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978-1-107-07913-7 - The Psychology of the Internet: Second Edition

Patricia Wallace

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THE PSYCHOLOGY OF THE INTERNET

An engaging and research-based book, *The Psychology of the Internet* provides a balanced overview of the psychological aspects of cyberspace. It explores crucial questions about the Internet's effects on human behavior, such as why we often act in uncharacteristic ways in online environments and how social media influence the impressions we form and our personal relationships. The book's balanced approach to the subject encourages readers to think critically about the psychology of the Internet, and how and why their own online behavior unfolds. Drawing on classic and contemporary research, this second edition examines new trends in Internet technology, online dating, online aggression, group dynamics, child development, prosocial behavior, online gaming, gender and sexuality, privacy and surveillance, the Internet's addictive properties, and strategies for shaping the Internet's future.

PATRICIA WALLACE is the author of thirteen books, including *The Internet in the Workplace: How New Technology Is Transforming Work* (2004) and *Introduction to Information Systems, 2nd Edition* (2015). Her work and educational background span psychology and technology, and she has held varied positions in higher education, including professor, chief information officer, and executive director of a research center. She holds a PhD in psychology and a Master's degree in computer systems management. She currently teaches in the Graduate School of the University of Maryland University College. Previously, she was Senior Director for online programs and information technology at the Center for Talented Youth at Johns Hopkins University.

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To Julian, Callie, Eric, Marlene, Lili, Keiko, and my whole *real life* family.

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PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

When the first edition of *The Psychology of the Internet* came out in 1999, brick and mortar bookstores still reigned. With eight employees, Google had just outgrown its garage office, and Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg immersed himself in classics as a high school sophomore. The release of Apple's iPhone and the torrent of mobile applications that followed were nearly a decade away. I would say "much has happened since 1999" if it were not such a laughable understatement.

The Internet of the 1990s attracted pioneers who explored an uncharted territory that took fortitude even to enter. Clunky dial-up modems, buggy software, frustrating load times, and unreliable connections dogged our efforts and blocked our work. At that time, the psychological aspects of the different corners of cyberspace received little attention from researchers, but anyone who spent time online could see that those aspects were already having fundamental effects on human behavior. To better understand how and why we were behaving in sometimes surprising ways, I drew mainly on classic research in the social sciences.

Those classic studies remain relevant, but this new edition adds a wealth of contemporary research that examines the psychology of the vastly expanded online world. Active research in psychology, communications, computer science, business, political science, and other disciplines is generating new insights about human behavior online, especially on social media. Many academic journals specifically focus on these topics, such as *Computers in Human Behavior*, *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*, *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking*, *New Media and Society*, *CyberPsychology and Behavior*, and *Cyberpsychology*. Universities are launching academic

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programs, conferences, and institutes on Internet studies to explore the broader issues that the net raises for human beings, bringing together people with different backgrounds and perspectives.

As in the first edition, my goal is not to extol a utopian future built on emerging digital technologies. Nor is it to paint a darker picture in which the Internet leads to dire consequences for human behavior and social relationships. Instead, I describe - in a balanced way - what we actually know from research about the psychology of the Internet, citing both positives and negatives and raising many new questions. Some of the research zeroes in on specifics the reader should find quite useful, such as how people form impressions from social media profiles, or why certain videos go viral. I also hope this book will help the reader steer clear of the kinds of online blunders that can cause irreparable damage. In any case, we are riding a fast-moving vehicle that is picking up speed as it goes, and this book will help equip the reader with knowledge about how to travel wisely and help guide it.

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I want to thank the many people around the world who helped bring this book to life with their suggestions, anecdotes, and insights. They come from different fields and life experiences, and they span every age group, from an elementary student showing off her Minecraft creations to an entrepreneurial retiree starting an online business. The reviewers offered excellent ideas about the topics for the second edition and tips for exploring some tiny Internet corners that I would not have otherwise stumbled on. Thanks also go to my colleagues at Johns Hopkins University and our students at the Center for Talented Youth, who participated in my research about the role that the Internet and emerging technologies play in child development. I also want to thank David Repetto, Rebecca Taylor, Jeethu Abraham, Stephanie Sakson, Jim Diggins, and all the good people who work at or with Cambridge University Press whose efforts contributed in countless ways. It is always humbling to remember that Cambridge University Press has published works by John Milton, Isaac Newton, and Stephen Hawking. And finally, I owe all the thanks in the world to Julian, Callie, Keiko, Marlene, and Lili.

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