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Ben Jacobsen and David Beer, **Social Media and the Automatic Production of Memory: Classification, Ranking and the Sorting of the Past**, Bristol, UK: Bristol University Press, 2021, 116 pp., $22.36 (eBook).

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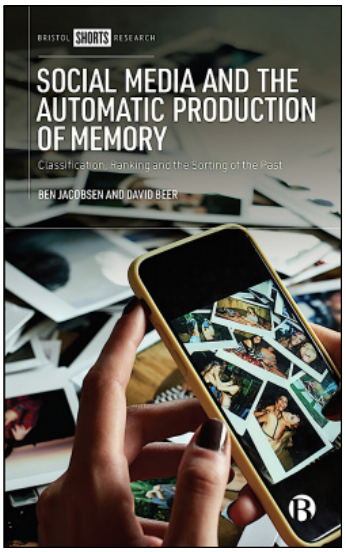

People have memories that they want to either remember or forget, but memory features—from Timehop to Facebook Memories to Instagram Throwbacks—automatically remind people of their digital traces. Indeed, people have long engaged with media technologies to document and remember life (e.g., Humphreys, 2018). As social media have increasingly become "memory devices," how do social media repackage user-generated content as "memories" through processes of classification and ranking? How do users respond to the "automatic production of memories" (p. 23)? These are the key questions that Ben Jacobsen and David Beer set out to explore in their book ***Social Media and the Automatic Production of Memory: Classification, Ranking and the Sorting of the Past***.

In this neat and compact book, the authors primarily aim to lay the conceptual groundwork for understanding automated processes through which memories are datafied, classified, and ranked. For them, the "authenticity" of memory lies in "the individual actively and under their own direction digging around to locate the memories among the detritus of experience" (p. 3). But as memory features automate the work of digging by selectively reminding them of certain content they shared on social media platforms, these archival technologies are marked by tensions between what users and algorithms remember about the past. Taking a step back, the authors argue that algorithmic memory making is associated with two interrelated contextual factors, namely, the extension of what Beer (2016) previously termed "metric power" and the expansion of online targeting. Specifically, metrics are now "used to judge memories and to allow them to be ranked for their asserted value" (p. 8). Online targeting meanwhile entails feedback loops of data that shape users' future actions. Taken together, this book directs attention to a wider logic of measurement in our daily life. As they put it, "even something as intimate and personal as memory cannot escape the reach of social media and their datafied and circulatory logic" (p. 91). This logic of datafication is built to be embedded into users' sustained engagement on a particular platform.

The book is structured around the automatic *production* of memories (chapters 2 and 3) as well as the *reception* of automated memories (chapter 4). Chapter 2 begins by highlighting the importance of classification in rendering digital traces meaningful. As Jacobsen and Beer put this, "To be remembered is to be classified . . . It is to be fitted into a certain classificatory schema that renders the world knowable and meaningful as well as potentially usable" (p. 28). Empirically, the authors analyze the development of Facebook Memories to show how the platform delimits the boundaries of what ought to be memorable through the process of partitioning. Specifically, Facebook developed a framework called "Taxonomy of Memory Themes," in which it suggested that negative memories should be filtered out because users

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preferred *not* to reexperience such memories in the future. The taxonomy also classified memories into categories such as relationships, family, and birthday. As such, memory features are not simply to archive the past but also to classify which part of the past is archivable and relevant to users.

The classification of memories provides the basis for the process of algorithmic ranking of memories, or what Jacobsen and Beer call "the promotion of the memorable" (p. 51), to which chapter 3 is dedicated. The promotion of the memorable is concerned with feedback data loops, that is, how Facebook personalizes and targets certain past data points to users and how users engage with such mediated memories in real time. In this vein, the ways and rhythms that users interact with selective slices of their past data contribute to the promotion of memories. Referencing Taina Bucher's (2012) earlier work on Facebook's EdgeRank algorithm, Jacobsen and Beer argue that Facebook Memories represents a novel way of producing (in)visibility because certain past content is weighted as more visible and memorable than others. Taken together, the partitioning and promotion of the memorable enable the automatic production of "a desired version of the past" (p. 94)—the past that could ideally incite users' continuous participation on social media.

Drawing on 26 in-depth interviews with frequent memory app users and four focus groups, chapter 4 offers preliminary insights into how users respond to the delivery of automated memories in everyday life. While chapters 2 and 3 focus on Facebook Memories, it is noteworthy that the interviewees and focus group participants used or had different degrees of familiarity with various archival technologies beyond Facebook, such as Timehop, Apple Memories, and Snapchat Memories. Although Jacobsen and Beer acknowledge that "the heterogeneity of memory features would necessarily have differential effects on how people experience being targeted by mediated memories" (p. 60), this chapter primarily aims to offer "jumping-off points" for future research. The authors identify four tensions that automated memories may engender, including technicity of attention, reductive algorithms, algorithmic misconceptions, and invasive algorithms. First, automated memories may enable platforms to direct users' attention to reengage with specific data points so as to reconstruct the past. Second, algorithmic memory making does not always fit the specific needs of users; therefore, automated memories may lack authenticity. Third, algorithms can misrecognize what is deemed memorable in the view of participants. Fourth, participants connected the automatic production of memory with broader concerns over how platforms would continuously extract data from users and invade their privacy. This chapter offers insights into understanding the possibilities of agency against algorithmic memory making and datafication.

Jacobsen and Beer conclude by highlighting the pressing need to study the tensions between algorithmic memory making and users' reception on social media. They argue that the automatic production of memory represents "the continued efforts to displace any void on social media: constantly participate, constantly remember" (p. 97). In this way, platforms actively shift the very meaning of memory to squeeze into the social media logic. Understandably, given the length and scope of the book, the book prudently limits the analysis to focus on the mechanisms through which algorithmic memory making occurs on social media. Yet, it may be worthwhile to explicate further the economic incentives driving the automatic production of memory and situate the development of memory devices into a wider historical context. For instance, Lee Humphreys (2020) suggests that the Associated Press's Today in History and Facebook Birthdays and Memories might share similar economic motivations for curating content, though they curate

content in different ways and have varying scales of curation. This raises questions about the historical continuity of (social) media as archives. As Jacobsen and Beer also note in chapter 4, users may experience distinct archival technologies differently. I would look forward to reading the authors' future work that details how platform-specific metrics (e.g., Timehop's Streak number) may create social pressure for data subjects to develop reactive practices toward automated memories. Moreover, social media users may use multiple memory devices, with convergent and divergent logics of algorithmic memory making in everyday life. A more nuanced comparative approach, therefore, would also help unpack the meanings of memory and selfhood in data-driven societies.

In conclusion, *Social Media and the Automatic Production of Memory* offers a thought-provoking and timely theoretical framework for understanding the mechanisms and threats of algorithmic memory making on social media. This book also provides a clear and accessible introduction to critical issues related to datafication, memory studies, and the politics of algorithmic systems.

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