles to navigate changes to the digital marketing industry — to say nothing of its ongoing reputational problems. “Meta is in a perfect storm,” they write. “As a result, more advertisers are not just increasingly willing to diversify away from Meta, but doing so for the first time. It’s a big shift for a company that historically could always count on their dollars, scandal after scandal, as long as their ads performed.”

🙏 Wisdom from Our Unfinished Salon

Earlier this week, we convened an amazing panel to discuss reimagining digital tech to build a thriving multiracial democracy. Claudia Peña, Executive Director of For Freedoms, led the conversation with Prakash Janakiraman, Co-Founder and Chief Architect of Nextdoor, Pia Mancini, Co-Founder and CEO of Open Collective, and Deepti Doshi, Co-Director of New_ Public.

We wanted to share some of their inspiring perspectives for those of you who missed the conversation:

- **Pia Mancini** reflected on our aging democratic institutions: “Thriving democracy is perpetually a work in progress. It needs constant adaptation... If it’s not changing, then it’s no longer a democracy... We have a set of democratic institutions that were designed for a different era. It’s a type of democracy where a few decide in the name of many... Society has changed radically, and we haven’t adapted these institutions to the society we have today.”

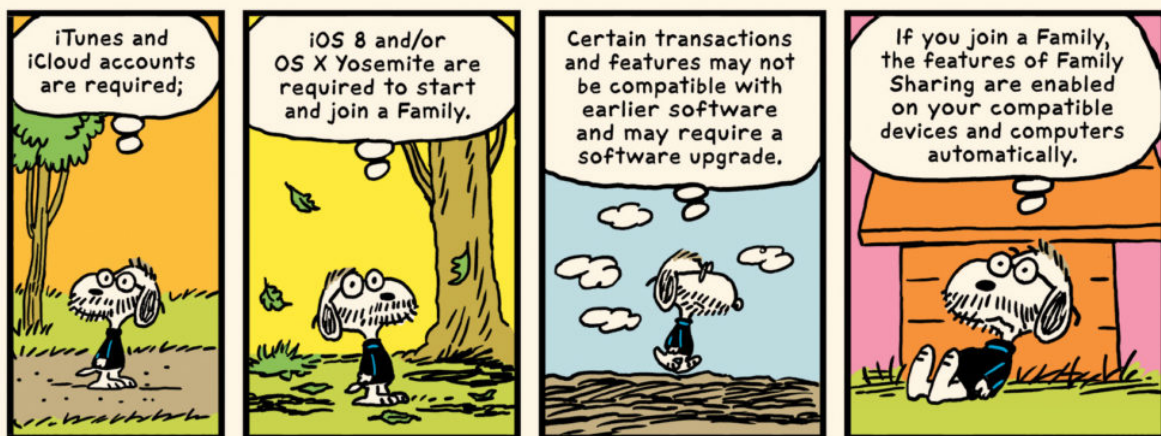
- **Prakash Janakiraman** highlighted the need for evolution to be a shared responsibility: “Technology is the means to some end in the world. It's some change we want to see, something we want to see improve about the world. We have to remind ourselves that technology is just one tool in the toolkit... I know how to build things. I know how to turn zeros and ones into bits and bytes and user experiences... But I'm not a sociologist. I'm not a psychologist. I'm not a civil rights worker... Why are we not co-creating these products and these experiences?”
- And **Deepti Doshi** summed it up: "What is real democracy? ... Democracy is co-creation and care.”

Join our next Unfinished Conversation on Twitter

On July 21, we're hosting the next in our series of panels on Twitter Spaces. We'll be joined by Angie Cooper, Chief Program Officer at [Heartland Forward](#), one of our Network partners, to discuss bridging the digital divide in the center of the United States. Other guests to be announced shortly — [tap this link to set a reminder to join the conversation!](#)

Something Fun

Speaking of terms and conditions, we can't help but recommend the 2017 graphic novel [Terms and Conditions](#), in which the artist Robert Sikoryak painstakingly transfers the vast ocean of iTunes terms into a variety of classic comic book styles, imitating the likes of *Peanuts* and the *X-Men*. Mozilla did a great writeup of the book [here](#), noting, that the book “not only makes reading the fine print more enjoyable, it also highlights the challenges consumers face in controlling of how personal information is collected and used by companies.”



Thank you for reading.

Follow Unfinished ([@byUnfinished](#)) on Twitter for ongoing chitchat on the changing web.

Have a great, restful weekend.

The Unfinished team

Project Liberty, 888 Seventh Avenue, 16th Floor, New York, New York 10106

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