

# Social Media Meltdowns: The Rise and Fall of MySpace, the Teetering of TikTok, and the Twitter Apocalypse

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Entertainment

## Midnight Facts for Insomniacs

Podcast Transcript

(Note: transcript consists of episode outline)

I have a confession: I didn't post a poll last week, because I just wasn't excited about any of the potential topic ideas. And that's not a dig at the quality of suggestions; I had a great time with lost and found media the week before, and there is currently a poll up right now in the discord, you can go and vote on it and that will be our next episode. I just go through phases during which nothing excites me and I have to free associate until something sparks my interest. Or sometimes I'll just be super basic and choose a topic by scanning the news and writing about whatever the hell is going on in the world, like the Christmas episode and today's topic: Social Media Meltdowns. I'm not talking about people melting down on social media, that would be way too much to cover, that's a constant occurrence, I'm talking about the rise

and fall of social media platforms and the disastrous circumstances they find themselves in today. And this actually might end up being one of our longest ever episodes. I bit off a lot more than I was planning to chew, so maybe don't listen to it all at once...wouldn't want you to get sick of us. I'm surprised *we're* not sick of us yet, we have to hear our dumb voices every single day. At least for listeners this experience is voluntary, for us it's unavoidable. We could quit the show but a big chunk of our lives would still consist of chatting about random facts, there's no escape. Maybe this podcast will eventually turn into true crime whether we want it to or not, death is the only way out. That got dark.

So let's start way back at the beginning, with the dawn of long distance communication. The first message ever sent over a form of social media was not a tweet or a post or any digital communication whatsoever, it was a series of dots and dashes tapped out on a telegraph line in 1844 by Samuel FB Morse, and it translated to "what has God wrought". And there couldn't have been a more fitting first message for the technology that would evolve into prank videos and the tide pod challenge. What indeed hath been wrought. Wroughted? That sounds like a different word. Still accurate.

Samuel Finley Breese Morse was an extremely intelligent wannabe artist

who had attended Yale but for most of his life would have been content making a living simply by charging patrons a dollar each for a portrait. However, in 1832 after returning from a painting excursion to Europe, he began tinkering with electrical wires and the world lost an entire museum's worth of potentially amazing handcrafted headshots. Think about what might have been. Instead of Morse code and long-distance communication and social media the world could have had a few more dramatic silhouettes. I like to imagine the portraits that Morse was creating were those bobblehead caricatures that you can get for a few bucks on the boardwalk. That was his passion. Anyway, Morse code worked by sending pulses of electrical current along a wire. Long pulses indicated a dash and short pulses indicated a dot. Each letter of the alphabet was assigned a certain pattern of dots and dashes and so messages could be transmitted by tapping out the corresponding code for each letter one by one. For the first time in history messages could be rapidly relayed across oceans and deserts and mountains and...other types of terrain. Corn fields. Dog parks. Puddles. All the terrains. It's hard to overstate how revolutionary this was. Before Morse, messages had to be delivered by hand, shipped on boats and carried on horseback, it could take months to get even the most urgent messages to distant family members and friends. But all of that changed with Morse's

first "what hath god wrought" transmission, and Pandora's box was flung open. It wasn't just a revolution of technology, it was a revolution in social interaction, it represented the shrinking of the world, bringing people together from continents apart. In his book "writing on the wall: social media—the first 2000 years" British journalist Tom Standage explains, "Telegraph operators could chat with each other by tapping on their keys. All the operators along the line could hear everything that was transmitted and join in the unofficial banter, in effect occupying a single, shared chat room."

A Washington post article explains "There were early versions of OMG: "G M" meant "good morning," "S F D," meant "stop for dinner." ...telegraphers played chess and checkers using Morse code, often becoming friends without ever meeting." From Standage again, "Romances between operators who met each other online were not unknown. Such was the sense of online camaraderie that some operators in remote places preferred to commune with their friends on the wires than with the local people." I wonder how much Morse code sexting was going on...light some candles, do some sensual tapping. I wonder if they had any version of emojis. Could you tap out an eggplant emoji?

My favorite part of the invention-of-Morse-code story is the fact that people bitched and complained about it from the very beginning. Morse code

was vilified in many of the same ways that social media is vilified today. For instance, journalists griped that it allowed random thoughts and observational snippets to be transmitted around the world pointlessly.

From an 1891 issue of Atlantic Monthly, here's a complaint from a journalist:

"America has in fact transformed journalism from what it once was, the periodical expression of the thought of the time, the opportune record of the questions and answers of contemporary life, into an agency for collecting, condensing and assimilating the trivialities of the entire human existence. The effect is disastrous, and affects the whole range of our mental activities. We develop hurry into a deliberate system ... the pursuit of novelties and sensations into the normal business of life." Just goes to show that every new form of technology is going to piss people off and/or scare the hell out of them. TV was going to rot our brains, iPhones would turn us into mindless phone-zombies, social media would be the end of face to face interaction, etc. Those aren't the best examples because they're kind of true...But you get my point. Every new technology sparks an outcry of "the sky is falling" but the sky hasn't fallen...yet. I don't wanna jinx it.

Now of course the most recognizable ancestors of what we know as social

media today began back in the early internet era, specifically the BBSes, not to be confused with BBLs. The bulletin board systems or BBS was very similar to a Reddit community today, just a much more primitive version. It was—as indicated by the name—a digital bulletin board, basically a webpage devoted to a single topic or subculture in which people could post pictures and comments and files and games. This was in the era of dial up Internet over phone lines, and long-distance charges might apply; as a result BBSes often formed around a specific geographical location, which meant that many of the participants would essentially be neighbors and these digital bulletin boards often facilitated real-life meet ups. Give people any form of technology and they'll figure out a way to masturbate to it or use it to find people to fuck. BBSes would eventually be linked together into larger networks like FidoNet, which still exists today, and I absolutely recommend people look up [fidonet.org](http://fidonet.org) if you want to experience a dose of early 2000s nostalgia...or maybe PTSD depending on your experience with the Internet back then. It's a blast from the past either way. Even better, I think we recommended [heavensgate.com](http://heavensgate.com) on a cults episode. The website of that infamous suicidal UFO cult is still live and it's pretty glorious. It's a perfect example of those early super-pixelated HTML webpages with all of the links underlined. I used to code really basic webpages in html and CSS, mostly for

our early bands, I wonder if any of those pages still exist. Remember 4Below, or Downland? We had a website for Downland. Might have been on GeoCities? That Downland site was a hot destination, I think we hit double digit traffic during a couple of the months of its existence.

So next came CompuServe in 1979, the first and oldest Internet service provider, though the version of the Internet that CompuServe provided was primitive stuff compared to the blazing and often wireless networks we know today. These were basically the technological equivalent of computers rotary-dialing other computers over a phone line, this was like computer party chat and in fact one of CompuServes most popular features was CB Simulator, the first true realtime chat service that had ever been made available to the public at large. It was called "CB" because it was modeled on the concept of CB radio, with different channels for different subjects, which CompuServe felt would be more relatable to the Internet-curious public and easier to grasp. Because there was a ton of crossover between the trucker community and early Internet geeks....question mark? CompuServe CB simulator resulted in the first wedding between online chatters, a couple that had met in the CBIG (the CB interest group). These were the pioneering and amorous nerds Zebra3 and ChrisDOS—aka Pamela and Chris Dunn, who would be featured on the

Phil Donahue show in the 1980s. The first online wedding that was actually broadcast over the service in real-time and attended by 50 "virtual online guests" was between MilesTeg and Cinderella on May 4, 1991. The stigma for Online dating has pretty much evaporated, but I feel like these usernames are why people still don't like to admit that they met in online communities like Reddit or second life or world of Warcraft or whatever.

"You're my soulmate QueasyGoose83. I'll never forget how met in that subgroup for libertarian furies." As of 2019 though, the couple was still together. Or at least a couple identifying themselves as MilesTeg and Cinderella, who knows, it's the Internet, this could be a Dread Pirate Roberts situation and this is like the third iteration of couples claiming to be MilesTeg and Cinderella. "I inherited this chat handle from the original MilesTeg, as you will inherit it from me."

Later enhancements of the CB service added online games, the ability to host conferences, and multimedia sharing. All of this is kind of blowing my mind, honestly. I had never even heard of the Internet back in 1991, it's so crazy that people were already getting married online while I was saving text documents on floppy disks. Those were some hard-core early adopters. I remember hanging out with some girls I had met in Oregon, this would have been around 98, they were chatting online and I found it endlessly amusing, I mocked them ruthlessly.

they probably invested in Microsoft and are millionaires by now. My mockery did not age well. Which makes sense, I haven't aged well either.

So CompuServe represented a milestone in social media history; However it would be CompuServe's eventual competitor, AOL, that would become the first true social media juggernaut.

America online was born in the early 80s when a primitive videogame service called playnet licensed its software to an internet provider called quantum. I was wondering what online games looked like back then so I checked it out, we're talking games like checkers, chess, connect 4 , hangman, etc. The games also featured basic chat functionality so that you could trash talk your opponent across the country after a brutal checkers annihilation. "King me, bitch!" The CEO of the merged and newly rebranded company, Steve Case, envisioned AOL as a way to bring Internet to the masses, it has been said that "he viewed AOL's killer app as community." And his strategy worked, to the frustration of many Internet veterans who did not appreciate the flood of newbies that had been attracted by this dumbed down and simplified and streamlined version of the online experience. AOL would eventually absorb CompuServe and purchase the popular Netscape browser, leading to even more ill will among internet nerds and also massive financial success, at least

initially. For many people, the Internet WAS AOL, they didn't really understand that AOL was just a gateway to getting online, many of your grandparents probably believed AOL created or at least was the only onramp to this magical world of email and chat. AOL also pioneered the idea of creating an online personal profile, similar to a social media "about you" page. Initially the service had fewer than 200,000 subscribers but quickly ballooned when AOL switched from charging hourly to charging monthly, allowing the first "all you can eat" buffet-style Internet experience. Finally, affordable porn, this was the true breakout moment for the Internet. You still had to wait 20 minutes for a titty pic to load, but at least you weren't paying per second and per pixel. I guess it was a porn buffet...all you could eat titties. And penises. Lotta penises are eaten online. In a non cannibal sense. Probably also in the cannibal sense, there's something for everyone. We don't kink shame. AOL would eventually grow to a user base of approximately 30 million and an estimated market value of 125 billion back in 2002 dollars. In the year 2000 CEO Steve Case helped facilitate AOL's merger with Time Warner, which has been referred to as "the biggest train wreck in corporate America." The merger was destined to be disastrous for many reasons, but there was an element of bad timing: it was finalized just months before the dot com bust of the early 2000s, and the worldwide pivot to broadband service over dial-

up would be the nail in AOL's coffin. AOL witnessed the arrival of lightning-fast modemless Internet and was like, pass. We know Americans, dammit, we are *America online*, and true Americans do not desire instant gratification. If there's one thing we know about Americans, it's that they they like to be needlessly inconvenienced. They particularly enjoy having to choose between phone calls and email. They want their technology to make angry hissing noises and move at the pace of an approaching glacier (radiocarbon decay?). The merger led to a \$98 billion loss in 2002, still the record for the highest annual loss in corporate history; that would equate to about \$143 billion today. But as we will discuss later, Elon Musk has managed to beat that undesirable corporate milestone all by himself. He was like, "hubris resulting in terrible financial decision? Hold my beer."

Modern social media, in the form that we envision today, began with services like classmates dot com, which connected people who shared an educational background, and if that sounds familiar that's because [classmates.com](https://www.classmates.com) was basically the model for Facebook, Enoch means that they had the opportunity to become Facebook before Facebook existed, and ouch. So close. The site still exists and boasts a respectable 70 million members but pales in comparison to the approximately 2.4 billion in zuckerbergländ. I guess I

could have just gone with Zucker... Berg. Like Williamsburg? Or Johannesburg? Zuckerberg? Get it? There was also the popular but short-lived [sixdegrees.com](http://sixdegrees.com). You can probably guess that six degrees is a reference to the concept of 6° of separation, which is based on a scientific theory called the small world phenomenon: the idea that almost every person on earth is only six social connections away from every other person on earth, which has not been proven by any means. Some have described it as an "academic urban myth," but Mathematically it seems not unrealistic; if you know just 44 people, and each of those people knows 44 people, via exponential growth you reach more than 7 1/2 billion people in only six steps. And obviously the Internet has managed to shrink the world significantly. However, a version of the six degrees theory that is much easier to study and test is the 6 degrees of Kevin Bacon game... the idea that you can connect any actor to Kevin Bacon via their appearance in films with other actors who appeared in a film with other actors who appeared in a film with Kevin Bacon. Scientific studies have shown that the real degree of Kevin Bacon is around two; Kevin Bacon has been a fuckton of movies.

Anyway, [sixdegrees.com](http://sixdegrees.com) went live in 1997 and only lasted three years in its initial form. It was structured around a web of contacts; you would list six people you knew and the site would immediately begin pestering them to

join and to list six people *they* knew...it was like an obnoxious online chain letter. I guess that's redundant. All chain letters are obnoxious. But if someone listed you as a friend and you acknowledged that you had a direct link with that person, you could contact and chat with them, and you could also contact their direct links and the direct links of those people as well, up to three degrees of separation, so basically it was a way for casual acquaintances and total strangers to bother each other and it got weird fast. Although the site shut down in 2000, it reopened soon after and it still exists today but no one cares.

Next came Friendster, another could've-been-Facebook that wasn't able to scale fast enough and eventually lost out to the next and much more famous casualty of Facebook: MySpace.

If you remember MySpace, you remember Tom Anderson. He was your first friend when you signed up, and if you are of a certain age, you're already conjuring the image of a handsome fratboy-looking dude in a plain white T-shirt smiling at you from over his left shoulder in front of a whiteboard scrolled with...equations? Ransom notes? Who knows. Did anyone ever zoom in on that thing? Tom was trying to tell us something. Tom Anderson was in fact the *cofounder* of MySpace, a former computer hacker from California who went by the handle Lord Flat Head and as a teenager had been investigated

by the FBI over his successful hack of Chase Bank. I had no idea Tom was such a scoundrel. He was a real digital scamp, that Tom. He was also briefly the lead singer of a band called Swank, he attended UC Berkeley, and briefly lived in Taiwan before returning to America and setting up the first MySpace pages after attending film school at UCLA. A way more interesting dude than I would have anticipated. We need to do an episode on Tom from MySpace. The site launched in 2003 as a Friendster clone, and the idea was to create a version of Friendster that didn't require a verified real name and identity. Apparently Tom anticipated and helped usher in the glorious era of catfishing. Thanks, Tom! MySpace's killer feature was the ability to customize fonts and backgrounds, to really make your profile into "my" actual space in a way that hadn't been achievable before. Even though Friendster employed an exponentially larger number of developers, the site was based on an older and less nimble technology called Javasever Pages and simply couldn't keep up with the features and adaptability of MySpace. Initially the MySpace business model was to charge a fee for the service, but luckily that plan was quickly shot down and the free website took off among teens and young adults, eclipsing Friendster and becoming the dominant social media site worldwide.

What did your MySpace look like? And what in particular do you remember

about the site? I remember the top eight friends. You could organize your top eight and it became an immediately controversial hierarchy because you were publicly ranking the importance of people in your life. Better put your significant other first, better put your best friend second. If two people thought they were your best friend, you were going to have some drama in your life, and you were going to have to make some ruthless choices. Relationships ended over the top 8. I also remember that you could determine so much about a person's personality based on their MySpace page. there was basic HTML control so you could customize your fonts, if you were into heavy-metal you would choose an appropriately Gothic and dramatic font, maybe your page would be all black with some deep and meaningful song lyrics. MySpace also came standard with blogging functionality, so you could share your very profound and heartfelt thoughts with the world. Mostly I recall pages full of earnest and achingly sincere and mostly cringe poetry. Music on the site was a big deal, MySpace launched bands like Fall Out Boy and Arctic Monkeys, and then there were random pointless celebrities like Tila tequila who was one of the first people on the Internet to become famous just for being hot. And one of the first to torpedo her career with random Nazism. She was Proto Kanye. And of course comedians benefited from my space, Dane Cook was the breakout Star of the MySpace era, he was

absolutely unavoidable and ubiquitous on that site. Finally, selfies pretty much originated on MySpace, especially the classic bathroom-mirror selfie. With ubiquitous soiled toilet in the background or bedroom packed with hoarder-caliber trash clutter. MySpace itself was trash, but it was trash that influenced the world...we are all living in an upgraded Instagram-filtered version of MySpace.

Little known fact: in 2005, Mark Zuckerberg offered to sell Facebook to MySpace for \$75 million. Tom and his cofounder declined. The umbrella company that Facebook has recently become, Meta, is currently worth some 245 billion dollars. Tech stocks are volatile right now and that could change overnight, but I have to imagine the man who was primarily responsible for rejecting the Facebook offer, MySpace cofounder Chris DeWolfe, has experienced many sleepless nights and thus might one day become a fan of this podcast. If you're an insomniac, Chris, out there listening to this show while you sob into your Dom Perignon, I will happily sell you the podcast for \$75 million. Do you really want to risk missing out on another amazing business opportunity? This is gold. I'm practically giving it away.

Later that same year, in August 2005, Rupert Murdoch's News Corp. purchased MySpace for 580 million. By 2007 MySpace had eclipse yahoo has the most visited site in America, and was valued at \$12 billion. News

Corp. promptly began squeezing its cash cow for all it was worth, signing a deal with Google that gave the internet search provider exclusive rights to deliver search results and sponsored links, cluttering up the MySpace UI with promotions and advertising. The site became a slow loading, bloated mess, and began to lose its coolness factor. It didn't help that the Connecticut Attorney General had opened an inquiry into rampant pornography on the site, and the lack of meaningful filters resulting in potential children's exposure to said pornography. Meanwhile, Facebook, which had started as a network limited to students at Harvard and then expanded into other colleges, finally abandoned its college-exclusive strategy and opened its doors to the world, offering a more streamlined, less chaotic, less cluttered and more cultivated experience. Even as it opened up to the public at large Facebook still allowed for more control over personal information and the ability to limit and lock down your social network. Myspace was never a good option for keeping in touch with family or communicating with close friends, it was more of a public statement to the world at large about how angsty and nonconformist you were and which of the backstreet boys you liked, and also a way—once again—to occasionally fuck strangers. Facebook on the other hand offered the ability to create a bubble of interaction with just your limited group of friends and family, your *actual*

social network rather than an extended online collection of acquaintances, celebrities, and randos. As older users migrated to social media, Facebook's cleaner interface and additional privacy features made it far more appealing than the chaotic, loud, ad-cluttered MySpace. Facebook overtook MySpace in April 2008 and never looked back. Tom stepped down as President in 2009, and now travels the world like Kane in kung fu. At least that's how I imagine it. He does travel extensively, he cashed out at the right time and he's doing quite well for himself. MySpace sold to a company called Specific Media for \$35 million in 2011. That is a weirdly vague name for a company that has the word "specific" in the title. What type of media are we talking about here? Suspicious. "Our company does business with a specific type of media." Definitely snuff films. It was later revealed that the purchase was made in partnership with Justin Timberlake, presumably for nostalgia reasons on Justin's part. Timberlake's role was to "lead the business strategy" for a turnaround of the site. I don't know what strategy he came up with, but it seems to have been strategically flawed. "[Chief executive of specific media] Tim Vanderhook said Timberlake, 30, had put his own money into buying MySpace, but refused to disclose how much. He confirmed that the former N Sync singer will have an office in MySpace but that he was "probably not going to

be there every day" Ya think? You're saying that international popstar Justin Timberlake is not going to be commuting to work every day and taking conference calls from his MySpace cubicle? It seems that Timberlake's main strategy was to try to turn MySpace into a site revolving around music and musical artist, and the site still exists, the website does boast a large number of music artist profiles and downloadable songs, but when was the last time you dial-up websurfed over to MySpace? Probably right after logging out of your GeoCities account and right before firing up Napster. The company was absorbed by Time Inc in 2016. When former Facebook president Sean Parker was asked about the fall of my space, he pointed to, ""The failure to execute product development. They weren't successful in iterating and evolving the product enough, it was basically this junk heap of bad design that persisted for many many years. **There was a period of time where if they had just copied Facebook rapidly, they would have been Facebook.** They were giant, the network effects, the scale effects were enormous." Yeah MySpace, why didn't you use underhanded tactics to copy and crush your rivals? Idiots.

Our next stop on the Social Media train is a bit closer to home;

It's appropriate that we discuss the origins of this next company here on a podcast, because Twitter wouldn't exist without podcasting. Specifically

the now-defunct podcast platform called Odeo. Created by an entrepreneur and coder named Noah Glass, Odeo would soon attract former Google employees Evan Williams and Christopher "Biz" Stone as well as a young web designer named Jack Dorsey, and if those names seem familiar it's because they are widely recognized as the four founders of Twitter. Odeo did not survive long... podcasting is a tough industry. In 2005 Apple debuted its own native podcasting platform that was bundled into every version of iTunes and Odeo became obsolete overnight. The founders began thrashing around looking for a new direction and a more viable technology. They hosted brainstorming sessions called hackathons and it was during one of these hackathons that Jack Dorsey and Biz Stone came up with the idea for Twitter. The original concept was that you could send a short message to a phone number and it would be blasted to all of your friends...they basically invented the already-a-thing idea of group SMS chat. Now Twitter debuted back when every individual text message still cost money, and the first Twitter subscribers had to rack up SMS charges every time they used the service. Not surprisingly it wasn't a massive hit out the gate. The first ever tweet was not nearly as profound or prescient as the first Morse code message. In 2006 Twitter went live with the message from founder Jack Dorsey that read "just setting up my twtr." Pretty much par for the course

when it comes to the profoundness of tweets. At the time the company was still on board with the Silicon Valley custom of dropping the vowels, so Twitter was spelled TWTTR. Naming your company like a game of wheel of fortune in which the public gets to substitute their own vowels vowels is dangerous... how are we supposed to know whether that's was tweeter, or twitter, or twatter. "setting up my Twatter" doesn't sound appealing. I don't know what it is but I don't want it. You set up that twatter, you can take it down.

Twitter was a shoestring operation in those early days, but there was an undercurrent of optimism, as if at least a few of the founders could sense that they were on to something. Says Noah Glass, ""There was a moment when I was sitting with Jack and I said, 'Oh, I do see how this could really come together to make something really compelling.' We were sitting on Mission St. in the car in the rain...It all fit together for me." Glass would come up with the name twttr (minus the vowels), and he was the original cheerleader and driving force behind the company. According to linked Insider article, "At one point the entire early Twitter service was running on Glass' laptop....

"It was right there on my desk. I could just pick it up and take it anywhere in the world. That was a really fun time." There are conflicting stories about what happens next, but what we know for sure is that Evan Williams downplayed twitter's potential in a

message to all of the Odeo investors and offered to buy back all of their shares. It's possible that he was being honest and was motivated by altruism...maybe. That would be a first in tech startup history, but I can't rule it out. More likely he had seen the writing on the wall and the enthusiasm that was building for Twitter, and had become convinced that Twitter was going to be huge, so he shrewdly maneuvered to minimize the number of people who had a slice of the twitter pie. When the investors agreed to sell back their shares, a bunch of potential millionaires became could-have-been millionaires within the span of a few hours. Says an early Odeo investor James Hong, "Obviously, I wish what happened hadn't happened. There was a dark period where I didn't want to hear about Twitter." That's why I'm glad I haven't even come close to any kind of major success in my life. It's so much better to fail consistently than to find yourself on the verge of success and lose it all. "Reach for the stars" is terrible advice, reach for the TV remote and live vicariously through people who are willing to suffer for their dreams. I like to pause in these episodes and give little pep talks to inspire the youth.

As soon as Evan Williams had secured control of Twitter, he promptly fired Noah Glass, the man who had created and founded Odeo. Again there are conflicting accounts but it seems to have been personal: the two men simply had conflicting personalities,

Noah Glass was described as loud and brash while Evan Williams was considered more pensive and thoughtful. Glass would be edited out of the Twitter origin story for years, his role in Twitter's founding wasn't publicly disclosed until 2011, but he did end up successfully securing some equity and he's doing just fine so I won't be shedding any tears for the loud rich guy. Sounds like he was the Dave Mustaine of Twitter founders. Eventually the rest of the guys ran out of patience and hustled him out the door like, "here's a bus ticket and a flask. it's one way. And we'll be keeping all your riffs. I'm referring to Dave Mustaine btw. I don't know if Noah Glass had any sweet riffs. The name "Noah Glass" does sound kind of metal but more like emo metal, not hardcore metal like Mustaine.

The breakout moment for Twitter came in 2007 during the South by Southwest conference in Austin Texas. The Twitter team set up two giant plasma screens that constantly displayed tweets about the conference, and it became a hit, everyone could tune in with their devices and join the conversation. Twitter won "best startup of the conference" and the volume of tweets on the platform tripled within two days. Those early years were tumultuous... actually, the final years are also tumultuous. As we are witnessing. But Jack Dorsey would be forced out as CEO in 2008, and replaced by Evans. despite all the

upheaval initially Twitter prospered, hitting the 100 million user mark in late 2011, and doubling it by the end of 2012. Its IPO debuted on November 7, 2013... an IPO or initial public offering is when a private company goes public and allows any regular jackass with a bank account to buy a stake in the business. Because who better to successfully determine the direction of your company than a bunch of random strangers whose qualifications consist of having disposable income. An IPO is a huge deal and often results in a massive financial windfall for the founders and initial stakeholders. Twitter's IPO was no exception and the founders became fabulously wealthy. The company itself however did not necessarily fare as well from a financial standpoint. The challenge was trying to figure out how to monetize. Twitter soon began acquiring a bunch of other start ups, including the short video-app vine... and killed them off when they didn't immediately prove profitable. Not a good look, especially considering that TikTok was basically a clone of vine, just with longer videos. So Twitter had bought its own TikTok and completely fumbled it. Jack Dorsey stepped back in as CEO in 2015 to right the ship, and if you've been paying attention to the news in the last year or so you know how that turned out. In fact, as mentioned Twitter has always struggled to consistently turn a profit. In the 11 years of its existence it has only begin in the black for two of those years. Every other fiscal year resulted

in significant losses. In 2020 Twitter lost over \$1 billion; it lost over 200 million last year.

So how did Elon Musk get involved in the Twitter debacle? Well, probably because debacles attract trashfires. It's like chocolate and peanut butter. And I get that we have some insomniacs and patrons who are Elon fans, I've been contacted by a couple of you, and I just want to say, I appreciate and respect you all, and I won't be offended if you turn off this episode. And in fact if you're emotionally invested in Elon Musk and not open to reevaluating that opinion, I would encourage you to bail on this one because this is a podcast about facts, and many of the facts regarding Elon Musk are unflattering. We cannot discuss what's happening with Twitter and its potential fate without explaining why the company finds itself in its current predicament, and that means we have to break down and debunk the myth of Elon Musk. And I know that you have in the past been a bit of an Elon Musk fan and have some friends who are, and here's what I propose: We will do this in honor of our friends over at asshole court—at the end of this segment, the whole Twitter thing, tell me your asshole score for Elon Musk. This will be our own little mini courtroom. Where would you score him now, with what you know about him? What's your preshow asshole score for Elon Musk?

Now Musk certainly is a visionary, I will

give him that, he is incredibly ambitious and I'm fascinated by both Neuralink and SpaceX. For many years I didn't actively *dislike* Musk and was even kind of glad that he existed. I'm a fan of space exploration and electric cars and...digging holes, I guess? The boring company was a strange choice but hey, he's a Renaissance man, or maybe he just has a short attention span, it seems like he starts or acquires a new company each week. His corporate philosophy is... Squirrel!

He's certainly doing great things when it comes to the final frontier. If humanity is going to survive in the distant long-term future we'll have to venture out of our solar system before the sun swallows the earth, and Musk is pushing that technology forward, so kudos. I mean that's still about 8 billion years away but hey, I'm all for being proactive. However—and brace yourself, because this is where it's going to get ugly—Musk has repeatedly proven that he is a far cry from the benevolent genius he attempts to portray. He has more than earned the nicknames Phony Stark and Space Karen. To begin with, Elon is not the founder of Tesla, and he was not a founder of PayPal, though he has lied about both of those facts on his Tesla bio-page. Despite all of the breathless articles clogging the web that compare Musk to Nikola Tesla and Edison, the truth is that Elon Musk has never created a single shred of groundbreaking technology himself. His innovations have been the result of

investing in some very smart people. And even though he has worked hard to revise his bio into a rags to riches story; Elon is the son of a wealthy South African electrical engineer who claims to have owned a stake in an emerald mine. After moving to America, the younger Musk initially made some very savvy investments and took some big risks that paid off, but his current wealth is largely imaginary...it is based on arbitrary valuations of his companies and those whimsical valuations have been steadily crumbling under scrutiny. For instance, in October of 2021 Tesla was valued at over a trillion dollars, more than its ten biggest rivals including Toyota, Volkswagen, Ford, GM and six others *combined*. And what was Tesla's share of the American auto market—not even the global auto market, just America? 2%. Toyota alone sells over 10 times as many cars as Tesla in a year. Meanwhile tesla lost money for its first 17 years and the bulk of Tesla's subsequent profits have been the result of selling regulatory credits; without government subsidies Tesla would be a financial sinkhole. Ditto Musk's startups solar city and SpaceX, which have also received billions in government funding. Yet in 2021 musk claimed that as a fiscal conservative he has always been opposed to government subsidies. Let *that* sink in. Now if tesla's valuation seems batshit crazy to you, it is, and that explains why Tesla is one of the most shorted stocks in history, meaning many

intelligent investors are betting against it and those investors have been having a very good 2022, as we'll see. Musk has compulsively overpromised and often outright lied about his companies and products countless times; every year we are supposedly just six months away from self-driving Teslas even though the software that Musk markets as "full self driving mode" is at best a blatant marketing scam and at worst a dangerous and flawed experimental technology responsible for multiple deaths. Musk promised autonomous humanoid robots and then delivered a dancing guy in a robot suit; the cyber truck and roadster and tesla semi and the sub 40,000 dollar tesla 3 still have not materialized; his "ditch-digging company" has never gotten close to creating anything resembling the touted hyperloop. Musk's 2018 promise of "lifesized lego bricks that could be used to build a house" are MIA, Neuralink, the implantable neurotechnology brain-chipping company that will supposedly allow you to interface with your phone, has to-date achieved only one thing: the ability for a monkey to play pong with its brain. In pursuit of this lofty goal Neuralink has killed over 1500 animals in 4 years...seems like a fair trade. I'm sure a good session of brain pong is totally wipes away the trauma of seeing your family members murdered by scientists. It probably does actually, but not on purpose. I'd be surprised if that monkey remembers breakfast. See episode 113 for more on

NeuraLink. Many of Elon's boneheaded and often downright cruel business decisions have had disastrous consequences, recently for his own wealth but also for the livelihoods of the many employees he has callously fired or insulted—or both fired *and* insulted—and then subjected to his troll army. As a result of recently outing himself as a flawed non-genius, Elon is no longer the richest man in the world, and is now the first human to have ever lost in excess of \$200 billion. I personally lost any last shreds of respect for Elon Musk when he proposed a clearly impractical idea for saving a bunch of children from a flooded cave in Thailand, and then, when a veteran cave diver stepped in and spent days at a time submerged in frigid water, squeezing through claustrophobia-inducing passageways to rescue all the children, Elon called the guy a pedophile because this genuine hero had committed the sin of pointing out that Musk's "child submarine" couldn't have fit through the cave's twists and turns. I mean, I'm no billionaire genius, but even I can fathom the impossibility of shoving a long rigid capsule through a twisty, tight canal. Sounds like a suppository. Incidentally and unrelated, Musk is also responsible for the most disastrous and painfully unfunny episode of Saturday Night Live to ever pollute my television. When it comes to his frequent attempts at comedy, Musk's is cringe personified. Jokes at Elon's expense have always been better than Elon's jokes, that is just

canon. Like for instance the Redditor who attempted to convince the world that Elon musk's full name is elongated muskrat. I don't care who you are, that's gold. Anyway, that's enough backstory for now. Backslash end-rant. So let's quickly jump into a recent Twitter timeline to determine how the marriage between debacle and trashfire all went down. Those should've been the names on 90% of the marriage invitations I've received. Please RSVP to the glorious union of debacle and trashfire...bring a gift but keep the receipt. The Elon musk era at Twitter actually began back in January 2022 when he started quietly investing in Twitter stock until he became the largest shareholder with 9.2%. When he publicly disclosed his stake in Twitter the company went into panic mode, because they anticipated exactly what we are living through, and to discourage a takeover attempt they offered Musk a seat on the board, because you can't simultaneously own a company and also serve as a board member. Elon initially accepted and then backtracked; changing his mind frivolously is kind of a thing with this guy. He's mercurial...there's an SAT word for you.

On April 14 Elon Musk formally offered to buy Twitter at a price of 54 dollars and 20 cents per share. Why \$54.20? Because of weed. Elon musk thinks the number 420 is absolutely hilarious because of it's association with marijuana, he also loves the number 69 and has tweeted the two numbers together a bunch of times, again this

is his caliber of humor. I'm not saying that you and I are above laughing at stupid shit, but we're also not the CEOs of multiple fortune 500 companies, neither of us have billions of dollars and thousands of jobs riding on whether or not we are taken seriously as adult humans. Thank god. I'm not saying I should own Twitter, just that Musk shouldn't either. Immaturity recognizes immaturity. And honestly even with my juvenile sense of humor, 420 hasn't been funny since the 90s.

So the price that Elon was offering for Twitter was 38% higher than Twitter's valuation at the time. I'm not great at math, but this seems like a very bad deal for Elon musk. If you need additional evidence that it was a terrible deal, look no further than the fact that Elon immediately tried to back out. He pretended that the reason he changed his mind was because he suspected Twitter might contain more bots on the platform than had been divulged, but there were two problems with that excuse: one, Elon had already accused Twitter of having a huge bot problem and in fact that was part of his rationale for buying the company in the first place...he was going to clean up the bots. Second, he had submitted an impulsive and legally binding offer with no strings attached; there was nothing in his offer that stipulated "I'll buy the company unless it turns out I was right about all those bots." He had

straight up said I'll give you this much money for this thing, end of transaction. But apparently being a genius billionaire and playing 4-D chess involves zero due diligence, knee-jerk impulsivity, and no understanding of the legal system. It quickly became clear that Elon was going to be forced by a judge to honor his offer, and so he backtracked yet again and claimed that he had once more changed his mind and decided to go through with the deal. Nice save, buddy. You hoodwinked 'em. No one suspects a thing.

Musk closed the deal for Twitter on October 27, my birthday. That feels personal. I'm pretty sure he listens to the show and has heard my criticisms, and decided to ruin my birthday by destroying a social media platform that I never really used. From the day of the purchase Musk promptly began firing executives in a cost-cutting bloodbath. Three days after acquiring Twitter Musk posted a QAnon conspiracy theory about Nancy Pelosi's husband. Paul Pelosi was attacked in his home by a violent extremist wielding a hammer, but Elon promoted a vile conspiracy claiming that 82-year-old Paul Pelosi was a closeted gay man who had been cheating on his wife and was attacked by a male prostitute. The link that Elon posted originated on a website that had previously claimed Hillary Clinton is dead and the Democratic Party is utilizing a body double...so a credible source. The Paul Pelosi conspiracy has obviously been thoroughly debunked

and Elon eventually quietly deleted his tweet, but he never addressed nor apologized for his actions—that also is his standard MO—and anyway, the damage had been done. Fuck. That. Guy.

On November 4, Musk fired half of Twitter via email and then rolled out a new product called “Twitter blue”. In the past, Twitter had a procedure for verifying accounts based on their noteworthiness and had assigned celebrities and journalists a checkmark so that they could not be impersonated online. But with this new system, anyone could pay \$8 to purchase a checkmark. Immediately, humans began doing what humans love to do: exploiting the flaws in a poorly implemented system to cause chaos and havoc. Hundreds of users immediately registered accounts in the names of celebrities and prominent companies. Someone made an account spoofing the drug company Eli Lilly and tweeted “we are excited to announce that insulin is free now.” Eli Lilly stock dropped by 4%. Musk sheepishly yanked Twitter blue and went back to the drawing board. Meanwhile Tesla stock began taking a well-deserved beating as suspicion began to spread that perhaps Musk was not in fact an unparalleled genius, and maybe his fortune was built on hype. Tesla stock lost half its value by November and as of this recording is still in a freefall.

As advertisers panicked and began to

pull out, Musk tried to pacify them by tweeting "Twitter will be forming a content moderation council with widely diverse viewpoints. No major content decisions or account reinstatements will happen before that council convenes."

This is when we need a narrator voiceover who steps in and says your favorite line, "These were lies." The council was neither created nor convened. There would be no convening whatsoever; as of the time of this recording Musk is still flying solo and making decisions on a whim. As we'll see.

On November 16, Musk sent an email to all remaining Twitter employees informing them that in order to avoid being laid off they would need to become *extremely hardcore*. "This will mean working long hours at high intensity. Only exceptional performance will constitute a passing grade...If you are sure that you want to be part of the new Twitter, please click yes on the link below. Anyone who has not done so by 5pm tomorrow...will receive three months of severance." How is this even a decision? *All right maggots, let me explain how this is gonna work. Anyone who's not willing to suffer and be harshly evaluated and tested on a daily basis will instead be forced to relax at home—or on a beach of your choice—and receive free money for a minimum of twelve weeks. Choose wisely.*

When the overwhelming majority of remaining employees shockingly

decided to choose free money over pain, Musk panicked and tried to convince a bunch of them to return. It was yet another humiliating fiasco to add to the pile. On November 19, Musk posted a poll asking whether Donald Trump should be reinstated. He did not mention the fact that polls are notoriously overrun by the bots that he has always complained about, especially Russian bots that are staunchly pro Trump because Trump was staunchly pro Putin. Apparently the bot problem doesn't matter when Elon wants a poll to go his way. Trump's account is now officially reinstated, though Trump has yet to tweet. Word on the street is that he is contractually obligated to remain on his own platform, TruthSocial. Elon also welcomed Kanye West back to Twitter with open arms and a tweet of friendship. Kanye immediately tweeted a swastika and free-speech absolutist Elon Musk swiftly banned him yet again. Free-speech absolutist Musk also began arbitrarily banning journalists along with anyone who mocked him; he is incredibly thin skinned for a guy who accuses all of his enemies of being snowflakes. His latest stunt has been to orchestrate the release of the so-called Twitter files. These files—they're actually just edited snippets of messages—supposedly reveal some of the debates that went on behind the scenes at Twitter regarding the decision to suppress information about the Hunter Biden laptop. You know, that laptop that could bring

down the entire...son of the president. It does seem like Hunter Biden is a drug addict with some major psychological issues, and I probably wouldn't ever vote for him to be president of United States. I'm not sure how having a drug-addicted son is supposed to bring down Biden, but QAnon isn't a movement based on rationality. The files ultimately revealed that Twitter had been conflicted about releasing potentially false information which—even if true—didn't seem relevant to the election. The debates within Twitter actually seem reasonable; if anything they humanize the process and provide a glimpse at the challenges facing teams of moderators who actually care about the information that gets vomited on the public. Musk has referred to these Twitter files as a bombshell...I do not think that word means what he thinks it means. They certainly represent an interesting glimpse into the kind of tough decisions Elon is going to have to make, because ultimately—as we have covered time and time again—there is no such thing as free speech. If you're the moderator of a social media site you can't legally allow threats directed to government officials, you can't allow child porn, and then you have to make decisions every day about where you draw additional lines so that you don't alienate your userbase. Because if "anything goes" on your site then the next thing that goes are the advertisers and celebrities, and eventually you become 4Chan. Elon

has painted himself into a corner, his situation is unwinnable because it's impossible to be a free speech absolutist in an America that has laws against certain types of speech—"free speech absolutist" is not a real thing, and pretending to be a champion of this blatantly false concept is especially hilarious when you clearly only care about protecting free speech that doesn't hurt your feelings. And so the promise Elon has made to the far right is impossible to keep, he is destined to disappoint them by constantly proving himself a hypocrite. Each time Elon calls himself a free-speech absolutist while simultaneously banning someone for making fun of him or posting a swastika or even posting death threats undermines his credibility. And I'm not saying that the political left doesn't need to ease up on censorship and online mob behavior, I'm just saying that Elon Musk is a twat. Or maybe a "Twater" would be more appropriate. He isn't offering any productive solutions and is actively making the world a worse place.

As of today Twitter is still hemorrhaging money. As is Elon. As is Tesla, which was always grossly overvalued and has been caught in the Twitter crossfire. It has lost 75% of its value since January 2022. The New York and San Francisco Twitter offices apparently don't have adequate janitorial staff and the work staff that was recently forced back to in person work when Elon outlawed the former

work at home policy is now suffering because a "foul sewage odor" and there is a BYOTP policy in place because no one is purchasing toilet paper. Twitter has now defaulted on at least two of its office leases, it is just... not paying rent. Elon musk has a strategy very similar to Donald Trump's, in that he prefers to simply not pay his bills until forced. The idea is that the other party might not be able to afford a long legal battle and may simply cut their losses and you won't have to pay. You know, genius billionaire stuff.

So what is Elon's final asshole score? And I will say, I didn't listen to the AHC episode about Elon because I believe it came out quite a while back before he took over Twitter, and I think people just didn't know what a dick he was back then. so I'm worried that they would've rated him pretty low on the asshole scale and that would annoy me...see, it's a good idea to avoid certain episodes of a show if they're going to raise your blood pressure; I follow my own advice.

And all of this brings us up to the present day in our overview of the state of social media. Let's review the current landscape: we have MySpace defunct, Facebook in decline, Twitter a raging inferno, and one undisputed champion of social media standing tall: TikTok. Or maybe not.

Depending on who you ask, TikTok is either the future of social media or a communist plot to spy on your children.

Owned by Chinese parent company ByteDance, the short-form video app was launched in 2016 in China as an app called Douyin, and in 2017 the international version—dubbed “TikTok”—was unleashed on the unsuspecting parents of the world like a dancing, prancing, robot-voiced tornado. It has been a bumpy ride. You’re probably familiar with the very public spat between Donald Trump and Tik Tok which coincidentally ignited right after a bunch of tick-tock Gen-Zers ruined one of trump’s rallies by coordinating an effort to purchase a bunch of tickets and then not show up. It was immediately after that incident that Trump decided TikTok was a threat to national security. Coincidence? You be the judge. Now, some of the suspicion aimed at TikTok is doubtless based on Trump’s extreme case of butthurt and also anti-Asian and anti-China sentiment that festered during the Covid pandemic, but there may turn out to be truth to it. Let’s look at both sides of the argument. TikTok servers are not based in China, they are hosted in whichever country that particular version of TikTok is serving. So American TikTok keeps its data on American-based servers, but that hasn’t quelled speculation that the Chinese communist party might be dipping into those American servers to gather information. And ByteDance is not above shady shenanigans. This seems to be a possible example of the old saying “just because you’re paranoid doesn’t mean they’re not after you.” Whether ByteDance is

actually spying on your children's dumbass dances is still up in the air, but there is no doubt that TikTok has admitted to spying on journalists at the very least. In 2022.m, TikTok denied the allegations that it was illegally accessing the IP addresses of prominent journalists in order to determine the source of information leaks, and it was not a good look when it turned out that the allegations were 100% true. According to a guardian article,

"The data was accessed by employees of ByteDance, TikTok's Chinese parent company and was used to track the reporters' physical movements...They looked at IP addresses of journalists who were using the TikTok app in an attempt to learn if they were in the same location as employees suspected of leaking confidential information." it doesn't get much creepier.

As you can imagine, the revelations of spying have resulted in a firestorm of condemnations by politicians. In December 2022, Florida Man and senator Marco Rubio introduced the "averting the national threat of Internet surveillance oppressive censorship in influence and algorithmic learning by the Chinese communist party act" and if you weren't scrambling to assemble that painful reach of an acronym in your head, it stands for the "ANTISOCIAL CCP act." I hate that so much, some poor intern slaved for days to make that work, I guarantee it. Rubio was

standing behind them with a whip, yelling make it fit! See it's clever because it links a word-salad that is vaguely related to China and technology to the word "antisocial" indicating that this is a bill taking aim at social media. It's witty, dammit! Long-winded acronyms will make America love me and forget that I'm awful!" Anyway the act would completely block all Russian and Chinese social networks from operating in America. Another act has already passed the Senate, and would ban TikTok on any official devices used by federal employees. I'm pretty OK with that one. I'm not sure why federal employees need to be Tikking and Tokking on their work phones. If I see a viral dance in a White House office I'm storming the capital.

TikTok is controversial for plenty of other reasons. Obviously there are concerns about addiction and the amount of time spent browsing the app, although those concerns get raised every few years anytime a new social media trend crops up. Other concerns involve content, because the secret to Tik-Tok's success is its aggressive algorithm. And for anyone who is wondering, an algorithm is just some code that performs a specific function, there's nothing inherently nefarious about an algorithm. In this case we're talking about algorithms that make assumptions based on data. The algorithm detects that you have watched 15 videos about gaming, and it knows that people who like

videogames also tend to enjoy watching people get bitten by crocodiles, and so it serves up some biting-crocodile videos, and some misogyny. Just for the hell of it. The TikTok algorithm loves alt-right weirdness and misogyny. Even though Andrew Tate is technically banned on TikTok his videos are still all over the place. There are toxic elements to any social media but TikTok does seem particularly egregious when it comes to pushing extremist content.

But the type of content that qualifies as "extreme" is subjective, and we see this clearly when we look at how other countries have reacted to TikTok.

According to the New York Times, in 2020 five women in Egypt were sentenced to two years each in prison as a result of Tik Tok videos. One of them had "encouraged other women to try and earn money on the platform" while another was convicted for dancing. The entire country of Egypt is basically like the footloose town, just a bunch of joyless boomers yelling about these filthy Tikkytokkers and their devil hips. Obviously censorship is a hot-button issue and not everyone agrees on what crosses a line. But probably the line for prison-time shouldn't be dancing. The convictions were finally overturned a year later, so you won, Egyptian teenagers. Now you can dance on the Internet while still living in a suppressive theocracy.

Meanwhile, I think it would be fair to

say that TikTok has been responsible for spreading some dangerous trends. The trend known as devious licks recently had parents freaked out. This was a viral 2021 challenge in which students basically filmed themselves being vandals and menaces. It sounds way worse than it was, actually. When I heard the name I assumed it was something completely different. Like any moral panic resulting from social media, this viral trend was overblown. In fact, the Washington post revealed that meta-platforms, owner of Facebook, had hired a Republican media consulting firm to spread stories about the viral challenge in an effort to hurt TikTok's reputation.

So clearly the war among social media companies rages on with no signs of a victor on the horizon. Who will reign supreme? Does anyone care, either in this room or out in Miffy-Land? I guess I'm mildly curious. Just like I'm a tiny bit Sly Curious, that's how curious I am about the future of social media. Any predictions? I'm sure we'll do more episodes that touch on these subjects, but for now that's all I've got. For anyone who's still listening and not foaming at the mouth over my Elon musk hot takes, I appreciate you.

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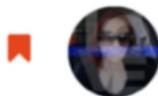
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You heard it here first, folks. That's going to be our new slogan. Miffy: not as bad as the worst possible thing. Tell your friends. Midnight Facts for Insomniacs: slightly better than being swallowed by the inescapable void of eternity. You're gonna want to check that out. Pretty much anything is better than death...like we could be of the same caliber as ice cream, or traumatic injuries. Both better than death.

Maybe this was intended as a threat to anyone who's not listening to MFFI. These are strong arm tactics, maybe I approve. I see you don't like listening to funny shows about facts. Let me tell you my friend, there are worse things. I'm going to give you two choices and here's a hint, one of them is better than the other one. Cake or death. We've reference that one probably second only to Mitch Hedberg.

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