EXPLORING LEVERAGES AND PITFALLS OF CONTEXT COLLAPSE IN MODERN COMMUNICATION

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Abstract—**Context collapse is multi- faceted and affects social justice and identity issues. This is evident in the everchanging social media posting behavior of influencers who long for authenticity. In the legal field, court cases are also influenced by context collapse, Depp v. Heard being a prime example. Additionally, groups and corporations can use it for leveraging through targeting specific demographics and reaffirming their confirmation biases. Context collapse disconnects people through misinformation and communication dissonance. This paper concludes that it is important to resolve the context collapse that occurs in the cyberspace and society in order to eliminate elusive generalizations and restore empathy and individualism.**

Keywords—context collapse, social justice, confirmation bias, communication dissonance.

I. Context Collapse in Everyday Scenarios

When you receive a text message from a friend you know personally, you immediately understand what they are saying, and what they mean even without much expression, emotion or feeling included in the text. When you message someone else that you do not know well, you might take what they're saying out of context. You never know how or what a person is thinking on social media unless you personally know them, or if they explain their thinking [1]. However, even if a preamble is given, context collapse can still occur due to a lack of incentive to understand. There is a limited attention span through the modern ephemeral medium of social media and digital communication. Context collapse can be seen as a lack of rigor. A good example of this is in cross generational communication. In a conversation between a Baby Boomer and a Generation-Z (Gen-Z), the Gen-Z will use slang lingo such as "no cap", which is nomenclature for "no joke". The Baby Boomer would be confused at first due to a lack of context. This context collapse can be seen as bidirectional, where both parties feel a dissonance in communication.

II. A Growing Issue

Communication dissonance is a major issue on networks with millions of users such as Twitter. Cancel culture has arisen due to the loss of context in posts. Individuals are entirely cancelled and despised, driving them to the brink of suicide.

This especially goes for those with a larger following. A deleted tweet (dated April 21, 2020, circa 12:00 AM) from Nessa Barrett, an influencer with almost two million followers, reads "social media is such a paper-thin layer of our reality. You don't know others simply based on what is posted." [2]. At the time of this tweet, she had 300,000 followers and had tweeted 500 times. In the same tweet she stated, "This is exactly why cancel culture is so insanely damaging as no one knows what the person behind the screen receiving thousands of hate comments is going through" [2]. The reason why it is hard for influencers, especially those from Gen-Z that rose through fame from social-media organically, is that they are now under surveillance by their followers. This often results in a cult like mentality wherein the influencer is no longer viewed by their followers as a person but rather as property or representation of their following. To back this claim from someone who faces this reality, we can look at another tweet from Nessa posted on the same day at 12:52 AM, "Sometimes I like to pretend I don't have 300,000 followers on here and can still tweet about my feelings". She then replied to her own tweet with, "Like every other normal teenager". On March 14, 2021, she had amassed over 1.7 million followers, but with only 200 public tweets. Nessa is often seen tweeting daily, but then deleting most of the tweets shortly after. We can see she wants an outlet, but due to the context collapse, she feels there is a need to constantly micro-manage her fleeting thoughts transiently. This micro-managing perpetuates the idea of people-pleasing, which social media was not initially intended for. Holistically, social media was made so we could share our lives with people that we know personally [3]. Our social media habits have been skewed from this original intent due to the growth and development of social media behavior [4]. Innovative practices are now synonymous with social media. It has been used for a wide range of entertainment purposes such as sharing talents, creating comedic content, and spreading news. However, modern social media behavior also includes social climbing and "clout chasing" (performing acts to achieve power or popularity) [5]. The rise of viral content has encouraged more users to strive for fame through their own social media posts. Surveys show that users do this in the hopes that fame will make them feel better [6]. Yet as illustrated by Nessa Barett's case, a large following does not always corelate to healthy, positive attention from your followers as society does

not view influencers the same way as they view others they know more intimately [7].

While cancel-culture and bullying may impact one's mental health, it can also affect a person's means to provide for themselves financially when they are dependent on the income it brings. This can also alter their behavior on social media. What an individual may be terminated for may prove to be incorrect or misconstrued. Once an influencer's reputation is tarnished, even if the incriminating behavior is proven to be false later on, it leaves a lasting effect on the influencer [8]. Not every person will receive the updated news, and hence most users will continue to accept the context that collapsed when they first encountered the incriminating information.

The hardest part is that, while context is critical, you frequently run into situations where one person is speaking about another. Then individuals choose sides and build upon one another. The accusation of abuse or assault is one of the most serious. Even before the case goes to court, the ramifications of being accused of crimes such as rape can be catastrophic and leave a permanent stain on someone's career. It becomes a form of instant slander.

For instance, in the domestic abuse case of Depp v. Heard, there is a stigma attached to the male frequently being the abuser, who may stem from historical and statistical facts, but almost becomes a stereotype in the way that we automatically believe the male is always the aggressor.

The assumption that we automatically believe the male in this case is supported by Amber Heard when she privately told Johnny Depp, "Tell them, I, Johnny Depp, I'm a victim, too, of domestic violence, and it was a fair fight, and see if people believe or side with you" [9]. Following the trial, it was found that Johnny was not the aggressor.

The main takeaway from this observation is that in our society, men are generally assumed guilty in domestic violence cases. "If a woman gets angry for any reason, she can simply accuse a man", says Dr. Helen Smith, Author of Men on Strike [10]. The impacts are irreversible despite a claim's retraction. Due to the mainstream exposure of the Depp v. Heard case, we saw a man's default judgement of being guilty change societal expectation at a historical level. This illustrates the importance of context being interpreted correctly.

According to the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence (NCADV), one of the most important mitigating factors in determining how often women were the primary abuser in a relationship are inconclusive. Reporting, which allows this statistic to be quantified, was not available. This lack of reporting could be the result of the stigma within the male victims of abuse [11]. The feelings of humiliation and "going against the grain" is an example of context collapse due to the lack of context inside a private domestic setting. Identifying the core aggressor is difficult as a victim may use force of resistive/reactive violence within an intimate relationship as a means of escaping or escalation.

Society has a vested interest in taking men being the aggressor more seriously than women, and that is due to the likelihood of injury, hospitalization, or death being far greater for women [11]. However, this should not discredit instances when a man is abused or falsely accused due to the context collapse. There is a lack of incentive to pursue the truth in cases

that aren't as publicized as Depp v. Heard. The problem is that domestic violence is taken seriously but attempts of false accusations discredit the integrity for those that truly experience such cases.

False accusations happen due to lack of penalty for the accuser, but the Depp v. Heard discourse provides more context for similar cases that do not receive the same media attention in the future.

III. LEVERAGING CONTEXT COLLAPSE

Context collapse can be likened to judging a book by its cover. For better or worse, when you do not understand the context in which something is being communicated, the context collapses.

We see things through a certain lens, crafted through our perspective. Our perspective is derived from experiences that we choose as beliefs. For example, if you attend an unfamiliar setting wherein you have no acquaintances, it is difficult to enjoy yourself. As a result, you will probably leave. Why did you leave? Because you felt excluded. Songwriter Ralph Murphy compares this feeling of exclusion to writing a bad song. When you do not invite someone into your song by failing to tell them what's going on (context), you exclude them - when you exclude them, they also exclude you [12]. They stop listening to the song. Before they can even finish the song, they have already judged its message. This is like what happens when we scroll past a post when we don't feel invited in due to a lack of context. When writing with the context collapse in mind, you want to try and invite the viewer/consumer in quickly.

The difference today between communicating in person and online is that you have time to edit, reword, and craft what you want to say on an online platform. You can express yourself the way you intended without a mistake in real time. You are sharing a crafted story, like a song. If you want an audience to stick around, you want to invite them in with a halo effect, something likable that conveys trust. From there, they have a bigger incentive to want to understand the context. WMW Radio is Walmart's very own radio-station tailored to their demographic and age-group appropriately. It is not crucial for everyone to understand context, it is merely important to know the appropriate niche for your message, so you can invite them in seamlessly.

IV. DANGERS OF A SINGLE STORY

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie gave a TED talk entitled "The Risk of a Single Story" in which she discussed how if you grow up hearing just one story, hearing only one thing, and believing only one thing, it becomes your sole perspective [13]. That is why, at the moment, a lot of dialogue is one-sided as we frequently despise hearing opposing viewpoints. We are frequently informed or fall into this one category where we do not want to explore or hear alternative ideas because they contradict what we have been told. The TED talk is centered on the concept of a woman who grew up with a singular point of view, a narrative. As she began to interact with people and gain exposure, she realized that her solitary tale was not the complete story; it was only a portion of it. It is relevant in light of the context collapse because our story is valuable to us.

Everyone has a reach, impact, and activity to analyze online. Even non-participating actors contribute to the data analysis

process. Social media influencers, in general, create a wave with their postings in order to reach their influencing position and reach a larger audience. That is why an influencer has a verified logo, which is also a part of their impression management for their influencer role performance. This is significant because if someone has this verified badge, they appear to be credible. Because we naturally think that someone with a verified badge has something credible to say, the context collapses. We also see this in the news; frequently, news items and articles are published before the entire story is known. A familiar example is when something happens and a slew of news outlets take up the story, and proceed to blame a particular group of individuals for causing the incident. Then, a few hours later, a complete video of the incident is released, and all of these stations are forced to retract their comments after discovering that the people everyone blamed were not the culprits.

This is the way social media drama unfolds on platforms such as Twitter. On Twitter, an incomplete scene surfaces in which two people engage in a fight and one of them appears to be the aggressor. After a few days, the entire clip goes viral, revealing the ostensible attacker to be the defender who was only protecting themselves against the real aggressor. Much research is omitted because we tend to think that what we see is the entire story. The issue is a dearth of incentives for discovering the complete story. It's pointless to expend energy defending an erroneous story about which we have no personal knowledge.

In this light, our own confirmation bias can be directly to blame for this phenomenon. We naturally seek out information that will directly support our opinion regardless of the validity of that information [14]. In a study of people who support and oppose capital punishment, both groups were given materials that either was in favor of their views and against it. In both groups the information that supported their views was considered highly credible while the opposing data was considered unconvincing [15]. This confirmation bias continues to be how non-factual or untrue information can proliferate.

This is how, and why, people easily promote narratives and agendas, both on a large scale and even within a group of their peers. Rumors are propagated in anticipation of the context collapsing. Thus, giving only a portion of a tale rather than the entire picture.

There are consequences for what one says online; one may not be personally offended, but the company you work for may be offended or have a bad reputation. When you work for a company, you become an ambassador for their personal brand. You can make a statement ten years ago and it will still feel as if you are making it now; the dimension of time is nonexistent. We build up an image and spend lots of time perfecting it, yet a single thing against us online can tear it all down. However, a scandal can also break you—it all depends on your line of work. A situation you've encountered as an author can serve as a springboard for your next book. If your position is significantly dependent on public opinion, such as a CEO, you are somewhat out of luck; on the other hand, if you have a low-profile internet presence, it makes little difference because the stakes are so minimal. What if the CEO was able to establish a personal brand in which they were perceived as a laid-back CEO who is unconcerned with cancel-culture, where ownership is not only accepted but encouraged? This is what Elon Musk demonstrated by making jokes about Bill Gates' appearance on Twitter [16]. Individuals can make incorrect assumptions and cancel you

based on false pretenses; this is where context collapses. The issue with context collapse is not usually with the content of your statement, but with the manner in which you state it. With the speed with which news spreads, even if the defamation is corrected and proven to be incorrect, the impact on your business or person does not always go away, as demonstrated by Johnny Depp's withdrawal from the sixth installment of the Pirates of the Carribean movie series.

According to a psychologist named Fritz Heider, there are certain types of triads that we find stable and others that we find unstable [17]. If we consider a triad as a triangle with each end representing a node and the link between each node representing a relationship with a balanced or unbalanced state, we can conclude that the damage has been done in the Johnny Depp issue. The triad is balanced at first, and subsequently unbalanced. Because the causation for the triad becoming unbalanced was unwarranted, the balance in the original triangle would never revert to its previous state just because a side was chosen in the preceding moment. There are no takebacks; once it is thrown, it is permanently tossed.

V. You Are Not Lucky if You Are Shy

If you're a business, you're not efficiently using all your cards by not displaying all your merchandise on social media. This is an example of context collapse negatively impacting your business because you are not exhibiting the potential customer, who is currently on their customer journey, what you have to offer as a business.

In business, if something takes a day, tell them it will take a few days and work on getting it done faster like the saying under promise but over deliver. From a commercial or software development standpoint, there are numerous scenarios in which you are halfway through and realize you require additional time. You do not wish to request further time. This is prudent, but context may not be viewed as so from the client's perspective.

From the standpoint of a recruiting manager viewing two prospects: one with an excessive amount of social media presence, it appeared as though they were attempting to develop their own firm rather than joining another. Then there was the second, in which they were completely invisible, with no social media presence. Both of these instances raised red flags because impression control is critical. There is a requirement for equilibrium. Absence of context, such as a digital presence, creates the illusion of being a ghost, which may not be desirable throughout the recruiting process. Durkheim discusses functionalism and how everything is connected, in this case the context we give it and the context we believe it to be. It boils down to a dialogue in which this assumption is made. It's difficult to provide a definitive answer, as this is an ever-changing landscape.

VI. How Social Media Prevents Context Collapse Today

Mark Zuckerberg stated "You have one identity…The days of you having a different image for your work friends or co-workers and for the other people you know are probably coming to an end pretty quickly…Having two identities for yourself is an example of a lack of integrity." [18]. This is particularly ironic given that Instagram, which is owned by Meta, has seen its users devise a "workaround" that subverts the concept of a single identity on the platform. It's as though people (users) intuitively

understand that context collapse is a problem, and they want to resolve it on their own, as current social media platforms lack the necessary tools. Today, more than ever, there is a requirement to be able to maintain numerous identities, both online and offline, depending on the context.

Snapchat allows for private stories, Instagram allows for private friends, and Twitter allows for private accounts. These are pre-existing platforms with a predefined schema. While Snapchat was originally designed so that your audience was comprised of friends, private stories have begun to ostracize those you formerly regarded to be your friends. What occurs there is that the definition of a friend is altered.

Snapchat's private stories are not secure; all it takes is for one trusted member of your in-group to reveal what you posted privately. Although there are safeguards in place to prevent content from being shared, such as a notification to the poster detailing who screenshotted your "story," all it takes is capturing it from another device. There are numerous methods for accomplishing this without being apprehended. When an item intended for an in-group is shared with an out-group, the context is collapsed. As a result, information sharing is a risky game due to the possibility of misleading context recognition when shared with the incorrect audience. Occasionally, a person may share in a private closed group on purpose, but remains vulnerable owing to leaks.

This is an increasing concern in terms of privacy and how information is perceived by individuals. Contrary to what Mark Zuckerberg believes, resolving context collapse has become necessary. In social media, we are distancing people from their friends. If a new platform were to establish the precedent that not everyone who follows you is a friend, it would operate in a manner consistent with how we as a society wish to communicate socially online today, given the existing state of affairs. In other words, posting on a story is a way to distribute content to one's social media audience using an ephemeral medium. Other social media networks, such as Twitter, have published this under alternative terminology, such as "fleets." [19]. When an individual posts to an audience made up of members of many groups, statements are taken out of context. The individuals who share the same space.

At the same time, sharing something with an in-group as if it were a private story enables the emergence of mob mentality, because once the poster takes something out of context and then proceeds to tell their "feed" how they perceive what was initially taken out of context, the next person is going to take what they are saying and run with it. It is similar to a telephone game; with each person that drops it, it becomes somewhat modified.

VII. AUTHORITATIVE FIGURES AND CREDIBILITY

On the topic of verified badges - we are willing to listen to those we regard as authoritative. Milgram experiments examined obedience by distributing the authority to zap someone and then directing them to do it [20]. That demonstrates our proclivity for blaming others. In battle, there is a sense that people must conduct certain activities that are judged correct as a result of what they were informed, and it is easy to place blame on someone. Generally, when we discuss context collapse, we refer to the act of perceiving something differently than it is supposed to be perceived. However, in this case, it is first person, in which you perceive things differently but continue to ignore the fact that you perceive things differently; we submit to authority and undermine our own intelligence, even when we know better. We opt complacently to perceive war through another person's viewpoint. Attempting to express worry feels pointless since the audience to whom you are speaking collapses in context. Insubordination in the military, particularly during older eras, was punishable by death.

Twitter verification is dependent on another person and therefore difficult to obtain. If everyone possessed a validated badge, it would be insignificant. The fewer individuals who own something, the more difficult or noteworthy it becomes to obtain. Consider the president; there can be only one and being president is difficult, which is why we hold it to such a high level. This may be applied to anything; obtaining a college degree requires several years of time and financial resources for tuition. This does not mean they are smarter than someone who did not, but we immediately elevate them because it is more difficult to obtain.

When one meets someone who has not completed a post-secondary education, our context collapses. When we learn that someone did not attend college, we automatically believe they lack a certain level of competency. If you're meeting a group of individuals for the first time and come across as extremely foolish, the members of that group are more likely to take you seriously when you're in a position that requires academic rapport. Context disintegrates when you are not taken seriously. This is the outcome of people's inability to disentangle personality from intelligence. It does not feel right to have a humorous CEO of a fortune 50 firm; the majority of them are serious and maintain a professional image (or mask). They awaken, dress in a suit and tie, and take a seat at their desk solemnly. Consider a game in which you have a limited number of stats to increase at the start; consider making a trade-off between showing professionalism and specific stat boosts that brought you there in the first place.

In general, let's assume that everyone on LinkedIn wears a suit in their profile image and that there is a small percentage of people who do not yet adhere to the standard of looking professional in profile pictures. Immediately, there is a stigma attached to the group that does not wear suits, which results in them not being perceived or respected in the same way as everyone else. On the other hand, consider the billionaire next door notion; you do not expect the guy next door to be a millionaire just because you do not see evidence of wealth (because they got to that level through this sort of frugality).

Consider an interview between two people who have the same number of abilities and experience, except that one of them wears a tie and the other does not. Who is the most likely candidate for the job? We need to ask further questions, as this is a trick question. What is the nature of the position and who is the interviewer? We require additional background to determine whether the tie is required for the position for which they are seeking. However, in a business setting, it is safe to state that the person wearing the tie got the job.

VIII. IMPRESSION MANAGEMENT AND ROLE PERFORMANCE

LinkedIn is a professional website used for networking and communicating a brand, a company, or a person. What you put on LinkedIn, your avatar, headline, biography is all impression management - a conscientious effort to manage your impression. You are inherently managing your role performance, your expectations, and duties that you uphold in the specific role you

are presenting. Your role specifies how you act, your worth, and how you are viewed by others. If you are a CEO of a marketing firm, you are expected to conduct yourself differently to a Senior Software-Engineer. In the former, you are seen as assertive, dominant, and independent. In the latter, you are seen as a mentor, a role model, and a guiding figure to Junior Software Engineers. Regardless of the position, you have a role to perform. Let's say you woke up on the wrong side of the bed and you're not carrying the role to the extent that you usually do. Someone can assist you in performing your role. When you hear the term "role," you immediately think of theatrics; you immediately envision the role you are playing as a character on a stage, in front of an audience. You're performing in some way; you're wearing a mask. Therefore, if you wake up on the wrong side of the bed and your mask begins to come off, someone can assist you in performing your role by pushing your mask up. This impression management relates to our online presence, our digital imprint, and how others see us. This impression management strategy considers the issue of context collapse and then prevents it by preserving the frame via our online personal brand, ensuring that the mask does not fall off.

In some cases, impression management can directly lead to the detriment of the individual's reputation as someone can take the time to frequently engage with their audience and make sure everything they post is perfect. Naturally, platforms will greatly reward this behavior due to the algorithm deeming their content as more engaging [21]. But behind the scenes, the viewers don't see the burnout that the individual is experiencing. Therefore, the moment the mask starts to falter, it will result in a much more violent response by the audience.

This concept of putting on a show or performing an act can also come back to haunt or bite us in situations when we are required to act in a specific or unusual manner. As soon as the closing act concludes and our disguise begins to dissolve, our true selves begin to emerge, and this is when you might get into trouble. That is where the repercussions may manifest. Consider watching films of instructors collapsing in classrooms and yelling at pupils, their mask has fallen off. You might dispute whether it is correct or incorrect, and conditions change constantly, but one of the most remarkable aspects is that as a teacher, you are expected to act in each of these ways. You are expected to behave appropriately. We frequently forget that they are also humans, ordinary people with feelings and emotions. We isolate individuals in diverse jobs from their contexts because of their role's demands. That is why it is unusual to see a teacher out of the classroom at a bar, game, or store. We frequently lose sight of the fact that they are just another individual.

To simplify this remark, we tend to overlook that these are simply people in these roles. It is a dehumanization of sorts. Because the setting of roles dictates that the mask cannot collapse, cancel culture can be a double-edged sword. It can assist us in determining right from wrong in terms of popular opinion, but it places an excessive amount of accountability on an individual who is then held up as an example in front of the stage.

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