5-12-2024

ANTI-AUTOMOBILE SUPREMACY: SOCIAL MEDIA NARRATIVES AND THE POPULAR RESISTANCE AGAINST CAR-CENTRIC URBAN LANDSCAPES

Allen Huang
Syracuse University

Abstract

The purpose of this research paper is to discover the content strategies employed by social media content creators living in North America who try to use their platforms and voices to build a popular counternarrative against the systemic framework of automobile supremacy. Automobile supremacy refers to the systemic prioritization of automobiles as the predominant mode of transportation through intentional design that justifies compulsory consumption while downplaying dangerous consequences. To understand content creator strategies, this study interviewed 25 adult social media content creators who live in North America who regularly share anti-automobile supremacy content and asked them 15 semi-structured questions to answer three research questions surrounding their perception of automobiles, their utilization of social media in challenging automobile supremacy, as well as their perception of the role social media plays in their effort. The participants indicate automobile supremacy to be a serious issue that requires the need to reframe the perception of automobiles to build a successful counternarrative. On social media, they actively frame collective stories that elevate individual voices to highlight the consequences and alternative transportation options. This study also provides an understanding towards how these creators evaluate the role of social media in their agenda building process; they point out that social media can act as a double-edged sword, and the negative effects of social media usage should not be ignored.

Keywords: *social media platforms, content creator, counternarrative, transportation, automobile, public opinion, anti-hegemony*

ANTI-AUTOMOBILE SUPREMACY: SOCIAL MEDIA NARRATIVES AND THE POPULAR RESISTANCE AGAINST CAR-CENTRIC URBAN LANDSCAPES

By

Allen Huang

B.A. Skidmore College, 2021

Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts in Media Studies

Syracuse University

May 2024

Acknowledgements

My sincerest gratitude to Dr. Anne Osborne, my advisor, as well as Dr. Brad Gorham and Dr. Regina Luttrell, my thesis defense committee members. who gave me the best professional advice and support I can possibly imagine. Writing about this topic in the field of communications is not easy, as it involves combining multiple different academic disciplines and extensive reading to scholarly information and academic theories, I was not familiar with before I started my research topic. Thank you for having faith in me to make this paper a reality.

Thank you, Dr. Rebecca Ortiz, for agreeing to be my thesis defense chair. I will really miss the fun and casual conversations we have had during my time here. Your insights and professional attitude are characteristics I strive to emulate every day.

A special shoutout to Prof. Greg Shill at University of Iowa College of Law, Dean Mimi Sheller of The Global School at Worcester Polytechnic Institute and Prof. Peter Norton at University of Virginia for your publications. Reading your works made me realize the inner urbanist in me, and how much I want to explore this concept further into the field of communications. That inspiration has been invaluable, and I will never not be thankful for it.

I would like to thank my parents for standing by me for 25 amazing years and beyond, as well as the many friends, professors and colleagues who have given me enlightening insights and suggestions: Yizhou Wang, Linzhou Xing, Jayne Chang, Yuqi Wang, Dr. Ye Tian, Tongtian Xiao, Zhongyao Peng, Tiara Johnson, Bryce Whitwam, David Peters, Jamie Gentry, Carrie Welch, John Stewart, Jocelyn McKinnon-Crowley, Dr. Martina Santia, Dr. Carol Liebler, Dr. Robert Thompson and Dr. Joshua Darr. Thank you all for everything.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

1. Introduction

In recent years, the pervasive dominance of automobiles has increasingly come under scrutiny, particularly through the lens of social media. The omnipresence of cars and the extensive infrastructure supporting them have long been assumed to be inherent and indispensable across America. This study delves into how contemporary discourse on social media platforms is challenging this entrenched automobile supremacy and seeks to uncover the ways in which social media serve as a battleground for rethinking urban mobility and advocating for more inclusive, sustainable transportation alternatives.

Enabled by the rise of social media, a new generation of advocates, thought leaders and content creators have taken to platforms like Twitter/X, Instagram, YouTube and TikTok to push back against car-centric urban design, highlight the social and environmental costs of automobile dependency, and advocate for more sustainable, equitable and human-centered forms of mobility. By sharing personal stories, elevating community voices, and reframing the conversation around transportation, these influencers are creating a strong counternarrative that contests the hegemony of automobile supremacy in the public discourse.

This study aims to explore how prominent social media figures perceive and critique the concept of automobile supremacy, how they leverage the affordances of digital platforms to generate compelling narratives and build their agenda, and how they navigate the challenges and opportunities of using social media for advocacy and activism. Through semi-structured interviews with 25 leading content creators across North America, the research uncovers key themes around the lived experiences of automobile dominance, the discursive strategies for challenging assumptions and power structures, and the potential and limitations of social media in effecting real-world change.

As cities grapple with the urgent need to decarbonize, promote livability, and enhance resilience in the face of climate change and other pressures, the insights from this research

can inform policy, planning and public engagement efforts to envision and enact more sustainable futures. At the same time, by centering the voices and perspectives of the content creators themselves, this study highlights the human dimensions of social media advocacy, from the motivations and creativity that drive their work to the personal and emotional toll of navigating online spaces.

Social media narratives contesting automobile supremacy have the potential of representing a significant cultural shift that can transform how to interpret and utilize mobility in the 21st century. By amplifying alternative visions and empowering citizens to participate in shaping their communities, these digital advocates are paving the way for a new paradigm of transportation that prioritizes people over cars, and that recognizes the vital role of walking, biking, and public transit in creating enjoyable cities for all.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Defining Automobile Supremacy

America is well known as "a nation on wheels." Although the exact origin of this saying is undocumented, as a country that was one of the first to have embraced automobiles and the country that has most commonly incorporated it into every aspect of its life, this phrase has become an adequate and accurate reflection on the ubiquity of automobiles in the United States. The automobile has been a part of American society for more than a century; generations of Americans have grown up and lived with the knowledge that the automobile is an integral part of their daily lives. Driven by this perception, most Americans will naturally come to the point where they will choose to prioritize travel via automobile wherever they go as a result of lack of alternatives (Ray et al., 2020). They will choose to take the initiative to learn how to drive and purchase an automobile once they are legally permitted to do so, perpetuating the ubiquity and indispensability of the automobile in society. The routine use of the automobiles by a vast majority of Americans has also had a fundamental impact on the composition and design of American cities: the phenomenon of urban sprawl can be found across the country (Filion, 2018; Brown, 2005).

The widespread acceptance and normalization of car-centric lifestyles, infrastructure, and policies have solidified the automobile's complete dominance as the primary mode of transportation across America. This hegemonic control is maintained through the constant reproduction and reinforcement of ideas and practices that prioritize and promote automobile use while downplaying or marginalizing alternative modes of transportation. As a result, the motordom maintains economic and political domination, shaping urban and transportation planning decisions to perpetuate their rule and suppress alternatives, constituting a hegemonic supremacy under the classical Gramscian definition.

When Gramsci was imprisoned for his socialist beliefs in 1926, he wrote down his ideas and the theoretical perception of a hegemonic structure dominated by the ruling class (Bates, 1975, pp. 321). Gramsci's concept of hegemony is the central theme of his prison notes, representing the culmination of his political experience. In his notes, Gramsci argued that the ruling class maintains its power through the creation of hegemony in civil society, where intellectuals play a crucial role in shaping public opinion and securing the consent of the masses; he also criticized the concept of the "ethical state" and rejected the idea that economic crisis alone can lead to a successful revolution (Bates, 1975, pp. 363-365). As a theory, hegemony provides practical principles for the left, including recognizing that an old order cannot be eliminated simply by pointing out its evils and that a new social order cannot be created solely by pointing out its virtues (Bates, pp. 365-366).

In contemporary culture and media, the hegemony-oriented perspective remains critical for evaluating the power dynamic between the dominant and subordinate forces. The Internet and entertainment media, which Kumar referred to as "new forms of media," have become American hegemony's renewed method to reinforce their influence across the world (Kumar, 2011, p. 34). In the digital future, while it seems like every little detail is broken up into pieces by the explosion of information, Kumar argues that people still tend to assimilate to like-minded content and opinions under the guide of media platforms, only with a facade of variety; people often browse and create content using the Internet without realizing that the Internet is still largely controlled by monopolizing forces like Google and Amazon (Kumar, 2011, p. 39).

The emergence of hegemonic control that is facilitated by the media creates what Hozic (1999) calls a "neo-Gramscian" operative in American cultural contexts. This idea conceptualizes hegemony in the modern context as the ability to present one's interests as universal and objective, creating willing followers of the vision of those in power; the usage

of authority is blurred between the public and private through popular culture and technology, which reconstructed the boundaries in a continuous process that effectively abstracts the public from meaningful political participation (Hozic, pp. 299-300). Hegemony is, through the mechanisms of a neo-Gramscian order, enforced through the powers of persuasion rather than coercion, hiding what is "ought to be discussed" by aligning people with issues related to seemingly apolitical issues using cultural and technological propaganda (Hozic, 1999, pp. 304-305).

The phenomenon of infrastructure-induced enforcement requiring people to drive in the United States, which includes going to work, shopping for food and other things that could be done in shorter distances, was the result of a systemic framework encompassing the legal, political and economic system. This framework has surmounted the popular will and public opinion by the collaboration between the government and the relevant interest groups, squeezing out all other possibilities in the process of urban planning and construction; according to a 2020 poll, 80% of respondents say that drive because of how their area's transportation infrastructure is designed (Ray et al., 2020).

The term used to contextualize the effects of this systemic framework has been given various definitions in academic literature. Bronner (1996) referred to it as "automobile dependency," arguing that automobiles have become a focal point in daily life, influencing where people live, work, and enjoy themselves, leading to a cycle of limitation and synchronization with unimpeded increase of car use. Wassmer (2008) defined automobile reliance as the degree to which households in urbanized areas depend on automobiles for transportation, pointing out the significance of differences in automobile reliance in influencing urban sprawl across urbanized areas in the United States.

An alternative phrase used by journalist Ryan Cooper and legal scholar Gregory Shill, which this paper will also use, is "automobile supremacy." The specific phrase was first

mentioned in June 2019 in the news magazine “The Week” by Ryan Cooper. A journalist, Cooper critiqued the abundance of automobiles in American cities as “all-pervasive,” where automobiles were “the only truly legitimate way for people to get around” and “entitled to priority over any other transport method” (Cooper, 2019).” With automobile supremacy dominating the design of the American built environment, negative consequences such as unsafe streets, environmental pollution, health issues, and inefficiency became widespread in the United States.

From a legal studies perspective, Shill provides a more nuanced and complicated understanding of automobile supremacy in “Should Law Subsidize Driving.” The paper primarily focused on the legal subsidies provided by the American government during the early half of the 20th century to prioritize automobiles right to the roads, considers automobile supremacy as not just an ideology but a structure with downstream effects that operate autonomously and leverage power through law, having its own power to self-enforce (Shill, 2020, pp. 578). The American legal system prioritized and subsidized the production and proliferation of automobiles consistently, playing a role in encouraging driving through mechanisms often overlooked by urban planners, transportation professionals, economists, and legal scholars (Shill, 2020, pp. 555-556). As a system of laws and policies that prioritize and promote the use of cars, Shill argues that addressing automobile supremacy requires repealing car-centric laws and total reorientation against the existing urban design (Shill, pp. 2020, 577-579). As opined by Chief Justice Warren Burger in the Opinion of the Court in *Wooley v. Maynard* (1977), driving an automobile is “a virtual necessity for most Americans.”

Exposure to automobiles and its consequences do not disappear based on individual choices. Automobile collisions, otherwise rationalized as "accidents," are the leading cause of death and injury for Americans of all ages (Shill, 2020, pp. 501-502). Data released by the

National Highway Traffic Safety Administration that estimates that there were nearly 41,000 people have died in traffic crashes, which symbolizes a 25% climb since 2013 (Gagliardi, 2024).

According to the Environmental Protection Agency, transportation accounts for the largest share of greenhouse gas emissions in the United States, accounting for 29 percent of total emissions. On top of that, sedans and light trucks account for about 56 percent of total transportation emissions (EPA, 2023). Automobiles, as one of the major sources of sound pollution, have also negatively impacted people's experiences living in cities, which causes a variety of psychological, cardiovascular, and other health disorders (Wilson, 2020).

Hidden behind the repercussions of a perpetuated automobile supremacy is an uncalculated expense on the taxpayer money that was spent to construct and maintain roadways specifically designed for automobiles. While most roads are technically free to drive, Shill asserts that the actual cost of those roads are incorporated in the taxation system and distributed towards the entire population (Shill, 2020, p. 536). A 2019 report estimated that the country would need $231.4 billion per year to maintain and repair the nation's roads over a six-year period, with 37 states seeing a worsening in the condition of its roads between 2009 and 2017 (Bellis et. al, 2019).

Automobile supremacy's definition should move beyond acknowledging the legal system that has vested disproportionate privileges to car use. Its continuous existence creates a framework that can constantly portray itself in a positive light, convincing a majority of Americans that driving a private car is an essential public good. The routine presence of automobile supremacy generates an assessment system that trivializes its negative consequences while rationalizing, normalizing and legitimizing its own necessity to exist and be supported. With the acquiescence of the masses that are short of choices, everyone is

involuntarily living with cars, emissions, pollution and the never-ending possibility of experiencing traffic violence.

The assorted interest groups that would personally benefit by promoting automobiles into American daily lives, in the realm of a neo-Gramscian state, maintains their hegemonic economic and political control by reproducing and reinforcing the ideas and practices that prioritize and promote automobile use while marginalizing alternative modes of transportation and voices of disapproval. The enforcement of the system promoting automobile supremacy and the passage of time normalized its existence and therefore justified the narrative that automobiles have to be the default, if not the only, mode of transportation. People living in an environment where every other mode of travel is virtually nonexistent will naturally and subconsciously get accustomed to this reality because of their upbringing and cultural milieu, and personally rationalize the dependence and usage of automobiles, becoming a fully cooperative member of the system of automobile supremacy.

2.2 Automobile Supremacy's Complicated History

The development of automobile supremacy is rooted in the technological revolution in the late 19th century and how automobiles became gradually incorporated and integrated in the daily life of American families. This process started from the transition from horse-drawn carriages to automobiles in urban transportation. While horse-drawn carriages remained the predominant mode of land transportation in the 1880s, the sociopolitical climate was calling for more progressive reforms to make transportation broadly accessible and affordable - functions horse-drawn carriages could not fulfill. Electric streetcars, also known as trams or trolleys, soon emerged as a viable substitute; their higher speed and lower cost led to the spread of over 850 tram systems encompassing more than 10,000 miles of track in American cities by 1900, beginning with the hilly environs of Richmond, Virginia (Geels,

2005, pp. 462-463). The popularity of trams cultivated public receptivity towards mechanized transportation.

Early automobiles were created by adding internal combustion engines to existing carriage and tricycle frames, incorporating innovations from traditional steam and electric vehicles; however, they were initially considered expensive, fragile, and challenging to mass produce (Geels, 2005, pp. 459-460). American industrialists recognized the economic potential and began large-scale automobile production and marketing through diverse channels (Laird, 1996, pp. 796-797). Frederick Taylor's scientific management and Henry Ford's streamlined assembly lines transformed automobiles from a niche product for the affluent into an affordable commodity for most urban residents (Hugill, 1982, pp. 344). Ford's mass-produced Model T cost just $360 ($10,721 in 2024 dollars) in 1916 (Geels, 2005, pp. 467). Industries like steel, rubber, energy, and asphalt that stood to benefit from widespread automobile use formed a business coalition called “motordom” to promote automobiles as public necessities and generate additional revenue (Norton, 2008, pp. 18). This was aided by government endorsement of industrial advancement, including the 1916 Federal Aid Road Act to construct automobile-friendly macadam roads with federal subsidies (Hugill, 1982, pp. 342).

From early on, the dangers of this automobile-centric road transition had lethal consequences. The rapid proliferation of automobiles soon created social tensions as their speed and lack of fixed tracks made collisions with pedestrians more likely and fatal (Norton, pp. 21). Automobile-related deaths climbed as ownership rose; in 1923 alone, around 16,000 died in collisions, mostly pedestrians (Norton, 2008, pp. 22-23). Many victims were children, sparking outrage and protests from grieving parents (Norton, 2008, pp. 41-45). By the mid-1920s, cars were seen as intruders and killing machines by many Americans (Norton, 2008, pp. 39). Mounting disapproval led cities to consider laws restricting automobile speed and

access, while sales declined in 1924 due to the public relations crisis (Norton, 2008, pp. 80-90).

Rather than self-reflection, the industry blamed motorists' misuse of cars and deemed jaywalking pedestrians a nuisance (Norton, 2008, pp. 66-70). Previously, pedestrians, cars, and streetcars shared roads equally; cars were speed-restricted for safety (Lewyn, 2017, pp. 1169-1170). To justify auto dominance, industry groups lobbied against pedestrian road use and cities banned it outside crosswalks (Lewyn, 2017, p. 1170). Facing sales declines, the auto industry aimed to ensure cars remained integral by promoting an agenda prioritizing them on city streets (Norton, 2008, pp. 175-178). They categorized cars as “public utilities” in lobbying government, a model stipulating certain enterprises as vitally important and competition infeasible (Norton, 2008, p. 130).

But by the late 1920s, the auto industry asserted motorists' “inalienable rights,” calling restrictions “tyranny” (Norton, 2008, pp. 183-184). Commerce Secretary Herbert Hoover hoped industry self-regulation would prevent harsh regulations against automakers (Norton, pp. 178). At a national traffic safety conference, the auto industry and government shaped laws favoring motorists over public interest (Norton, 2008, pp. 232-234). This devastated pedestrian interests and transit. Without subsidies as auto ownership rose, trolleys' costs increased but revenue declined, eventually forcing most into bankruptcy as streets became the “exclusive property” of cars (Geels, 2005, pp. 466-467).

After the end of WWII, the emergence and development of suburbs across America reinforced the presence and abundance of automobiles as a social obligation. There are many reasons that lead to the rise of suburbs including the growth of family sizes, favorable government policies, and the promotion of an idealized lifestyle, along with the White rejection of racial integration due to the large-scale migration of African Americans to the center of American cities (Filion, 2018, pp. 4-5; Kye, 2018, pp. 38-39). Even though the

demographics of suburbs in America is rapidly changing, the infrastructure of suburbs continues to rely heavily on driving and low-density development, which contributes to forming a distinct identity among suburban residents that perpetuate the necessity to drive (Filion, 2018, pp. 10-12). Increased reliance on automobiles in the suburbs across America, argues Fillon, has led to the normalization of unsustainable aspects of living and exacerbated the negative impact of automobiles (Filion, 2018, pp. 11).

A pivotal figure in the shaping of modern American car-centric landscape is Robert Moses, whose approach to urban planning in the post-war era heavily emphasized the construction of freeways and expressways, which prioritized the efficiency of vehicular traffic over other modes of transportation, leading to the proliferation of road networks that facilitated the widespread adoption of cars in cities (Brown, 2005). Moses' approach, which was implemented through the construction of interstate highways, only transformed the physical landscape that came at a significant cost to inner-city neighborhoods, many of which were dissected or marginalized by the imposing freeways, choking them off from resources and accessible infrastructure (Lutz, 2014).

In the modern era, the influence of automobiles to the livelihood of Americans were usually categorized and studied in the study of automobility, a concept that Urry summarized as a dominant force that shapes social life, remakes time and space, and generates new socialites on its own (Urry, 2004, pp. 25-26). While automobiles have a pretense as a source of individual liberty, they also constrain users to live their lives in spatially stretched and time-compressed ways; such expansion and domination, Urry believes, has resulted in irreversible social and spatial patterns that lock societies into the mode of mobility that automobility generates (Urry, 2004, pp. 27).

Following up on Urry's research, Sheller believes that discussions of automobility and its potential consequences should focus on the restrictions on mobility faced by marginalized

groups due to factors such as gender, race, class, ethnicity, sexuality, and physical abilities (Sheller, 2018, pp. 23-25). Sheller asserts that automobility perpetuates inequality and externalizes the environmental impacts of such lifestyle onto everyone living in America. As a dominant system, the problem with automobility is the inequality divided by the obligation to drive; the wealthy would continue to have the means to provide for their own mobility, security, and safety through privatized corridors and special facilities, while alternate forms of transportation are discouraged and undersupported (Sheller, 2018, pp. 26-27).

The concept of automobility doesn't just encompass the use of cars but refers to a broader system that privileges certain modes and patterns of movement, often at the expense of more sustainable and equitable alternatives, making the framework of automobile supremacy deeply rooted and entrenched within the American society in the long haul with no end in sight. The complicated history of the automobile has made it clear that the prioritization of car-based mobility isn't just a matter of individual choice or convenience but is embedded within a larger system that influences urban planning, environmental policies, and social norms. This system often marginalizes non-car users, exacerbates social inequalities, and contributes to environmental harm, challenging us to envision and advocate for more just and sustainable mobility futures.

2.3 Automobile Supremacy's Ideological Propaganda

Since the 1900s, automobile manufacturers have wanted to use advertising techniques to promote their products as a public commodity for widespread application. Automobile motorists, satirized by Sinclair Lewis' "Babbitt," believe that their care was "poetry and tragedy, love and heroism," an imagery largely caused by the industry lavishly spending large sums of money with full-page ads in magazines on a regular basis when most other advertisers consider it an extravagant and unnecessary practice (Laird, 1996, pp. 801).

Automobile advertising not only is essential to the development and professionalization of the advertising industry itself during the early 20th century, but it is also inseparable with the symbolic social status symbol of freedom and mobility automobiles have represented since then. The psychological and cultural effects of these advertisements, according to Soron (2009), propels a deep emotional connection to cars, leading to an inability for many drivers to acknowledge the downsides of car-centric lifestyle. Such advertisements present cars with glamor, magic, and intense appeal, making them psychologically indispensable to consumers; the irrational attachment to driving is thus perpetuated within the logic of the advertisements, inhibiting a rational evaluation of alternative transportation options (Soron, 2009, pp. 185-186).

Ever since the introduction, popularization, and integration of automobiles into American society, mass-produced consumer product manufacturers have paid homage to the ideals appealed to in early automobile advertisements, which became an inseparable part of the patriotic American identity; when IBM started promoting personal computers in the early 1980s, they released a printed advertisement with the words, “If computers scare you, just imagine how people felt when they first saw the horseless carriage (Wernick, 1989, pp. 198-200).”

Cars carry special imagery in the United States; as methodical products of capitalism and industrialization, they became a sign-bearing representation of technological advances and progress made because of fundamental American values (Wernick, pp. 201-204). Such symbolism is complicated by divisions within the market and influenced by various factors; its association with individual freedom, according to Wernick, was undermined by traffic congestion and unease with road constructions as a result of the abundance of cars (Wernick, 1989, pp. 215-216).

The perception that automobiles are an essential part of life has persisted to the present. Modern automobile advertisements in North America embed the cultural code to promote car dependency and overlook the issues due to the abundance of automobiles (Conley, 2009, pp. 37-38). The advertisements convey both mundane or instrumental and magical or symbolic representations of automobiles (Conley, 2009, pp. 38-39). They draw on a stock of collective representations and the social organization of automobilized societies and associate cars with intense emotional experiences that transcend routine daily life, depicting cars in settings that evoke happiness, natural beauty, solitude, and escape from day-to-day existence (Conley, pp. 46). On the other hand, some automobile advertisements convey messages of status or domination; they invite the audience to identify attributes of the car with themselves in a way that distinguishes them from others (Conley, 2009, p. 51).

Simms argues that with advertising's ability to separate the product from the actual conditions of its production and consumption, automobile advertisements often create the seductive image of the finished product that is very different from the reality of living in an automobile-dependent society (Simms, 2009, pp. 130-131). Many automobile advertisements position and mediate people's relationship with cars, creating a presupposed illusion of empty country roads despite the congestion and inconvenience directly caused by the production and proliferation of private automobiles on the roads (Simms, 2009, p. 131). Some advertisements mentioned not only individual success, freedom, and mobility, but also masculinity-driven desires for power, speed, and sex, which eventually became the fig leaf to cover up the litany of negative consequences of automobile dependency (Simms, 2009, p. 139).

What we should not forget is that automobile advertisements, as a method aggressively pushed by the automobile industry to foist itself into the American lifestyle, became a means of ideological propaganda with the ultimate purpose of perpetuating an automobile-centric city design to ensure the American public's continued reliance on them.

The persuasion and appeal-driven design of the advertisements, which, combined with the American political power that actively pushed a pro-private automobile agenda, resulted in the continued dependence on automobiles in the United States. In the crafty handwork of advertisers, automobiles are attached with larger American values such as individual freedom and mobility, as well as a strong emotional and capitalist desire for success and power (Wernick, 1989).

2.4 Automobile Supremacy in the Context of Social Media Platforms

Automobility is often seen as a symbol of individual freedom, but it also imposes serious constraints, such as compelling users to adjust their lives to the infrastructure designed for cars. This system tends to marginalize certain groups based on factors like gender, race, class, and physical ability, often perpetuating inequality. The concept of "automobile supremacy" highlights the pervasive dominance of cars in the U.S., to the point where they have become the only legitimate means of transportation, leading to environmental, health, and efficiency challenges. The fabric of American society, deeply interwoven with the threads of automobile supremacy, presents a multi-layered tapestry of benefits, challenges, and implications. This car-dominated landscape, fortified by societal norms, legal frameworks, and economic policies, has fundamentally transformed how Americans interact with their environments and each other.

In the context of discussing media and its influence on shaping public perceptions, particularly regarding automobile supremacy, it is crucial to understand the role of social media. Social media stands as one of the prominent forefronts of the ideological battle over the legitimacy of opinions and narratives. Various forms of traditional media, such as television, films, and news coverage, have historically reinforced and normalized an auto-centric paradigm in the United States (Choo & Mokhtarian, 2004). They often glorify car culture and the freedom associated with driving, while minimizing the negative externalities

of automobile dependence (Goddard et. al, 2019). American car culture has become the pervasive obsession and overreliance of driving that, despite its origin from car-dependent infrastructure and policy design, has been fully accepted, rationalized and celebrated by automobile drivers as a matter of course (Soron, 2009, pp. 193-194). The consistent depiction of automobiles through traditional venues shapes social meanings and public discourse, making it essential to scrutinize these representations through narrative theory and ideological criticism (Humes, 2017). Media content constructed under such circumstances not only reflects but also reinforces the structural hegemony of auto-centric systems, often prioritizing cars over alternative modes of mobility in urban planning, economics, and engineering (Davis, 1997; Urry, 2004; Sheller, 2018). This ideological entrenchment occurs through symbolic validation in stories, images, and myths, creating a dominant narrative that significantly influences policy debates and public opinion.

Automobile supremacy is connected to media because media can shape public discourses. Social media platforms democratize content creation, sharing and interaction, allowing alternative mobility viewpoints and criticisms of automobile supremacy to gain more traction. Deconstructing the mediated narrative of car dominance through methodologies like discourse analysis and semiotics exposes how it functions as coherence-formulating metanarrative that privileges certain interests over others (Barthes, 1972; Lyotard, 1984). Contesting such ideological conditioning requires proliferating counter-narratives that challenge naturalized assumptions, from urbanist documentaries questioning auto-reliance to ads valorizing cyclists' freedom over driver convenience.

In the era of social media, this battle of narratives gains an added dimension. Social media platforms enable diverse voices and perspectives to emerge, challenging the traditional news media's dominance in shaping public opinion. This democratization of content creation and sharing allows for a more varied discourse, where alternative viewpoints, including

criticisms of automobile supremacy, can gain traction and challenge the established narrative. The interactive nature of social media also facilitates more direct and dynamic engagement among users, allowing for the formation of communities that can mobilize and advocate for change. Therefore, in understanding how media narratives shape views on issues like automobile supremacy, acknowledging the influential role of social media is paramount. It is not just a platform for disseminating information, but also a battleground where various ideologies and perspectives vie for legitimacy and acceptance (Gillespie, 2018). Analyzing the narrative role of social media content reveals the construction of automobile supremacy across interconnected texts, discourses, and power relations.

Current research trends tend to summarize and categorize social media not just as individual apps, but as broad platforms that are established and operated with their unique functions, purposes, features and reaches (Nau et. al, 2022, p. 15). Platforms themselves usually are not producers of content, but they are rather "custodians" of such content and can make important choices about what type of content they prefer hosting (Gillespie, 2018, pp. 18-19). Gillespie defines "platforms" as online sites and services that are built on an infrastructure for processing data for customer service, advertising, and profit, with the ability to host, organize, and circulate users' shared content or social interactions without having produced or commissioned the majority of that content (Gillespie, 2018, p. 18). For social media platforms, especially those that are mainstream and have a large number of users, the content they choose to support and allow on their platforms, as well as the way in which they preside over the existence and functioning of this content, will be a decision that will be made by a tug-of-war between users and stakeholders, in which the platforms will compete for the right to be heard and represented as a space for public opinion.

Despite its relatively short history, social media have gone through significant transformations and have established a firm and unshakeable foothold in public discourse.

There are an estimated 4.8 billion users in 2023 across all social media platforms, representing 59.9% of the global population and 92.7% of the total number Internet users (Nyst, 2023). Several major social movements and political events, such as Black Lives Matter, #MeToo, Arab Spring, and significant elections, have underscored the role of these platforms in shaping culture and politics (Nau et. al, 2022. p. 13). The increasing presence and importance of social media platforms to become the forefront of information and public opinion signifies a crucial cultural and political shift from the past, when traditional news media platforms such as newspapers, network news and radio were where a vast majority of Americans receive information and formulating their opinions (Gillespie, 2018, pp. 205-206). However, a major and fundamental difference between traditional news media and platforms is that while the only function of traditional news media is to provide information and opinions, social media platforms have the ability to act as "intermediaries" that handle the distribution and curation of such content, making likeminded people find and affirm each other much easier. They actively solicit user opinions and judgment in governance, feature design, and content moderation while platforms face challenges in balancing moderation with commercial imperatives and political pressure (Gillespie, 2018, p. 210). Platforms moderate content and have rules and procedures that form technical and institutional systems. Moderation shapes platforms as tools, institutions, and cultural phenomena. Moderation is industrial, and the design features of platforms are used to codify and impose a value system. Despite existing studies examining algorithms and content moderation policies, Gillespie believes that the moderation systems for the platforms are often opaque to public scrutiny (Gillespie, 2018, p. 139).

Nau et. al defines social media as "web-based and mobile services that allow individuals, communities, and organizations to collaborate, connect, interact, and build community by enabling them to create, co-create, modify, share, and engage with content

(user- or bot-generated)" (Nau et. al, 2022. p. 15). They grouped the different types of social media platforms into ten broad categories: social networking sites (such as Facebook/Meta), media sharing (such as Instagram, YouTube and TikTok), messengers (such as WhatsApp), microblogging (such as Twitter/X), forums (such as Reddit), content curation (such as Pinboard), geolocation-based technology (such as Tinder), blogging (such as WordPress), groupware (such as Slack), and consumer review platforms (such as Yelp) (Nau et. al, 2022. p. 16).

When discussing social media platforms, it is crucial to recognize the importance of narratives that are formed around these platforms because these narratives have the power to create connected experiences in unique ways that both strengthen the arguments within the narrative and promote wider outreach. Social media is not just a collection of tools for communication; it is also a space where people's shared stories become cultural, political, and social narratives that are created and spread.

Existing literature often understood the terminology "narrative" in broad terms that refer to as "social patterns that shared stories help to constitute," a definition Page (2018) rejects, claiming that analysis into this term and its impact requires specific analysis that can use empirical evidence to examine. She believes the term "narratives" should not be used in the limited structuralist viewpoint, but should rather be used interchangeably with "shared stories" to recognize the diversity of narrative forms (Page, 2018, p. 6). Key features of narratives denote a series of events with temporal ordering, drawing correlative and logical connections between events focused on the similarity of the shared story, as a method of recapitulating past experience through a verbal sequence of clauses for research purposes (Page, 2018. pp. 6-7).

Page argues that social media narratives are participatory and collaborative; by using shared, remixed, modified, and co-constructed story elements rather than an individual

author, they involve the active participation of social media users in a “co-tellership” the creation and sharing of such stories, thereby forming collective identities in the process (Page, 2018, pp. 101-102). Since the shared stories on social media make connections to other shared content through interactive references, they can be easily reproduced across iterative segments and multiple units much easier than other forms of messaging (Page, 2018, pp. 19-20).

Another important feature of social media narratives, especially for media-sharing and microblogging social media platforms, is that it is multimodal and nonlinear by intentional design. Social media narratives are loosely connected pieces of content, which intertwine written text with multimedia elements, converging communication modes (Poulsen and Kvåle, 2018). This distributed linearity of shared stories allows for narratives to unfold across different timescales and media units, which allows for the incorporation of various media elements, such as images and videos, which can be arranged in a sequence to convey temporal order and enhance narrativity (Page, 2018, pp. 197-199).

Social media narratives are also immediate and ephemeral. They unfold in real time, with constantly updated content, making viral topics usually dynamic but temporary (Page, 2018, pp. 1-2). The mechanisms in these platforms specifically promote recency by displaying content in reverse chronological order over retrospection by default through features such as hashtags and timetables, prioritizing immediate engagement and interactions (Page, 2018, pp. 199-200). This feature could also split conversations on topics across disconnected posts over time rather than developing a consistent depth in one place, making the discourse uncontrollable.

In essence, social media’s unique functionality has turned the platforms to work as a base for contesting the dominance of automobile supremacy, enabling diverse and dynamic narratives that challenge the status quo and facilitate a broader and more inclusive discourse

on mobility. Traditional news media have historically promoted a car-centric discourse that glorifies car culture and downplays the downsides of automobiles. On social media platforms, content creators have disrupted the traditional media landscape with the help of these platforms' unique features that encourages the democratization of content creation and dynamic engagement, which facilitates the formation of ideological narratives, with the ability to meaningfully challenge existing and entrenched beliefs.

2.5 Social Media as a Force for Counter-Hegemony

The popular resistance against automobile supremacy on social media should be categorized as an exemplar of counter hegemony, which is created through the formation of counternarratives. Lundholt et. al (2018) define counternarratives as a type of narrative that derives its own meaning through their relation with one or more other narratives by involving a stance that is at odds towards those narratives. As counternarratives offer differing interpretations of organizational realities compared to dominant or authoritative narratives, they become a means of interacting to contest them in the public discourse (Lundholt et. al, 2018, p. 4).

Theoretically, counternarratives can play a significant role in the construction of identity, as its sole existence is a challenge against the dominant power structure, stimulating individual or collective experiences that are suppressed, silenced, or excluded by these dominant narratives in the past (Lundholt et. al, 2018, p. 3). While they may not be exhaustive accounts of an entire system juxtaposing the existing ideology, representations of selected experiences and elements can still construct an identity that serve as a resource for individuals to make sense of their own experiences and to find stories that align with their own sense of self (Lundholt et. al, 2018, pp. 3-5).

Counter-hegemony and counternarratives intersect in their efforts to address and dismantle the existing power structures by rearticulating social forces around an alternative

conception of the system. According to Carroll (2006), counter-hegemony is rooted in the struggle to liberate power-to from power-over, which involves the reassertion of the social flow of doing against its fragmentation and denial. As a form of struggle, it occurs in direct opposition to the aspects of capitalist hegemony, such as social and semiotic fragmentation, neoliberal insulation and dispossession, and globalization, aiming to organize dissent across space and time by articulating various subaltern and progressive-democratic currents into a counter-hegemonic bloc (Carroll, 2006, pp. 19-20).

In the midst of mass popular revolts, social media platforms have become the starting point for many to find, form and organize counter-hegemonic opinion trends. In the United States, #OccupyWallStreet evolved from an idea to a mobilized mass protest with the help of social media platforms, particularly Twitter/X (Gleason, 2013, p. 967). To test his hypothesis that people are actively learning about the movement through hashtags associated with Occupy Wall Street, Gleason conducted a case study to explore the learning process of an individual through the #OWS hashtag on Twitter by designing a qualitative content analysis using an inductive model of category development (Gleason, 2013, pp. 970-971). Gleason concluded that a significant percentage of #OWS tweets contained hyperlinks to other learning spaces, including user-generated content such as videos, making Twitter an active platform for participation in the social movement and offering multiple opportunities for learning and engagement (Gleason, 2013, pp. 977-978). As the idea turned into a substantive social movement, Twitter became a place for informal learning, encouraging users to study about both the movement itself and the ideological reasons behind the protest, virtually diffusing the counter-hegemonic narratives to a mass audience for a large number of people (Gleason, 2013, pp. 977-979).

Another social movement that has gained ground and mobilization through the usage of social media is the international movement “Fridays for Future” calling for climate action,

led by Swedish student activist Greta Thunberg. It first began when Thunberg, then a 15-year-old student, started a solo protest outside of the Swedish parliament on the first Friday of the new school semester on August 20, 2018; the incident soon received viral attention, was subject to intense discussion and inspired millions of people participating in similar strike to call for greater acknowledgement and action over the dangers of climate change (Hasegawa, 2022). Both Fernández-Zubieta et. al (2023) and Herrmann et. al (2022) credited the role social media platforms played in expanding the impact, popularity and scale of the protest movement.

In Fernández-Zubieta et. al's paper, titled "Digital Activism Masked—The Fridays for Future Movement and the 'Global Day of Climate Action'", the researchers state that as a hybrid entity, social media serve both as a method of interpersonal communications and a facilitator that spreads mediated content for social movements (Fernández-Zubieta et. al, p. 16). Taking a framing-based approach that used a combination of manual coding and automated data classification techniques, they collected a dataset of 9,529 tweets on Twitter/X related to the Fridays for Future movement, particularly the 2020 Global Day for Climate Action, and analyzed their distinctive characteristics (Fernández-Zubieta et. al, 2023, pp. 6-8). As a result, the researchers discovered that most tweets served a variety of functions conducive to the mobilization, particularly in defining problems, envisaging solutions, and motivating people to take action, with tweets serving a balanced function in providing focus, knowledge and enthusiasm (Fernández-Zubieta et. al, 2023, pp. 16-17).

Herrmann et. al's paper discussed the specific features in social media networking sites, particularly Instagram, which were central in increasing the salience and popularity of the Fridays for Future movement by pointing out that the interactive features, including its emphasis on visual content and the ability to post up to 30 hashtags, are important in all stages of the process, including organizing protests, mobilizing people, and facilitating

connective action (Herrmann et. al, 2022, pp. 1571-1572). They hypothesized that the thematic features of Instagram made the movement itself popular and conducted a social network analysis on hashtags used in 59,112 posts tagged with #fridaysforfuture on Instagram that were divided into 11 different clusters (Herrmann et. al, 2022. p. 1574). Their analysis revealed that as this youth-led movement is primarily mobilized by a young, school-aged generation that have a stronger penchant of using common social media platforms, and the intense discussions of identities primarily oriented and associated with their concern of climate change made this movement a surprising success (Herrmann, et. al, 2022, pp. 1580-1581).

Currently, most research on the issue of automobile supremacy focused on the political and socio-economic fallout of automobile supremacy and did not adequately address the role social media are laying in revolutionizing the car-centered narratives. Further research examining the role of social media in contesting the hegemonic system of automobile supremacy would provide valuable additional insights. Research in this field can delve into how influential thought leaders leverage social media narratives to shift public discourse on automobile reliance, similar to Greta Thunberg's impact on climate activism. Interviewing these opinion leaders about their messaging approaches, resonant frames, and perception of the role of social media could reveal effective techniques for contesting the dominance of car culture.

2.6 Social Media's Impact on Misinformation, Polarization and Mental Health

Social media platforms are not neutral bystanders to the formation and development of the information environment; on the contrary, they are constant participants that catalyze the development of beliefs, trends, sentiments, and real social movements. A comparative content analysis on Twitter and Instagram posts found that while platforms tend to frame engagement in strategic terms related to metrics like likes and comments, users often discuss

engagement in civic terms, emphasizing community and political participation, making them significant roleplayers in how information is presented and interacted with in the public discourse (Hallinan et. al, 2022).

As the issue of political misinformation and polarization have garnered greater attention after the role social media platforms have played in spreading misleading and polarization in the 2016 United States Presidential Election, there are increasing concerns over how people interact with social media and what level of influence do the content on these platforms leverage against them (Gaultney et. al, 2022, pp. 60-61). Another worrisome trend that must be emphasized before designing this research is the correlation between social media use and negative impact on mental health; media investigations and psychology studies have all yielded concerning findings over the potential well being damage of extensive exposure to social media content could result in (Wells et. al, 2021; Haidt, 2024; Schmuck et. al, 2019). Emphasizing the negative consequences of social media provides a more comprehensive understanding of the environment in which these creators operate, which enriches the analysis on the role social media plays in building their agendas.

Misinformation remains a significant problem within the social media information environment, particularly in the context of political polarization. Systemic misinformation goes beyond being factually incorrect, but a phenomenon that is amplified and spread through social media channels with the intention of influencing the public opinion on certain issues (Gaultney et. al, 2022, p. 61). Individuals who are actively engaged in political matters are more likely to disseminate misinformation that justifies their narratives due to confirmation bias; this inclination is intensified when efforts by traditional media to debunk misinformation inadvertently solidify users' pre-existing beliefs due to a mistrust on traditional media (Barberá, 2020, pp. 44-45). In a highly polarized environment where people have difficulty assessing the veracity of information individually, existent confirmation bias

and the intention of sharing ideas that correspond to their beliefs will lead to a fragmented information landscape where different groups of people are exposed to vastly different sets of information, creating echo chambers.

Bandura (2001)'s social cognitive theory emphasizes the role of human agency, suggesting that people are not just passive recipients of media messages but actively engage with and interpret these messages based on their cognitive processes. Media exerts their influence through two primary pathways under this framework: the direct pathway and the socially mediated pathway. The direct pathway involves media promoting changes by informing, enabling, motivating, and guiding participants, while the socially mediated pathway connects participants to social networks and community settings that offer personalized guidance and incentives for desired changes (Bandura, 2001, p. 285). In the context of social media platforms and ideas, social cognitive theory provides a framework to analyze how communication influences the formation of ideologies and gets mediated through interactions that emphasize user-generated content; in this sense, the platforms can serve as originating and reinforcing influences within different patterns of social influence.

In many social media platforms, users not only consume content on social media but also reproduce it by sharing posts, creating their content, or engaging in discussions. This reproduction of behavior can amplify misinformation and polarization as users propagate content within their networks. The content that gains attention on social media is often that which is sensational, emotionally charged, or controversial, which can encourage misinformation, exacerbate polarization and lead to negative mental health outcomes.

The social media circle that focuses their discussions on topics of automobile supremacy and alternative transportation should not be understood as exception from the rule, which means the social media content creators in this sphere are also experiencing the same problems in regards to misinformation, polarization, and mental health struggles just as other

social media users will. Any study that focuses on the usage and users of social media should be keenly aware of the phenomenon and take it into account while designing the research.

2.7 Theoretical Lenses: Agenda Building and Critical Framing

If agenda setting is about what to think about, agenda building is about how it was being thought. Agenda setting, developed by McCombs and Shaw, originally focused on how mass media's attention to specific issues influences public perception of those issues' importance (McCombs and Shaw, 1972). It is an inherently political process that determines the political issues that receive attention and concern from decision-makers within a community by making them salient and stand out in the public agenda (Cobb and Elder, 1971, pp. 905-906). Agendas are built, or in other words, made more salient, through a complex process influenced by social forces and the participation of various actors between the systems, the institutions, and other decision makers through active participation and deliberation (Cobb and Elder, 1971, p. 907). Cobb and Elder believe that the process of agenda building contributes to the democratic process by including the social requisites of democratic rule, the nature of popular participation, and the prospects for social change (Cobb and Elder, 1971, pp. 910-913).

Kim and Kiousis (2012) define agenda building as the process of transferring salience or importance of issues, political figures, or organizations among public relations messages, media coverage, and public opinion. They argue that it can have both cognitive and affective effects on attitudes and behavioral intentions, which shapes public perceptions of importance and influence overall evaluations of objects as the issue itself gains attention in public discourse (Kim and Kiousis, 2012, p. 6). There are two levels of agenda building in practice, with the first level focusing on the salience of the topic, and the second level focusing on the salience of substantive, or cognitive, and affective, or emotional, attributes, specifically how these topics are being conveyed in the messaging process (Kim and Kiousis, pp. 3-4). Given

the comprehensiveness and complexity of agenda building, Kim and Kiousis argue that applying agenda building in communicative fields like public relations can thoroughly shape public perceptions of importance and influence overall evaluations of the topics (Kim and Kiousis, 2012, pp. 6-7).

The notion of framing, developed by Gitlin (1980) and Entman (1993), further extends the applicability and usage of agenda setting. Framing emerged as a critical component to elucidate how the media not only tells us what to think about but also how to think about it. The conflicts between the two theories also saw researchers exploring the conditions under which agenda-setting effects are stronger or weaker, like the role of personal relevance and uncertainty (Scheufele and Tweksbury, 2007).

Previous studies have utilized framing theory to explore how news media shapes audience perceptions. Pan and Kosicki (1993) emphasized a constructivist approach to analyze news framing, particularly in the context of an anti-abortion rally. Their work highlighted the importance of examining the themes within news texts, which are pivotal for understanding the associated attitudes and values, especially when considered in the context of the broader social environment. They argue that frames in news discourse are deliberately and systematically constructed to elicit specific responses, creating messages through texts to garner intended reactions deliberately and systemically (Pan and Kosicki, 1993, p. 70).

By the 2000s, a seismic shift in the media ecosystem brought about by the advent of digital media and social networking platforms necessitated a re-evaluation and adaptation of the agenda-setting theory; the proliferation of online platforms has decentralized information dissemination, challenging the traditional dynamics of agenda-setting (Fernández-Zubieta et. al, 2023, p. 16). If frames shape our attitudes and evaluations of candidates and issues, then critical framing systematically analyzes different frames to better understand their impact on shaping public perception (Carnahan, et. al, 2019).

A 2013 study analyzed framing in the use of hashtags on Twitter/X by accounts from American political figures, which discovered that politicians frequently use hashtags to signal the salience of certain issues in favor of their political perspective (Hemphill et. al, 2013, p. 19). The researchers found that Democrats were more likely to tweet about women's rights and education, while Republicans tended to focus on jobs, the economy, and energy policy, and that there was little crossover or discussion between the two ideological sides regarding their core issues (Hemphill et. al, 2013, pp. 19-20). In this case, hashtags on social media act as a tool that enhances selective exposure - people view content that reinforces their existing beliefs. As Republicans and Democrats use distinct hashtags aligned with their respective platforms, it further polarizes discussion on the platform.

Agenda building and critical framing differ in their primary focus within the context of media and communication. Agenda building discusses how the media prioritizes issues to make them more noticeable in the public discourse that involves elevating specific topics, assisting in the construction of the public agenda. Critical framing, on the other hand, examines the specific salience of particular issues that are being presented. Content creators on social media focus on making the issue of automobile supremacy more visible and urgent as the agenda they try to build by framing the issues in their narrative favor, and both theoretical lenses are crucial to examine the impact of such narratives.

The theoretical lenses of agenda building and framing are particularly effective for analyzing narratives on social media about automobile supremacy, especially as propagated by influential anti-automobile supremacy content creators. These people often use their platforms to highlight the salience of issues related to automobile supremacy and its alternatives. The processes of agenda building and critical framing provide potent theoretical tools for scholars seeking to understand how influential voices on social media shape discourse and action around automobile supremacy.

2.8 Research Questions

RQ1: How do social media content creators perceive the concept of automobile supremacy, especially in relation to their own experiences living with automobiles?

RQ2: How do social media content creators frame their stories to generate narratives to challenge the assumptions around automobile supremacy?

RQ3: How do social media content creators perceive the necessity of using social media itself for the building of their agenda?

3. Methodology and Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative research approach through the use of semi-structured interviews to explore the narratives of prominent social media figures advocating against automobile supremacy in the United States. This method allows for an in-depth exploration of the influencers' motivations, their approaches in how to build a strong counternarrative, and their alignment or deviation from mainstream discourses on mobility. Semi-structured interviews offer a balance between the systematic collection of comparable data and the flexibility to delve deeper into topics that emerge during the conversation, making it an ideal approach for this investigation.

Although social networking sites like Facebook are still the most widely used platform regarding overall users, the direction of this study is to focus on two types of platforms: media-sharing platforms and microblogging. The decision to focus on these two types of social media platforms for this study was based on the unique characteristics and position of these platforms in the landscape of American public opinion. None of the social media content creators interviewed for this study use Facebook as their preferred platform for communicating information.

Platforms like Instagram prioritize visual content (e.g., pictures, videos, and memos). Visual content focuses on non-textual forms of communication, allowing for the creation and dissemination of ideological narratives through powerful, emotionally resonant visuals (McEwan & Fox, 2022, pp. 30–31). Because visual content is easy to consume and share, these platforms also enable these narratives to spread quickly. Platforms such as Twitter/X emphasize short and to-the-point messages, which makes it an ideal platform for quickly disseminating opinions, reactions, and narratives (Conger, 2023; Rhee et al., 2021). Users can quickly construct and disseminate their ideological views, often in response to ongoing events, which is critical to shaping and reflecting public opinion and speech (McEwan and

Fox, 2022, pp. 34). Both types of platforms use hashtags and trending topics to amplify and categorize ideological narratives, which enables users to connect their content to broader conversations and movements, resulting in increased visibility and engagement (McEwan & Fox, 2022, pp. 34–35). This feature facilitates the aggregation and dissemination of content that aligns with a particular ideology.

These two kinds of platforms, media-sharing platforms and microblogging, also provide tools for high user engagement, such as liking, commenting, and sharing, which enables users to measure the resonance of their narratives, refine their messaging, and build communities of like-minded people (Nau et al., 2022, pp. 19–21). A sense of community and shared ideology can reinforce and spread these narratives more effectively. Both media-sharing and microblogging platforms use algorithms to curate content based on user preferences and engagement, personalization features can create echo chambers or filter bubbles, in which users are primarily exposed to content that is consistent with their existing beliefs and ideologies, reinforcing and reinforcing those narratives (Nau et al., 2022, p. 20). The widespread use and accessibility of these platforms means that ideological narratives can reach a large and diverse audience. This ubiquitous nature makes it easy for narratives to gain traction and influence broader public discourse. The ability to integrate multiple media forms (e.g., text, pictures, and video) and sharing content across different platforms enhances the richness and appeal of ideological narratives; users can effectively combine different forms of media to create a more engaging and persuasive message (McEwan & Fox, 2022, p. 29).

By broadening access to narrative construction, distribution channels, and the public discourse itself, media-sharing and microblogging social media can elevate more dynamic debates and discussions regarding automobile supremacy that may, otherwise, go unheard. Understanding these platforms requires one to understand the specific characteristics of

narrative structures in social media and what makes them different from those in other environments.

The research targets individuals who are prominent on various media-sharing platforms and microblogging social media platforms and are known for their advocacy against the dominant auto-centric transportation model in the United States. These participants are selected based on their influence, the relevance of their content to the study's focus, and their contribution to counter-hegemonic narratives regarding transportation. The selection process aims to ensure a diverse range of voices, encompassing different social media platforms, geographic locations, and backgrounds to capture a broad spectrum of perspectives and experiences.

There are three basic criteria the interviewee needs to qualify to be defined as a "social media content creator" in the context of this research paper:

1. They must be living in the United States or Canada.
2. They must have more than 1000 followers on their social media platforms.
3. They must be producing original, anti-automobile supremacy content on a regular basis, at least once a week would be the threshold as "regular".

By concentrating on individuals renowned for their advocacy against the auto-centric transportation model in North America, the study taps into a niche yet potent segment of the public discourse, providing valuable insights into how social media narratives can influence perceptions and potentially foster social change. This interview will not include individuals residing in Europe due to the unique severity of automobile supremacy in North America, particularly the United States in levels spanning from motorization rate to lack of public transit (Buehler, 2014).

The choice to interview prominent social media figures is grounded in the understanding that these individuals can be influencers who shape public opinion. Their

experiences and strategies in crafting and disseminating narratives offer a unique lens through which to explore the dynamics of social media activism against automobile supremacy. "Anti-automobile supremacy content," in this case, refers to original narratives, discussions, visuals, and other forms of media that critically address the dominant position of automobiles in transportation systems and advocate for more equitable, sustainable, and diverse mobility options, including but not limited to the critique of car-centric urban design, lack of public transit, as well as promotion of alternative transportation such as walking and biking.

The semi-structured interviews will be conducted using a consistent set of 15 questions (Appendix A) to ensure uniformity in data collection while allowing for the exploration of additional insights that participants may offer. This uniformity ensures the systematic collection of data while permitting the exploration of additional insights offered by the participants. These questions delve into how individuals perceive and are impacted by automobiles in their daily lives, the comparative standing of the automobile industry against alternative transportation modes, and the effectiveness of public transportation systems. Additionally, the questions seek to uncover the strategies social media influencers employ to communicate the drawbacks of automobile reliance, the types of content that resonate most with their audiences, and the overall impact of social media in promoting sustainable mobility options and counter-hegemonic narratives. Interviews will be conducted remotely using Zoom or phone calls, leveraging digital communication tools to facilitate participation from a wide geographic range.

As the concept of automobile supremacy is not widely acknowledged and defined from the perspective of transportation studies or communications the interview guide uses the term "automobile dependency" instead of "automobile supremacy." While I personally consider the latter phrase a more fitting description that incorporates the neo-Gramscian hegemonic perspective into the understanding of automobile influence in North American

cities, this wording is used in the interview guide to prevent confusion among interviewees and carries the same meaning for the context of the interview and analysis.

The inquiries further probe the ability of social media to spotlight underrepresented issues and the translation of online movements into real-world actions. Furthermore, they address the challenges of countering resistance, perceiving the role of social media, and balancing information consumption with mental well-being, all while gauging the progress in altering societal attitudes towards automobile use. Through these questions, the study aims to capture a comprehensive understanding of the dynamic interplay between social media advocacy, public opinion, and the movement towards more sustainable transportation alternatives.

The collected data underwent a thorough analysis to identify recurring themes, unique viewpoints, and patterns that emerge from the interviews. This analysis was qualitative, focusing on the content and meaning of the narratives while also examining the frequency and co-occurrence of specific themes. The analytical process will employ coding techniques using MaxQDA to categorize data, facilitating the identification of significant trends and the extraction of insightful conclusions.

In the research methodology of this study, a two-phase coding strategy will be employed to analyze the qualitative data gathered from semi-structured interviews with prominent social media figures who are advocating for counter-hegemonic narratives against automobile supremacy in the United States. This approach combines open coding and thematic coding to ensure a rigorous and comprehensive thematic analysis of the coded segments in each interview transcript.

By employing semi-structured interviews to gather and analyze the perspectives of social media influencers on counter-hegemonic narratives against automobile dependency, this research aims to contribute to the scholarship on transportation systems, urban planning,

and the role of social media in shaping public opinion. The findings will offer valuable insights into the formation and spread of beliefs challenging auto-centric models, potentially informing future research, policymaking, and practice in transportation and urban studies. Through a comprehensive understanding of these alternative narratives, the study seeks to illuminate pathways for integrating such discourses into broader media and societal conversations, ultimately influencing the future of transportation frameworks and narratives in North America.

3.1 Data Collection and Analysis

The process of data collection took place between February and March 2024. Overall, I sent 92 requests via Instagram and Twitter / X direct messages, and a total of 25 interviews were conducted, yielding a 27% response rate. The interviewees' locations spanned from both coasts, encompassing 20 cities and 14 states. Of the 25 people being interviewed, 15 were men and 10 were women, and all were above the age of 18, having read their informed consent statement (Appendix B) and participated in the study to answer interview questions voluntarily. Their information, including their first name (pseudonyms), gender, primary social media platforms, and location where they live are listed in the table below. A sample transcript of the interview can be found in Appendix C.

Codes are assigned to the answers of 15 questions given by interviewees, and eventually 11 codes are assigned. The two-rounded codes are then organized into three separate sets, each set answering one of the research questions. The sets will then be subject to a thematic analysis. The results section will organize and summarize recurring themes across different interviews and use the themes to answer the research questions.

Table 1: Data Collection and Analysis

Name	Gender	Primary platform(s)	Location
Participant 1	Male	Twitter / X	Richmond, VA
Participant 2	Female	Instagram	Santa Monica, CA
Participant 3	Male	Instagram	St. Louis, MO
Participant 4	Male	Twitter / X, YouTube	NYC
Participant 5	Male	Twitter / X, Instagram	Los Angeles, CA
Participant 6	Male	Twitter / X	Warren, MI
Participant 7	Male	Instagram	Albany, NY
Participant 8	Male	Twitter / X	NYC
Participant 9	Male	Twitter / X, Instagram	Ottawa, ON
Participant 10	Female	Twitter / X	Redwood City, CA
Participant 11	Male	Twitter / X	Chicago, IL
Participant 12	Male	Instagram, TikTok	Denver, CO
Participant 13	Female	Twitter / X	St. Louis, MO
Participant 14	Female	Twitter / X	Minneapolis, MN
Participant 15	Female	Instagram, Twitter /X, TikTok	Austin, TX
Participant 16	Male	Twitter / X	NYC
Participant 17	Female	Twitter / X	Los Angeles, CA
Participant 18	Female	Twitter / X	Orlando, FL
Participant 19	Female	Twitter / X	Victoria, BC
Participant 20	Male	Instagram	Portland, OR
Participant 21	Male	Instagram	San Francisco, CA
Participant 22	Female	Twitter / X	Alexandria, VA
Participant 23	Male	Instagram, Twitter / X, TikTok	Portland, OR
Participant 24	Female	Instagram	Austin, TX
Participant 25	Male	Twitter / X, Instagram	Hamilton, ON

Thematic analysis, according to Braun and Clarke (2006), is a method for "identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns within data." This method minimally organizes and describes the data set in detail, and is a commonly used, flexible yet systematic strategy to make sense of qualitative data. Using their stated strategy for the analysis of the

transcripts, I first familiarized myself with the interviews by reading them repeatedly and identifying patterns that can be subjects to thematic coding. After the codes are assigned and organized, they will be weaved into the analyzed data to draw interpretations into an analytical narrative that can offer arguments that are aligned with the research objectives. Thematic analysis, as an iterative approach, involves moving back and forth between the entire data set and the themes to ensure a comprehensive and nuanced understanding, ensuring that the analysis is not just a superficial aggregation of data but a deep and thoughtful interpretation.

The theoretical lenses of agenda building, and critical framing will be incorporated during the process of thematic analysis. By applying the concept of agenda building, this analysis will explore how social media content creators make certain aspects of automobile supremacy more salient in the public discourse, effectively determining which facets of the issue garner attention and provoke discussion within their online communities. Critical framing will allow for a nuanced examination of how these content creators not only present issues related to automobile supremacy but also frame them in a way that influences their audience's understanding and attitudes. This aspect of the analysis will focus on identifying the specific frames employed by influencers to challenge the prevailing assumptions around automobile supremacy, examining the thematic structures within their content to understand the underlying messages and the intended emotional or cognitive responses they aim to elicit.

4. Results

4.1 RQ1: How do social media content creators perceive the concept of automobile supremacy, especially in relation to their own experiences living with automobiles?

This question was answered through three different angles, originating from question 1, 2, and 3 in my interview guide (Appendix A). Most social media content creators, during the process of our interviews, have strongly critiqued the state of automobile supremacy in their lived experiences. Such critiques revolve around their constant exposure to automobiles, the dangers and pollution they create, the level of influence created by the automobile industry through lobbying and advertising, as well as a lack of alternative transportation options, including public transit, sidewalks, and bike lanes.

Their negative perception and experience with automobiles, in turn, became the precipice for many of them to engage in creating and promoting alternative transportation content on social media in the first place. Ultimately, their critiques extend beyond individual experiences to encompass a broader societal commentary on the systemic nature of automobile supremacy and its negative consequences for public health, environmental sustainability, and social equity.

4.1.1 Theme 1: Automobiles create lifelong, persistent exposure

The state of automobile supremacy was constructed before our lifetime, which means both me and the interviewees have lived in a state of highly car-centric urban infrastructure throughout their life, which has gravely influenced their own livelihood and their perception of automobiles. The theme of lifelong, persistent influence of the state of automobile supremacy is echoed by every one of the interviewees, which became a focal point of their critique of automobile supremacy on social media.

Most participants lived near and around cars in their entire life, and it was only after having the opportunity of not being dependent on car-based transportation that they began to rethink the transportation system, as well as the role automobiles have played in it. “As I got older, my family moved to further and further out into the excerpts on a rural area where it's even more car dependent,” says Participant 13, “I got a big shock to the system when I was in high school, when I went to a boarding school where I didn't drive it all for 4 years and experience a lot of freedom and mobility. And that was sort of like the start of me, starting to think about the roles that car dependency plays in my individual life. That questioning process got a lot deeper since.”

Being dependent on cars is a condition many interviewees, especially those who grew up in smaller towns and suburbs, were extremely familiar with from a young age. “I don't think there's a way that they haven't impacted my day to day life.” says Participant 14, who has spent most of her life in Minnesota. “I grew up in a very traditional suburb of the Twin Cities and cars were freedom, because cars were the only option. If I wanted to go anywhere, if I wanted to leave my neighborhood to see anything, there was no public transportation. Everything was too far to walk. Biking was unsafe. And so we drove everywhere.”

It was not until she started raising her own family did she understand the importance and benefits of a denser, walkable and bikeable community, but the design of the city of Minneapolis made that difficult to come by. Even choosing to buy a house in one of the most pedestrian and public transit-friendly neighborhoods in the city, as she lamented, “I cannot avoid the threat of cars…cars have impacted literally every part of the design and movement in my city.”

A consequence of the lifelong exposure to automobiles is the impression that they should be the only mode of transportation in every circumstance. “When it comes to everyday lives of most citizens of North America, they've completely dominated their trips

that they choose to travel on very, very short trips when the alternative would be much more, not even easier, but cheaper, environmentally friendly," says Participant 18.

Participant 22, who grew up in central Ohio and now lives in Alexandria, started driving at the age of twelve and has grown up to believe the idea of public transportation as "foreign." While she grew up frustrated with traffic, her initial belief that "a couple of stupid people are the reason why they can't move around quickly" became central to a justification of automobile supremacy that did not change until later in life. Many people she knew in her life in Ohio were either killed or injured due to traffic crashes, but few people she has talked to ever blamed cars themselves as the primary cause of their pain and sorrow. As she now puts it, "the normal narrative" of misbehaving drivers made her and many others "oblivious to the expenses of all of it," which she says is extremely common around those who grew up or lives in rust belt areas.

4.1.2 Theme 2: Automobiles are dangerous and pollutive

The well-known dangers of automobiles, and the level of which such dangers have been normalized and rationalized in the society on a regular basis, has been another recurring theme among interviews, which often used the word "dangerous" and "pollutive" to characterize living with automobiles.

"Cars represent the single most dangerous device I encounter every day of my life," says Participant 16, who lives in New York City. As someone who primarily walks bikes and takes transit for transportation, "everytime I go somewhere, I'm exposed to noise, pollution, air pollution, and physical risk," says Participant 10, who lives in Silicon Valley. For Participant 2, a cyclist who lives in Santa Monica, "they put my life at risk every single day" due to the fear of being hit by cars.

For Participant 19, who walks for most of her daily routine, living at a place with automobile-oriented road design has made her frightened of what could happen to her as a

pedestrian. She has a heightened awareness of the constant presence of cars and unsafe driving behavior as she crosses the street. The threats of traffic crashes, as she puts it, are “on a day to day level because I mostly walk. My entire life experience is just different than it seems for most people, because I’m constantly aware that I could be hit by a car.”

Traffic violence does not impact only those who don’t drive, as a majority of the people killed in traffic crashes are those in cars (Gagliardi, 2024). For Participant 22, who lives near the I-495, seeing the destruction, injury and death of car crashes is a harrowing but not uncommon scene, and she is deeply frustrated with people’s apathy about it. “People think the car deaths are inevitable and the further you go from urban centers, the more they think that way. There’s a huge momentum behind the idea that there's nothing that can be done to solve traffic violence. There's just an oopsy thing that's just inevitable and nobody's fault.”

4.1.3 Theme 3: Automobiles are powerful in their propaganda power

As mentioned in Norton (2008), Conley (2009), Simms (2009) and Wernick (1989), the automobile industry has a strong tendency to market itself by selling a car as the very manifestation of individual freedom, transcending a car far beyond its practical utility. The idea of “freedom” has often been mentioned by interviewees as one of the symbols a car appears to represent, but fails to deliver as a direct result of saturation. In Participant 1’s words, “if I'm looking at the whole scope of my life, they've given me incredible freedom. In other ways, they incredibly limit my freedom.”

However, the symbolism that equates cars to freedom is inseparable from the reality of automobile supremacy. As Participant 14 describes it, “A lot of folks in the US mind that cars equal freedom, cars equal privilege, the ability to access the things that you want to access. Because of the car-centric street design and city design in so many of our cities, it's true that having a car, it gives you access to things that you would have a much harder time

getting access to if you relied on underfunded public transportation…I think that message has stuck into a lot of Americans' brains and has effectively created the world that we live in now."

The message of automobile supremacy is spread not just through propaganda from the industry itself, but by people who use automobiles for their primary, and sometimes only mode of transportation. "So people who primarily and or only drive who are building places where people live, places where people work, places where people go to school. So you have origin and destination, built by people who primarily or only drive," says Participant 12, an artist living in Denver.

The freedom of mobility represented by automobiles are often portrayed in advertisements and commercials, which often features a lone car driving on a closed road with no one else, a reality the vast majority of motorists do not live in. "When you look at the advertisements or car commercials, it's always giving you the feeling of freedom of going from 0 to 60 in several seconds. But in reality, no one really drives like that. Everyone is stuck in traffic. No one goes 0 to 60 to pick up a gallon of milk," says Participant 18, who lives in Orlando.

While it is true that advertising is integral to the automobile industry's ability to shape the dangerous products it sells and interconnect them with individual freedom, it is by no means the only way the industry can shape public opinion. As Participant 9 says, the automobile industry no longer needs to promote and influence public opinion because of how deeply the use of cars has been embedded in people's daily lives. "The political apparatus that ensures a constant demand for cars because of the development pattern is so car centric, so I think the influence that they have, for example, through advertising is fairly minimal compared to the right, how entrenched the political infrastructure is," he says.

Participant 10 puts it in even more bluntly over the contrast between herself and the automobile industry, but argues that the truth is on her side, “The automobile industry has $20 billion a year. I have a Twitter handle, right? But I think that truth is really powerful, like I have the luxury of telling the truth and being really clear about it, like that—the harms are predictable, preventable, and I would say premeditated, like, baked into those models of the Department of Transportation. I think it's so egregious and such a clear violation of good policy that a person who’s trying to work against it doesn't have to invent stuff. It's clear. It's bad, and you have the luxury of just being honest about what’s really going on.”

The interviewees strongly agree that lobbying remains an integral element for automobiles to solidify its manifested image, creating the compulsory consumption that forces people to use automobiles as the only functional means of transportation through its political leverage. “It was all about lobbying, creating laws. It is our ownership like the standard and made anything else kind of subservient to. And where that ended up is that we spent trillions of dollars building these highway systems,” says Participant 8, who lives in New York City. The automotive industry has more political and financial power in the lobbying process than any other industry can hope for. “You never hear about how powerful the bike lobby is,” jokes Participant 4.

“They're so good at what they do. They're true masters of public messaging and controlling the narrative around their product,” says Participant 11, an urban planner who lives in Chicago, who believes the propaganda the industry has used is a narrative that has been accepted by many in the U.S. government, especially the Department of Transportation. “They have the masterful ability to shift blame. They have willing partners in DOTs all across the country here where it's not their deadly product that is to blame. It's driver behavior, which is just aka just human nature, then blaming pedestrians and other road users for their own deaths,” he says.

4.1.4 Theme 4: Automobiles take away access to alternative options

As many interviewees agreed, automobile supremacy removes the right to choose whether or not to coexist with cars, as an automobile-centered infrastructure makes it impossible to not live with cars. Participant 3 has never owned a car, but not driving in Missouri means he is constantly reliant on people who do own a car, despite trying his best to walk, bike and use public transit. “It really shapes the experience of going across town when there is no dedicated bike infrastructure and where you can walk at the block, sometimes without any buildings at all, where you’re almost the lone pedestrian and there’s just cars speeding by.”

When the roads overwhelmingly serve the benefit of automobiles, the lives of those choosing non-automobile travel will tend to be made miserable by the priority that roads give to cars. “The car prohibits, in many ways, making all the other alternative methods more attractive and quick and healthier,” says Participant 4, who has never driven a car and never had a driver’s license.

The false promise of freedom, a central element in the propaganda created by the automobile industry, makes the whole idea a “con,” says Participant 8. “They essentially con the American people into believing that car ownership was imperative to their sense of freedom, to our sense of identity, which is built in this exceptionalism. That's around the idea that we can do, whatever we want. We can go wherever we want whenever we want to. The problem is that it's possible to do with a robust public transit system,” he says.

For Participant 24, who lives in Austin, Texas and shares a car with her husband, frustration with the role cars have played in her life is palpable. Only having one car in a car-centric area means daily coordination due to their different schedules and needs, leading to a complex daily routine, which is only made worse due to a lack of infrastructure and amenities within walking distance. “We're very much mindful that the problem's not with each other.

The problem isn't that we can't afford a second car. We don't want a second car and the design of our city and the lack of alternative options kind of forces us into this situation," she said.

When asked about the state of public transportation in the cities they live in, the most common words that the interviewees use to answer this question are "lackluster," "inadequate," "unreliable" and "inefficient." "When it comes to availability, the roads are open 24/7, but we only have a few 24/7 bus routes. And those are only within the city of Detroit. And they're hourly when it comes to availability of cars. It's they're trying to cover a region of 4 million people with a few hundred buses. It's not going to work," says Participant 6, who lives in Warren, Michigan, a city within the Detroit metropolitan area.

While some areas where the interviewees lived in have a relatively robust and functional public transit system, it is often put into the backdrop and not the primary or recommended mode of transportation for most people. "The infrastructure is very much car oriented, and that is reflected in the amount of parking garages and the number of lanes. So although I live in a very, very walkable bikeable neighborhood, it is still very much visible what the priority is," says Participant 18.

The cities themselves may be easy to navigate with grid-based urban planning, that neither guarantees safety for non-car users, nor does it mean good public transit. Two of the most serious problems that plagued the efficiency and adequacy of public transit are funding and the representation of it in the country, both of them are direct results of a car-centric political and economic system. In their words, the decline of public transit due to funding is a result of state and local departments of transportation putting their priorities upon automobiles.

As Participant 12 describes Denver, "In the urban core, I would just say there is a system. I would just say that with, I would say some baseline, there's a baseline system that

has buses going east, west, and buses going north, south. But we have so much disconnect from, I would say the primary like what still feels so primary is its people driving to take the train into the city. And that isn't necessarily a bad thing. It's just all the other access points, zoning, land use, sidewalk, wheelchair access, people that can't drive a car, people that live near transit, that would take transit, but they can't get there safely."

Participant 24, who describes Texas as "the least pro-transit state," summarizes the disrepair of public transportation thusly: "It's just like, the only people who do this are the people who don't have any other options. So it just reinforces our culture. Because if you make it so crappy, then no one will use it. So everyone feels like, I don't have an option because public transit is so bad, but then we should invest in public transit. Everyone's like, why invest in public transit? Nobody uses it."

However, there are some exceptions to the rule. In Albany, New York, Participant 7 finds his city's public transit experience "really robust," for which he thanked the efficient management of the Capital District Transportation Authority, as well as the city planning of Albany that predates the proliferation of automobiles. "Our downtowns have very dense connectivity. So there's a lot of benefits that come along with that," he says, "In particular, its downtown neighborhoods are very dense places that again predate automobiles. So I think the basic infrastructure that exists here is extremely workable. It is very tailored to getting around the city very easily."

4.2 RQ2: How do social media content creators frame their stories to generate narratives to challenge the assumptions around automobile supremacy?

This question was answered through question 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 9 in my interview guide (Appendix A). The content creators have focused on using personal stories and describing community experiences to elevate the narratives that exist outside of the dominant structure of automobile supremacy, and it has become a mechanism to connect them better

with people who often do not have equal voices and representation in the realm of public opinion. As a result of elevating personal experiences, the true harm and problem with automobile supremacy, such as its impact on public health and its alienation of alternative transportation options gets highlighted in the process. These narratives serve as a potent tool for advocating change and fostering empathy, particularly among those not directly affected by the issues at hand.

Social media platforms give people a way to make connections happen without distance, which makes the ability to form counternarratives easier and more likely without restraint. While some progress has been made as a result of social media-induced protests and campaigns, not every creator believes that this can be translated into actual policy changes. These creators also do not have a unified idea over what type of content resonates the best with their target audiences, or even if there is a "target audience" that is designed to be more engaged with their content.

4.2.1 Theme 5: Personal and community experience matters

Many interviewees emphasized using personal stories and community voices, either from themselves or people they interact and converse with, as consequential in their content strategy on social media. They recognize that personal narratives and firsthand accounts can humanize abstract issues, making the consequences of car-centric policies more tangible and relatable. "My philosophy personally is that a lot of the times the conversations around urbanism and general policy discussions are way too academic, way too loaded with jargon and too devoid of connections to people's actual lived experience. It's all about the data and best practices and the things that most people aren't just like thinking about," argues Participant 8, who works as a community organizer for an urbanism organization in New York City.

For some people, who may not have started their social media accounts with the intention of specifically highlighting their experience of automotive supremacy, they soon found themselves finding strong resonance in the process of spreading their experiences on social media. Participant 2 first decided to prop up a camera for her personal safety. “I know I just wanted it as evidence for if or when I get in a hit and run,” she contends. However, as she documents the dangerous driving actions that threaten her personal safety, “I realized that I had a lot of content that shows a lot of the terrible things that drivers do to other people that are not thought about enough or not highlighted enough. And so I’m using it to kind of show the anxiety out there.”

Some others, on the other hand, changed their own mind on thinking about automobile supremacy because of their personal experiences. Participant 25, who worked as an advertising executive for automobile clients, had a transformative experience that led to renewed clarity when he started to take his children to school on a bike in Hamilton, Ontario. As he gets more involved, he becomes frustrated with the discourse of this topic and how much it has been maligned for something that should be simple. “What really kind of set me off was just the way the discussion was being had in the mainstream and the push for the significance locally on some simple things, simple, safe street type measures to make it a little bit better for kids to go to school. I couldn't believe that was problematic for people,” he says.

Participant 19, who is 5’5’’, is around the average height of an adult Canadian woman. A common content strategy she employs on Twitter / X is posting pictures of herself next to heavy-duty pickup trucks to juxtapose the difference in height, and the level of danger due to the blind spot caused by the high elevation of the truck’s cockpit. “What makes my content different is just the stark contrast between my height versus the truck. I’m 5 foot 5 and I think a lot of adult women are not. Even if I was super short, I think a lot of people who

really don't have anything to say except negative things, they'll just say just grow taller, but it doesn't work that way."

By spotlighting the voices of individuals and communities, especially those disproportionately affected, such as BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and people of color), elderly, the disabled and lower-income groups, content creators aim to build empathy and awareness among their audience. "We try to get in the community and elevate their voices rather than it being about our own voices. And we especially focus on the historic and current and ongoing harms to BIPOC communities, lower-income communities that have been disproportionately impacted... showing photos, having video interviews with real people who have antobeen impacted," says Participant 14, who argues that these real experiences can resonate with people who are not part of their own group by giving them a direct opportunity to realize the harm of automobile supremacy.

Participant 15 runs a social media page that opposes the expansion of the I-35 in Austin. She believes in emphasizing personal experiences raises awareness to exhibit the harm such expansion would be done to those most disproportionately impacted by it, "Historically, when it comes specifically to I-35 in Austin, when it was first proposed to cut through Austin, it cut off the majority of our Black and Latino populations and on the East Side. So like that was way back when it first started and back, then social media was not a thing." Now with the help of social media, "we're talking about giving access to those platforms for people who traditionally have been left out, I feel like right now that we're revisiting the project. Social media is allowing those people who have been affected, who still see those impacts in their community on the east side. They have a 100% way more of a voice because of social media. I think that's a big influence because they are the sole source of what information is getting out there to other people."

For Participant 4, who works as a filmmaker, having a conversation while walking, biking or using public transportation instead of driving cars greatly reduces the distance between him and people, making their communication richer and more meaningful. “It's easier to document if you’re not behind the wheel of a car, you're not driving 20, 30 miles an hour. You can talk to people. So you can see the same, you’ll come by the same place over and over.”

Participant 12, who uses his platforms to primarily highlight the threat of automobiles against pedestrians, believes elevating the lived experience of them to increase empathy and awareness. “As an artist, and a storyteller, I just wanted to experiment with how I can create the vantage point of being in your body as a human being whether we all are drivers or not a driver, it doesn't matter. At all points were outside of a car moving through spaces. What are these lived, felt nuances that I think just so easily get missed when so many decision making bodies are driving and bypassing what this actually feels like.”

4.2.2 Theme 6: Highlighting the problem and the existence of alternatives

This theme is directly tied to Theme 5, as personal experiences lead many of the content creators to understand the problem with automobile supremacy and reconsider the necessity of alternative transportation options. The content creators interviewed articulate a clear strategy for using social media to contest automobile supremacy by highlighting the problem both by discussing how the existence of automobile supremacy overshadowed the potential for change, as well as the existing danger of automobile supremacy to personal health. Many accounts on social media that post this form of content choose to use humor to reach their goal of more audiences, both for demographic reasons and for making this issue easier for them to understand.

For Participant 8, identifying problems is central to promoting his organization’s message, because “that’s simply a good way to talk about it.” Once the messaging becomes

problem-oriented, the content strategy becomes clear and straightforward for them. “ I like taking the issue directly to people, and interviewing them, asking them questions about their experience, and then connecting what the problems that they recognize, connecting the problems that they can articulate to, the solutions that we’re advocating for and bridging that gap between the people on the ground who are waiting for a bus that doesn't show up or sitting on a bus that stuck in traffic. Here's how we can solve that problem. Here's who you should call to tell them your story and implore them to enact these solutions.”

Giving people their agency is crucial while strategizing content for Participant 8. “It’s about making sure that the voice, the people who are voicing those concerns, the people who are voicing those solutions are the people who are riding the transit, not necessarily like the experts who are looking down from above and saying, here's the problem, here's the solution. Here's the proof of all of it,” he says. If the opinions are only given to the “experts,” people will lose the personal connection to the problem of automobile supremacy. “People intuitively know all of these things. People intuitively know that sitting in car traffic sucks. People intuitively know that if they had reliable transit near them, they would take it. But I think a lot of times these conversations are being had in a tone in a voice is way too serious in a way too academic and alienates a lot of like the people that we need to organize, to let them believe that they have a stake in this and have the ability to do something about it, for them to be able to say these things they want to advocate exactly. It's typical. Make it so it’s okay to attract the average rider.”

For Participant 10, who works in the public health industry, highlighting the consequences of automobile supremacy, especially its negative impact to public health, can help to educate others on social media the true costs of automobile supremacy and to advocate for change in transportation policies and infrastructure. “I think the first thing I want people to really understand is that automobile dependence is an absolute climate catastrophe

and public health scourge. The blunt force trauma deaths alone have been the leading cause of child death by bar for decades and actually were surpassed by guns in 2020, not because roads got safer, but because gun violence got worse by so much. But they kill more people out the back end than they do out the front. There are more deaths for pm 2.5 from tile tailpipe emissions, tire particles and brakes."

As mentioned in Theme 4, the issue with automobile supremacy is not only the physical and health harm caused by crashes and emissions, but the deprivation of alternative modes of transportation. "Walking is actually the base unit of transportation that is what humans were made to do. And we evolved to walk 5 to 10 kilometers a day. And so when you supplant that at the population level, it has a vast array of public health implications which have not been measured or accounted for. So just the tip of the iceberg is huge, but there is this vast amount of other public health damage that hasn't even been measured," says Participant 10.

Highlighting the transportation situation and accessing the situation in their own ways as a personal approach has made the problems even more salient for some social media content creators. A lot of Participant 6's content on Twitter / X are photos he took on his phone over the places he had traveled, but he often provides his own opinion over what was done well and what wasn't, highlighting effective urban planning or transportation solutions as well as critiquing areas where cities fall short, such as the potential removal of a highway in Detroit that might not lead to the promised improvements. "I'm trying to use it to share and bring to light all these issues and things that are being done, right and wrong, as much as possible," he explains.

A key method many content creators have used to attract audiences and criticize automobile supremacy is through humor and satire. For people who have not engaged with issues in this angle in the past, as Participant 9 thinks, humor brings them closer to the topic.

“Humor is a great way to break the seriousness of this issue, right? I think that's where a lot of my success comes on social media, especially where the humor and the more deterring content can bring in new audiences, which then can be exposed to the more serious content, the more information-based stuff.”

Similarly, Participant 15 also uses satire as one of the approaches her group employs while discussing the issue of I-35 expansion, which is related to the audience she wants to attract. “I have a lot of fun using the social media aspect to kind of shed some light on the issue that is cars. Basically, my main strategy is just satire and humor, because when you're making content and putting it on social media, people aren't really there for serious things. But for a lot of the time, especially my target audience, is people my age, in their early 20s. People just want something that is entertaining, that makes sense, and easily accessible.”

Once the problem has been highlighted using humor and satire, the problem becomes much clearer for people who have not imagined such a possibility. “I used to spotlight buffoonery, mock, ridicule the same people that are doing terrible things and just point it out,” says Participant 1, “It's like the old fable of the emperor's new clothes. I want people to be able to see what's right in front of them that they don't yet see. Once it's revealed, they're like, ‘the emperor is not wearing any clothes!’”

Participant 20, who currently runs an anonymous account that dedicates the entirety of its feed in creating memes that make fun of drivers, cars and the state of automobile supremacy after his social media pages were spammed by drivers disapproving his content, shares a nuanced view over the necessity in using humor as his approach. “The 10,000 followers I have now was kind of unintended at first. I made it just like a troll sockpuppet account to like mess with like dumb drivers who went and messed with my favorite pages,” he says, “my future career is about having these bad faith arguments in person. I am not going to then go home and then talk with these people on social media like this meme page.”

What he plans to do in the future, however, does not mean he wants to give up his current meme-based approach in creating content: “You like some legitimate content, having the feeling like these are so big solutions to a problem, right? But then you click into my page, and you like, this guy makes dumb memes. Chad versus Soyjacks, how drivers suck. It's hilarious.”

4.2.3 Theme 7: Social media’s role in creating counternarratives is powerful yet controversial

Creators are largely optimistic about how the ways in which social media can drive successful counter-narratives and challenge the justification and normalization of automobile supremacy. They noted that social media often brings attention to previously underrepresented issues and encourages them to get involved in campaigns and causes. The best way to measure the needle being pushed, as many creators contend, will be on how policy makers have reacted to the posts on social media. As social media content generates traction, it could sometimes lead to measurable changes, although the complete effectiveness of it is difficult to quantify and a subject of disagreement among different creators.

The power to create that counternarrative, Participant 1 believes, rests in the power of the users and their content, instead of the platforms themselves. “It's not so much the platform itself. It's how people use them. There will always be a percentage of people on different topics who want to be told what to think. That's just human nature. They will trust people in their circles to guide them and tell them what the things are.” At the same time, there are also “critical thinkers” who, he argues, help these people to think. “You'll also have the opportunity to sort of shine light into something and say ‘no, this is how it works’; you can take those nuggets and articulate them in such a way that it gets amplified,” he says.

Participant 4, who has started posting car-free content before social media websites were widespread, recalls one of the more successful counternarratives that has manifested in

measurable change is the increase of protected bike lanes across American cities. In New York City, where cyclists have a disproportionately high death rate, he shot a video of dozens of people holding hands as “human bollards” to protect cyclists at the unprotected bike lane at 2nd Avenue in Manhattan as a form of protest against the lack of protection in 2017. “Flash for about 6 months later, it happened on 5th avenue, 400 people turned out because they saw my video. And the amazing thing is, they just closed down the lanes, and there were so many people riding. It was so much fun. We took over 5th avenue seven or eight blocks,” he says. As a result of these movements, bike ridership has increased, and New York Mayor Eric Adams has released a five year plan that will massively expand the construction of protected bike lanes.

Other content creators living in New York City also believe social media advocacy is voicing opinions and establishing a new narrative, which is a more accurate reflection of the reality in this city. “The majority of NYC households do not own a car, but that group is underrepresented in terms of political power,” says Participant 16, “progressive transportation planners take to social media to give voice to these people and their transport causes.”

For Participant 11, who has often attended street safety protests and campaigns after seeing them on social media, one of the most heart-wrenching incidents was when he saw the news that three kids on bicycles were killed in the span of two weeks from car crashes around the same area in Chicago. As a father of young children, he was deeply saddened by the event. “It really impacted me in a very deep and personal way. My daughter at the time was the same exact age as these kids that were getting killed. And they died doing things that she does. It was so personal,” he says, which reaffirmed his conviction to continue his advocacy work.

Participant 1 believes social media gives regular people an access directly to policy makers that would not have been possible without such a venue. “People who would have

been just kicked to the curb can access anybody," he says, "they can access a city manager, they can access city councilors, they can access a consultant, they can access me. They can access people who have either influence or experiences or something to teach, some other anecdotes to share, pictures to share, case studies to share."

Another reason for counternarratives to be more successful on social media, he indicates, is the abject failure of legacy media outlets to narratively advocate for the rights of those suffering from automobile supremacy. "There was such a monopoly on what gets shared and how it's presented in the narrative structure," he points out, "even to this day, you see this happening with how preventable crashes are reported as 'accidents,' like it's a 'whoops-a-daisy' that somebody drove 50 miles an hour in the city."

Creative measures that can be better employed with the help of social media have led to politicians changing their minds on issues in ways that they have not thought of in the past. In Denver, a major arterial called Sheridan Boulevard is notoriously unsafe for pedestrians, especially those who use wheelchairs. Near one of the bus stations on the boulevard, the lack of sidewalks leaves wheelchair marks and footprints in the dirt as people are forced to walk on the soil to get between the nearby grocery store to the station. After Participant 12 posted a 25-second video on TikTok lamenting the situation, it soon went viral and led to the review of this area from the city government and local Department of Transportation officials. "Literally the next day, I got an email from the DOT, basically saying we had hundreds of submissions coming into our contact about this. We want to connect with you to come up with solutions."

What happened the next day was jaw-dropping. "Several directors from the DOT came out and experienced this for the first time. The engineer who was the main engineer for that quarter for 20 years. It was his first time in 20 years, he managed the lead engineer on this whole roadway. It's his first time to walk to this place," recalls Participant 12, "I said,

‘Do you know it's insane?’ That's the piece that’s so revealing every time where it's trying not to shame people. I don't like shaming people. I don't like making them feel bad, but it is important to be very unapologetic about the harm.” Even though the local DOT has since improved their practice, in his words, “they are still so far from where they could be. Far, far, far. And they frustrate me.”

Participant 8 is optimistic that the popularity of social media will generate more positive traction and people having their voices heard, which becomes a crucial mechanism for them to engage with constituents. “As elected officials become younger, there are ones that get it. And there are ones that are really able to capitalize on that very well. It's almost a requirement now, they’ll have staff looking at these comments and opinions. The discourse is consistently online and the politicians are responding to folks and making sure they're on top of what's happening out there, it's almost necessary nowadays.”

Others are skeptical as to whether advocacy on social media alone can have the proper and positive effect in building a counternarrative that will move the needle. “There might sometimes, I guess, broadly, when it's legislative season and bills are getting introduced and then debated and voted on, it's a way to kind of learn about what traffic safety bills are out there and being discussed and kind of the nuances within them. That can be interesting to understand. Sometimes there are some people who are able to really do a good job of explaining the built history or things that you might not necessarily get the details of in the bill text, kind of like some of the political discussions around bills, but doesn’t directly translate to change,” says Participant 17, who works as a policy analyst at a multimodal mobility advocacy group in Los Angeles.

Participant 20 believes that such change is dependent upon the use of social media among the people who will have the power to reform. “It depends on how active your city council people are on social media. Some are more active than others, but the ones that are

active, you can most definitely get some good leverage, a good like back and forth with some of these people on social media for sure," he says, while encouraging public officials to engage with social media discourses, as it is more straightforward and accessible to people's real thoughts than bureaucratic jargon and avoiding responsibility. "You read letters and you read and you listen to voicemails, right? And you have an intern who looks through it all and then gives you a memo on it, right? It's nonsense, the politicians should have a direct line of like, hey, like I wanna talk to you, and then, like ping, there's this problem, ping, there's these problems, there's those coming from people directly. It is like you should just be like them on their phone and they shouldn't be able to turn it off."

While some creators believe the discourse can change as a result of social media voices, others do not. "For social media posts to lead to actual actions, I absolutely think they have to be targeted. It's not simple. You have to be really targeted in your messaging. For example, when I share a story like the play date that my kid had and what I learned about the family, that's not a specific call to action," says Participant 14, "But when there are opportunities to take some of those stories and put them into a call to action, I think really amazing things can happen."

Participant 3, who only started publishing content regularly recently, believes that potential does not directly translate to tangible actions and changes. "I think they have the potential for me but I don't think they always do. And that's one thing that I am wary of when it comes to sorting out our peers running different accounts on Instagram," he says when discussing if his posts are a measurement for changing ideas. "It's one element of the whole thing. It's maybe something that does involve the pleasure, verbal activities of engaging with people in that way, through visuals, through data, through a meaningful quote. But it's not going to represent the greatest portion of our involvement in the movement around creating better streets, better public transit, and better bicycle infrastructure."

While Participant 19 believes that certain approaches on social media can lead people to think differently, it does not always mean their attitude or behavior will change as a result of it. “I still think that it's probably tough for people to change, because I think if you don't understand it, it seems like you still require a bit of knowledge about what people like to hear,” she says, “someone that has really great things to say about me might still not have my voice heard. But I'd say I think it's really beneficial for them to know about it.”

4.2.4 Theme 8: Visual content and emotional narratives attract engagement

There isn't a one-size-fits-all approach that guarantees universal success on social media platforms. While many agree that visuals are the most likely rewarded element in watching content on social media, it alone is not enough to create a meaningful narrative, and they do not often contain the same amount and depth and seriousness the content creators are originally looking for. On the other hand, many creators have also pointed out the public discourse on social media is not usually driven by facts alone, and focusing on it does not always yield the most amount of positive engagement.

Participant 2’s approach, which puts her personal experience on the forefront on a regular basis, is emphatic on the importance of visuals. “Just showing what I'm going through, what I'm seeing every day.” However, she also finds personal anecdotes important for constructing a compelling narrative: “I have noticed that if I show just one interaction, that's something that might happen to me all the time, but showing it, highlighting it, also gets people’s attention.” Participant 4, whose social media channels often depict him interviewing people while walking, riding bikes, or using public transit, agrees that visuals are very important on social media, and the mechanism of social media apps that reward fast reaction and viewing is behind it, “Algorithms and TikTok. If you don't say anything, the first 3 or 4 seconds, you are moving on to the next person. That has changed a lot of things.”

Participant 25 believes he can use social media as the primary method to highlight his frustration with the normalization of automobile supremacy, and he tries to employ the skills he learned from advertising into it through visual elements and graphic design, “I am trying to do that in a way that I hope is reliable in some instances across the board, do it in ways that are ideally visually impacting it, as trying to take some of the tools from the advertising world, and applying it into this kind of complete street space.” He also stressed the importance of not getting too into the technical weeds when discussing a topic on social media, which partially influenced his decision to prioritize visual content, “From a communications perspective, our stuff doesn't connect emotionally to some people. We are generally too data driven, and it doesn't create compelling stories. I don't think it shifts the narrative as much as something that really connects on a more of a human level.”

Participant 7 also agrees that visuals are crucial in building a story for the account he operates with other people, which aims at rerouting the I-787 highway in downtown Albany to let people living in this area gain direct access to greenspace and the Hudson River. One of the repeated themes the account uses to promote the idea is to show the before and after pictures over the construction of the highway and the overpass in downtown Albany, and how much it has restricted people’s access to the area. “We've come up with renderings of what removing the highway could look like, trying to be non-prescriptive, but saying like, hey, there is actually a future in this. It is feasible," he says, “Showing people that kind of stuff is really important, like it's suddenly not such a ridiculous thing when you can see green space at the river or you can see a boulevard, which is what our proposal is.”

Participant 23, a Portland, Oregon school teacher who posts videos of himself driving “bike buses” where young students line up together and create a formation as they ride to school, instead of letting their parents drive them, believes visuals and personal anecdotes are deeply connected on his video posts. “I use it to communicate why it's important, how it

impacts the students. Sharing bike bus videos or photos of walking school buses that I've done before has been incredibly impactful and powerful."

Participant 11 argues that social media platforms, such as Twitter / X, actively encourage people to use visual content to get more engagement, which is often frustrating because visuals do not contain the same amount of depth, but get much more likes than the more thought-out things involving research and statistics he posts. "If I don't post a picture with my tweet, nobody looks at it. It actually is kind of frustrating. This will happen where I will spend 5 hours working on content for a post. And it's like kind of more in the weeds, more data forward. It will end up getting 80 likes. I'll just like fire off a meme in 30 seconds. And it'll get 10,000 likes," he complains.

Participant 24 believes that personal anecdotes work more persuasively in her approach to discuss the intricate nature of American cities and how they have been impacted by automobiles, as this approach gives people a way to access and understand that alternatives do actually exist, "there's definitely an exposure bias problem, and the conversation about transit shows that people just have never really been exposed to other options."

For Participant 1, his approach is more multifaceted. "One thing that I am over the years, I've been fascinated with propaganda and advertising and the things that advertisers have known about cars. So over 100 years the facts alone do not move people to action. Facts alone or data alone is not enough to persuade people to do anything. There have to be stories that are wrapped up in that. And it could be personal anecdotes. It could be absurd if the type doesn't necessarily matter for different stories, different types for different audiences," he says, but that does not mean the argument themselves should stray from relying on facts, "It has to be rooted in real information, real data, for example, missing middle housing or how

intersections are analyzed, whatever your topic is dealing with the built environment related to personal travel, get to start from a place of facts."

For Participant 13, there is no "strategy" at all in terms of what resonates best. As someone who works in an online publication that regularly writes stories related to transportation and uses social media to publish her stories, use of Twitter / X is mostly about the amplification of the topics she writes, which are often against the idea of automobile supremacy. In her words, "my core job day to day is not social media."

However, that does not mean social media has no use for her to tell her story, which are often research-oriented but personal narratives-driven. "Narrative is what resonates with our audience that is grounded in accessible reinterpretations of research. A lot of what I do is take things that academics and policy makers have put out there for each other, and I translate it into formats, either on social or in one in my journalism work. That is what I'd like to say is emotional, actionable, and urgent for everyday people."

Participant 21's Instagram page, on the other hand, is rather unique among other people, as it does not feature him in person, but as a hub that reposts news articles from across the world over the benefit of reducing automobiles in urban spaces. "My account doesn't really get into personal anecdotes," he says, "It's really about reposting news from around the world. Lots of different sources that talk about either that either talk about things that are related to car free or car lite."

While he initially thought his account would only be narrowly talking about a specific car-free lifestyle, he soon realized the goalpost has changed as his followers have increased, and people have actually had an interest despite the news often uses a dry, pedantic tone to discuss the issue of automobile dependency. "I have been very encouraged by the fact that a lot of people really get a lot of the policy angles," he says, "a lot of the posts about pretty nerdy policy issues are the ones that are the most popular. I'm glad about that because I didn't

expect that from the beginning." As a result of the content curation strategy, his Instagram account now has become a notable guiding resource for people who want to learn more about alternative transportation.

Having large engagements, however, does not directly translate to resonating with their target audience for every content creator. Despite having thousands of followers, Participant 19 does not believe most of her followers are in good faith or follow her to engage with her content positively. "The visual content of me standing in front of trucks, if it gets big enough, a lot of the audience are people that really disagree with me and are quickly reactionary, just kind of bullies," she laments, "so I would say its my target audience, but then the other and then I think that a large part of a large part of the audience is like, are people that are already kind of aware and feel the same way?"

4.3 RQ3: How do social media content creators perceive the necessity of using social media itself for the building of their agenda?

This question was answered through question 10, 11, 12, 13, 14 and 15 in my interview guide (Appendix A). While they acknowledge its importance in allowing direct public conversation and outreach, most social media content creators also recognize that social media algorithms and user habits can contribute to polarization, misinformation, and the creation of echo chambers where they primarily reach those already knowledgeable and supportive of their cause. The creators understand that amassing social media followers alone does not directly translate to real-world change. They emphasize the need for offline work, such as campaigns and community engagement, to track tangible successes in advancing their agenda. Social media is seen as a vital tool for learning, connection, and outreach, but it must be supplemented with on-the-ground efforts to create lasting impact.

In terms of mental health, the content creators stress the importance of considering mental health when using social media for advocacy. Setting boundaries, avoiding

unproductive arguments, taking breaks, and balancing one's online persona with real-life interactions are crucial in preventing burnout and maintaining a sustainable, long-term commitment to their cause.

4.3.1 Theme 9: Social media can both inform and polarize

When answering the question over whether or not they believe social media lead to a more informed public or contribute to misinformation and polarization, the vast majority of the content creators answered “both.” The interviewees have pointed out a variety of reasons for their views on the irreplaceably positive connections made possible only by social media, as well as why they are concerned with the current state of public discourse on social media as a result of increasing polarization and misinformation. They consider algorithms on social media platforms to be a great threat over people’s information environment, but some also point out that people’s own habits would also shape the content they receive.

Social media’s impact is heavily influenced by the algorithms that curate content, which can intensify one's existing interests or biases, whether they be constructive or conspiratorial, justifying pre-existing biases. “it depends on what the algorithm is feeding you. Let’s say you're part of transit Twitter. If we do projects and policy articles and great stuff, if you're part of right wing conspiracy theory Twitter, so it intensifies whatever it is,” says Participant 10, “you are already interested in or thinking about amplifies and intensifies.” Participant 2 also agrees with this sentiment, believing that the result of social media use is dependent upon the consumption habits of the users themselves, but polarizing and false information are very common. “It definitely can do both depending on who's using it and what message they're sharing. People see a lot of crazy things that are inaccurate there,” she says.

One of the reasons why social media can lead to both results is the complexity of the platform’s public influence, as well as who will be more likely curated to the content and

how they will react to said content. Participant 22's advocacy work has unfortunately led to a vicious trolling and harassment campaign that forced her to temporarily lock her account. Recalling that experience, she sighs: "For me, I don't care. Did it get rid of the bad ones? That's good enough. And I'm back in public now. For other people, that's quite traumatic and I respect that, but not everybody is comfortable with being out there."

However, she still acknowledges the necessity of using social media for better outreach in a way other platforms would not be able to do. "But at the same time, how else can I have a direct conversation with major organizations in public? There's no other mechanism for that. I don't have the personal resources to set up a $10 million nonprofit to write press releases and all that stuff. But I can tweet," she says, "I can tag the mayor in the city and people of larger organizations nationally. And then when enough people re-share those things, you do actually get attention. It's kind of the only way currently for the little people to actually collaborate quickly."

As the handle for Participant 20's Instagram account has the word "cars" in it, he joked about the "both-sides" content about automobiles the algorithm has been feeding him. "The algorithm sees cars in my name and gives me a bunch of car content, right? All that crap. I see all that crap, like I see all the dumb like truck videos of dudes being like look at my truck," he laughs, "but I also see all the dash cam videos and all the bad driver failed videos and stuff too, which is always funny."

Some interviewees believe that with the right amount and method of content curation, the effect of polarization would naturally decrease. "If you have narrow interests, you use social media as a tool to engage with. And it can be really powerful. I agree for me, Twitter has been a really great tool to not only build my audience, but to learn and to connect with people who have turned into colleagues and friends, but that's because of how I use my Twitter," says Participant 11, who warns that his experience is not universally applicable.

The progress to inform audiences, as Participant 21 says, is gradual. “I do think that it leads to more education, awareness. It's a long term process, though. I know, just I compare things between the U.S., the bay area, and my hometown in Croatia, where educational levels are a lot lower. People in Croatia are not nearly as media savvy,” he explains, “people in the U.S. are much more aware, educated, informed about transportation issues than they are in a place like Croatia. I think social media has a big role in that, and there is information for sure. I think in the end it is a long term process. In the end people learn, people have to get both sides of an issue, and eventually they'll make up their minds. Eventually most people will reach the right conclusion.”

While eager to advocate for alternative transportation in general, Participant 23’s sole focus on his social media feed about the idea of bike buses have made polarizing attacks a lot less common than others, as it provided an alternative option without directly offending or hurting anyone. “I think people see bike bus videos and they think at least that place is possible. Ideally, they could start putting pieces together to see how it could be possible where they live,” he says, “we don't necessarily like to see videos of parents posting about long school car lines and how miserable they are about it, I feel like if more people saw what the alternative is.”

Some, on the other hand, are more pessimistic over the dangers in the integrity of the information environment because of the uncontrolled misinformation, especially on the platform Twitter / X. “I think most people are not on the same social media sites, the ones they are on are isolated among people they already agree with,” says Participant 17, “I think this is why misinformation can spread very easily.”

Participant 13 believes that social media would inevitably lead to polarization and misinformation as a result of the algorithm, saying that it is happening “not because of what people put on there,” but “of the way that social media algorithms prioritize incendiary

content.” She cautions that we should not find a fall guy to blame for why such a problem exists, but that “the bigger concern is that social media engineers things that make them feel upset and make them engage with that.” “Being upset can be a good thing, it can be joyful, it can be funny, whatever,” she warns, “but it often makes them angry,” hence causing the increased polarization.

Ultimately, the result of the algorithm’s catalyzation means the accounts need to carefully calibrate to manage their content and the people who view them, and that is usually outside of the control of the content creators themselves. “The people who don't want it gone are not following us,” says Participant 7, “I would like to think that we cross our t’s, we dot our i’s. We make sure that everything is correct before we put it up. But I think that misinformation is part of that discourse. It's something I've certainly thought about, but it's hard to, I think, find a better way to deal with it because there certainly are groups that do that.”

Many social media content creators acknowledge it will be challenging to change the status quo. “We already know the algorithms are set up to create bubbles of information. That's a known datum. The problem with how it all goes, I have no idea how to legislate that out of existence,” says Participant 5, “I would tackle that piece of legislation if I could because I do work on legislation. But the point is, we already know the answer to what the algorithm does to us.”

Participant 18 believes that the best way to keep oneself informed in social media is to establish some “ground truths,” even if encountering an opposing view. As an academic, “I look at the journal at its quality. I look at the papers that are being rigorously reviewed and fellow researchers. So that's how I established my ground truth. And then when someone tries to present an opposing view, I don't take it personally, because this is not my opinion. This is what has been studied and confirmed.” A tangible sense of reality will be crucial in this

process, “where do you ground that reality? Because you can challenge opinions. You cannot challenge scientific evidence exactly. In the era of misinformation, you have to be very clear on defining and that comes probably from individual to individual on what you believe in and what sources you believe in.”

4.3.2 Theme 10: Social media is a bubble, using it alone is not enough to change

The words “bubble” and “echo chamber” have repeatedly emerged as a recurring theme during the course of interviews. Many social media content creators acknowledge that they are situated within a bubble and that it has impacted the ability of outreach, which they believe is partially caused by the way social media works, such as algorithms and recommendations, corresponding to Theme 9. People within this circle are interacting with those who already have the knowledge on this topic and are already determined in the cause.

“A lot of times there's an echo chamber in the public transit space where a lot of people who are involved in public transit, road safety, housing, they all support that. You can call it urbanist twitter. There's a lot of like circle talking where there's a lot of people that are in the space that agree that already know,” says Participant 6, warning the danger of not reaching out, “as far as trying to reach out beyond that, your best spaces are either having a very strong pose to get shared widely or commenting within a like a regional thread on things. And that's when you kind of kick the hornet's nest. And there's a lot of misinformation, a lot of people who are uninformed. There's also a lot of push back from small minded people who just don't have awareness or don't know or have actual real experience in public transportation.”

In Participant 5’s words, “We don't focus on solutions, we focus on problems. And social media is part of that.” His organization, based in Los Angeles, have heavily promoted the successful passage of Measure HLA, which obligates the city to incorporate enhancements like expanded sidewalks, as well as designated lanes for bicycles and buses,

whenever undertaking street upgrades spanning a minimum of one-eighth of a mile (Linton, 2024). “But just realize there's a disadvantage to social media, which is the algorithms. And the algorithms create islands of divisiveness,” he says, “it’s not actually as effective as people think, because it's a closed, aa relatively close circle, small circle of people that are sharing that same content amongst each other. And I see the same likes and the same people and they're sharing. ”

In his view, the impact social media can have on meaningful change is still limited and not as strong as traditional forms of media like billboards. For their Measure HLA campaign, statistics have shown that far more impressions were created from traditional sources than social media sources. “The total social media impressions that we generated are 1 million impressions. The number of media impressions in all other media is 1.255 billion,” he says, while doubting if the measure would pass only with the existence of social media, “The amount of times people are now talking about the issues of needing bike lanes and needing safer pedestrian and ability for safer needs to be safer for pedestrians and things like that. It's not that it's changing massively overnight, not just through social media.”

Polarizing, negative comments are not always a bad thing, and it can sometimes be seized as an opportunity. “There are times when I realize that things that I share are going well beyond the echo chamber that sometimes exists on social media. I love that having folks come in with innocent questions, or even sometimes mean questions or mean statements tells me that I’m reaching folks outside the folks that I want to reach,” says Participant 14, “that feels effective. I also have literally received direct messages from folks being like. I never thought about the things that you're bringing up. Thank you for sharing this, like I've learned from this, and it's making me rethink some things. So I know that it can be effective. ”

Having followers on social media alone does not mean that social media can be a positive and informative experience for everyone. While many people learn about knowledge

regarding issues such as urbanism and alternative transportation on social media, they can also be exposed to hateful content, Participant 8 warns. “Every issue, every stance in society has their own bubble where they feel like they're growing, they feel like it's catching on,” he says, “for every urbanist that's online with 1 million followers, and getting hundreds of thousands of views and growing, there’s some white supremacist who's also growing. It feels like exponential growth for them, and they also feel like they're catching on.”

Participant 9, who works as the social media operator for a parking reform organization, believes that social media can still be used to measure tangible change. Recently, a local group in Austin has collaborated with other content creators on YouTube to discuss the issue of parking reform, and it generated enough traction for the city council to abolish mandatory parking minimums. “Especially in the last 2 years, a lot of their growth can be attributed to the the specific issues they really did dedicate a huge amount of the resources, really upping their game when it comes to social media and collaborations with other YouTubers,” he says, “ I think it really showed that they really can have great effects through social media.”

Despite having over 27,000 followers on Twitter / X, Participant 25 is well aware that it does not directly translate to change. “I hope I am getting to know different people here and there, but I also know that we live in a bubble in social media,” he says, “when those opportunities come to do work for street safety campaigns or quiet work outside of social media, those are things that you can track as changes.”

Participant 3 is also worried over the potential implications of creating an echo chamber and only receiving supportive comments, which is why he also believes that social media alone is not enough to push meaningful change. “When I hear from people that they've changed their behavior or they thought about it in a new way, I see that as a sign of success,” he says, “but I think what is yet to be seen is specific changes on the ground in our city that

we're advocating for. We should try to measure the smallest successes and keep trying to build up to the bigger ones where we have more car-free spaces in general."

4.3.3 Theme 11: Mental health consideration is important when using social media

Balancing social media use and their own mental well-being is a priority among many content creators and becomes an important aspect in their perceptions of the role social media platforms play in building their agenda. Many social media content creators admit it is challenging to keep the balance between staying informed on social media and protecting their own mental well being. To help themselves with the situation and prevent it from mental strain, these creators have developed a variety of coping mechanisms and methods controlling their usage, including setting boundaries, selective engagement, limiting usage time and focusing on specific issues and solutions, or even avoiding social media unless necessary. Most agree that avoiding having low quality, unnecessary arguments with bad faith accounts have been important for them to stay positive on social media.

Participant 13 considers her Twitter / X page her "work account," where she usually only posts content related to the articles she wrote. " I only look at doing work and I do not look at them outside of my normal working hours from 9 to 5," she says, "because it is so propulsive." She considers staying too much on social media not only damaging to her mental health, but also a hindrance to her work, " I write 4 to 6 articles a week. I would never get anything done during my workday if I spent a lot of time on it."

Participant 12 believes a skill a popular creator on social media needs to possess is the ability to avoid engaging in bad faith arguments. "When you hit a certain number of followers, you just have to learn how to identify when somebody is arguing in bad faith and just being a terrible person. I'm not engaging with this person," he says. "When people are just battering you and hitting you with all kinds of names, calling, and making silly

assumptions about you," says Participant 4, "I will stop engaging with them. That's how I keep myself healthy."

A useful method of avoiding engaging with low quality arguments, for Participant 1, is to mute those he knows are not trying to engage positively. "I have thick skin and I enjoy banter on this stuff. I enjoy controversial exchanges in this context about built environments and earth, but I also have limits," he says, " if the same accounts are gonna come at me, just basically with mindless attacks, I mute them."

For some, running separate accounts between their real life and their professional work page brings them back to reality, and coming to senses that they are both producers and consumers of social media content. "I have the separation of I run this account for my organization, and I also have my personal accounts," says Participant 12, "honestly, having both of those at the same time, makes me more aware of like how much i'm on content they're like on social media and how much like content consuming is not only am I making it. I'm so consumed by it. As someone who's trying to reach audiences, I am an audience for other people, more aware of what's happening."

Participant 22 believes staying solutions-oriented made her experience on social media much more relaxing. "I follow people who talk about solutions. So there is the problem. The problem is horrifying, but I really have always been," she says. Instead of only spending time critiquing automobile supremacy on social media and following their relatively negative energy, she tries to follow those who are looking for ideas to change the situation instead. "On any topic in the issue, I'm not following the people who are just talking about who to blame all the time. There are people to blame for all of our problems," she says, "I am really interested in people who actually make things happen versus the people who stress me out are the ones who are very philosophical and very negative."

For many, staying with their family has become important to dissociate themselves from social media engagement, but it's not without challenges. "When I'm at home with my kids, it can be challenging to put my phone away," says Participant 23, "if I'm not engaging in the most positive ways or ways that I think represent me, I try to do it next door away from my children." "Try to be present with my family when my kids are around and not getting sucked into things," Participant 14 points out, while also pointing out there is no point in engaging in bad-faith arguments, "is it actually a worthwhile use of my time? Or am I just arguing with someone who is not actually open to listening?"

Despite their organization heavily using social media to promote and strategize content, Participant 9 does not use a smartphone. "I barely intentionally designed my day around social media," he says, despite his day job being a social media curator; "when I am on social media, it's like for a very restricted amount of time. And so I have an intentional focus on only doing what was called active social media use. When you actually create content and write stuff, I avoid as best as I can the passive engagement where I scroll and read other bad tweets. I very rarely become frustrated with social media, just because im not I dont put myself in a situation where I'm consuming a lot of material passively."

Taking breaks, as Participant 20 sees it, is important to not be enveloped by the negative emotions on social media. "When I take a break, I will still post and I will still have interactions with my fans, but I won't like to do anything beyond that," he says, "that makes it a lot easier for me to moderate, because a people don't usually follow to say something and be if they do follow to say something to me, I can find them easily and then like take care of them from there."

Some content creators, however, do not consider using social media to be something that would hurt their mental health because of their conviction in their causes. "I feel like if I only get insults and death wishes, I find it kind of fun, and it doesn't seem to really hurt my

mental or emotional health," says Participant 10, "I think I've just learned that low quality content are always going to be there, but I don't worry about them."

Personal interactions outside of social media, says Participant 2, is vital in keeping the balance and not letting the social media avatar take over the real person, instead of only engaging with arguments. "I've been trying to use social media to gather people to go on community rights. It really helps to just meet those people and have a fun interaction with them and be like, hey, we care about the same things," she says, "in that situation, we're both humans, and we're having a good time, and we just want to fix things and make them better for everyone."

5. Discussion

5.1 Key Findings

This study employs thematic analysis under the theoretical lenses of agenda building and critical framing, and analyzed the semi-structured interview transcripts of 25 anti-automobile supremacy social media content creators in North America on various media sharing and microblogging platforms. As the results to the three research questions have shown, this study reveals several key insights that contribute to not just our understanding to the issue of transportation and urban landscape, but also a new understanding of the role social media plays in challenging dominant narratives and fostering social change.

The interviewed content creators offered concrete and comprehensive critiques of that they believe to be the faults of the system of automobile supremacy, further enriching the idea that automobiles and the system designed around its prioritization act agents in a neo-Gramscian hegemonic framework that perpetuate the cycle of compulsory consumption while minimizing the consequences. Reshaping the perception and imagery created by the system of automobile supremacy step by step became a crucial strategy in the works of the creators to increase awareness on the dangers, thus framing the counternarrative in their favor, as demonstrated in the four themes summarized in Research Question 1.

To do so, the content creators shared their lived experiences with the pervasive and harmful effects of automobile supremacy, which serves as a powerful catalyst for their advocacy work on social media. Their firsthand accounts of the dangers, pollution, and lack of alternative transportation options underscore the urgent need for change and lend credibility to their counternarratives. By sharing these personal stories and elevating community voices, especially those of marginalized groups, the content creators humanize the abstract issues surrounding automobile supremacy, making them more relatable and emotionally resonant for their audiences.

The interviewees' narratives are meant to explicitly reframe the public perception of automobiles; they highlight that the dominance of automobiles in urban spaces is not merely a matter of transportation choices or infrastructure, but rather a complex web of social, economic, political, and cultural factors that shape the very fabric of our cities and communities. To further demonstrate that reframing automobiles is possible through change, many interviewees have personally participated in resolving automobile supremacy's negative consequences with practical actions.

To counteract automobile supremacy's longtime narrative dominance in North American public discourse, social media content creators have used a variety of methods to share their stories to construct a cohesive narrative agenda with community outreach. A major finding from Research Question 2 is that the most prominent approach is that content creators build their agenda specifically to utilize the functionalities of social media to share personal stories, community voices, highlighting the consequences, and pointing out alternative options as critiques to build their narrative agenda.

The content creators' advocacy works extend beyond simply criticizing cars themselves to encompass a wide range of interconnected issues from both their own and their communities' voices. These issues include public health, environmental sustainability, street safety, public transit, social equity, urban infrastructure, and community well-being. By highlighting the far-reaching impacts of automobile supremacy, from the dangers and pollution it creates to the lack of alternative transportation options and the disproportionate harm it inflicts upon marginalized communities, the content creators underscore the need for a holistic, systemic approach to challenging the dominant paradigm of automobile supremacy.

Content strategy on social media platforms is essential for agenda building, especially surrounding anti-hegemonic counternarratives. The creators employ a variety of approaches

that emphasize visual appeal and emotional storytelling to attract more engagement from people outside of their likeminded circles.

Visual content, such as photos and videos, is widely recognized as an effective means of capturing attention and conveying complex ideas in an accessible manner. However, the creators also emphasize the importance of supplementing visuals with personal anecdotes, research-based insights, and calls to action to create a more comprehensive and persuasive message. Humor and satire emerge as popular tools for exposing the absurdities of automobile supremacy and engaging audiences who might otherwise be resistant to more serious content.

Another key finding based on the interviews is the widespread acknowledgement among these creators of the double-edged nature of social media, as themes summarized based on Research Question 3 indicate. While social media platform users can build a meaningful anti-hegemonic agenda, the creators believe the negative consequences in polarizing the public discourse should not be ignored. While social media algorithms can intensify users' existing interests and biases, potentially leading to echo chambers and the spread of misinformation, the interviewees also highlight the unique opportunities social media provides for direct public conversation, learning, and outreach. They stress the importance of curating one's online environment, engaging in good faith discussions, and grounding their content in factual information to mitigate the negative effects of polarization.

Despite the potential of social media to amplify counternarratives and foster connections, the content creators recognize that online advocacy alone is insufficient to effect tangible change. They emphasize the need to translate social media engagement into offline actions, such as campaigns, community organizing, and policy advocacy. While amassing followers and generating impactful content can raise awareness and shift public discourse, the ultimate measure of success lies in the implementation of concrete solutions that prioritize

alternative transportation options and challenge the dominance of automobiles in urban spaces.

The interviewees also shed light on the mental health implications of using social media for advocacy work. They highlight the importance of setting boundaries, avoiding unproductive arguments, and balancing online engagement with real-life interactions to prevent burnout and maintain a sustainable, long-term commitment to their cause. By developing coping mechanisms and strategies for selective engagement, the content creators demonstrate the need for self-care and resilience in the face of the unique challenges posed by social media advocacy.

This study has approached understanding the issue of automobile supremacy by directly approaching the people who voiced their opinions and shared stories on social media, which is sometimes lacking in social media analysis research. By engaging with the content creators themselves, this study provides a unique perspective on their motivations, strategies, and experiences in using social media for advocacy. This approach allows for a more nuanced understanding of the challenges and opportunities they face in building their online presence and influence, as well as the personal and emotional dimensions of their work. In filling this void, this study contributes to social media analysis by showing the value of incorporating the voices and insights of content creators in research on online advocacy and social change.

By examining the experiences and strategies of content creators advocating against automobile supremacy, this study provides valuable insights into the potential and limitations of social media as a tool for agenda building and critical framing. The findings underscore the importance of integrating online and offline advocacy efforts, as well as the need for further research into the mental health implications of social media activism.

5.2 Limitations and Future Research

This study is written as a baseline for future research into the world of social media content related to transportation and the theoretical framework of automobile supremacy. While this study provides valuable insights into the experiences and strategies of social media content creators advocating against automobile supremacy, it is important to acknowledge its limitations and identify areas for future research.

One limitation is the study's reliance on self-reported data from interviews. While the interviewees provided detailed and thoughtful responses, their perspectives may be subject to biases or limitations in self-awareness. Future research could employ additional data collection methods, such as content analysis of social media posts or participant observation of online interactions, to triangulate findings and provide a more objective assessment of the impact and effectiveness of social media advocacy against automobile supremacy.

The study's focus on North America, particularly the United States, limits the generalizability of its findings to other cultural and geographic contexts. Researchers have found that American cities are much less accessible with public transportation and walkable spaces and deeply oriented in car use on a global scale, which means people's perception of automobiles and their usage of social media as a method of alternative transportation advocacy in non-American spaces would likely be different as a result of this fundamental difference (Wu et al., 2021). Future research could explore the dynamics of social media advocacy against automobile supremacy in different regions of the world, taking into account varying levels of automobile dependence, public transportation infrastructure, and cultural attitudes towards alternative modes of transportation.

This study's touches upon the mental health implications of using social media for advocacy work warrants further investigation. Future research could delve deeper into the specific challenges and stressors faced by content creators, as well as the coping strategies

and support systems that enable them to maintain their well-being and effectiveness over time. Such research could inform the development of resources and best practices for individuals engaging in social media activism.

The study highlights the need for further research into the translation of online advocacy into offline actions and policy changes. Future research could examine case studies of successful social media campaigns that have led to tangible changes in transportation policies and infrastructure, identifying key factors and best practices for bridging the gap between online engagement and real-world impact.

As the findings of this study underscore the importance of personal storytelling, visual content, and community engagement in generating compelling counternarratives that challenge the assumptions and power structures underlying automobile supremacy. As we look to the future, it is clear that the struggle against automobile supremacy will require sustained, multifaceted efforts that bridge online and offline spheres. Social media content creators have a vital role to play in this process, by continuing to raise awareness, spark conversations, and inspire action towards more equitable, sustainable, and people-centered urban mobility systems.

Appendices

Appendix A: Interview Guide

1. How have automobiles impacted your day-to-day life?
2. How do you see the automobile industry maintaining its influence, especially in comparison to alternative modes of transportation?
3. How would you describe the availability and efficiency of public transportation in your area in relation to automobile use?
4. In what ways are you utilizing social media to highlight the downsides of automobile dependency and advocate for more sustainable mobility options?
5. What kind of messaging content best resonates with your target audience - statistics, visuals, personal anecdotes, etc?
6. How do you perceive the role of social media in amplifying voices that traditionally have had limited access to mainstream media platforms?
7. Can you share an example of a time when social media helped bring attention to an issue or cause that was previously underrepresented?
8. Can you discuss a moment when you were motivated to take action or join a movement because of something you saw on social media?
9. How do you think social media platforms enable narratives that counter established power structures?
10. In your experience, do online social media movements usually translate into tangible offline actions? Why or why not?
11. What strategies have you found useful for countering opposing narratives or resistance on social media?
12. How do you respond constructively to dissenting views?

13. In your opinion, does the wide outreach of social media generally lead to a more informed public, or does it contribute to misinformation and polarization?
14. How do you navigate the balance between staying informed via social media and ensuring your mental well-being?
15. How might you measure progress or impact in shifting societal perspectives on automobile dependency through your social media presence and campaigns?

Appendix B: Oral informed consent statement

My name is Allen Huang, and I am a second-year master's Student at Media Studies at Syracuse University's S. I. Newhouse School of Public Communications. I am inviting you to participate in a research study.

I am interested in learning about how people use social media platforms to create counter narratives against automobile dependency in the United States. You will be asked to participate in an interview to answer some questions. This will take approximately _30-45_ minutes of your time. These interviews will be audio-visually recorded.

Involvement in the study is voluntary. This means you can choose whether to participate and that you may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

If you have any questions, concerns or complaints about the research please contact me at xhuang49@syr.edu, or my advisor, Dr. Anne Osborne at anosborn@syr.edu.

Please verbally affirm that you are 18 years of age or older, and you wish to participate in this research study.

Appendix C: Interview Transcript Sample: Interview with Participant 1

Allen Huang

How are you doing?

Participant 1

I'm doing very good.

Allen Huang

So first question. How have automobiles impacted your day to day life?

Participant 1

That's a giant question. In some ways, if I'm looking at the whole scope of my life, they've given me incredible freedom. In other ways, they incredibly limit my freedom. That's how they've impacted my life. They give me, over the years, point-to-point transportation where otherwise I would not have had transportation. That's the positive. And the negative is when everybody else is doing the same thing, point-to-point transportation at the same time, things get jammed up. And also, people get more aggressive, and then you get crashes increasing and all these things that I deal with - traffic safety, Vision Zero, and all that sort of thing.

So yeah, they've had a profound impact on my life, for good or for evil. One of my favorite quotes is from Thomas Sowell, the economist, who says, "There are no solutions, only trade-offs." And transportation is one of those topics where there are trade-offs.

So personal cars have a lot of... I don't like to even say pros and cons. I just say trade-offs. Like, if you have an emergency and you've got to get to the hospital, you can get there. If you need to get to the grocery store and carry a heavy load, you can get there. At the same time, there are lots of resources, the impact on mental health, physical health, safety.

Allen Huang

How do you see the car industry, the automobile industry, maintaining its influence, especially in comparison to alternative modes of transportation?

Participant 1

There are a lot of different reasons why they're able to maintain dominance. Others have done great work - I know you're familiar with some of the people that have written about the history of motordom and how it came to be, just documenting the influence of the corporate world with politicians. There's plenty to find out there. Peter Norton is one of my favorites on that subject. I think the other thing, so there's that aspect, and along with it once they had their grip established, since lobbying is a thing in the United States... The automotive industry is a $1 trillion industry, and part of the way they are able to continue being a $1 trillion industry is through spending billions of dollars on lobbying. And lobbying is simply paying for power and influence. So because that industry is so wealthy, just like pharmaceuticals, they pay to influence policy. That's just the nature of it. So whether you love them or hate them, that's how the game is played.

And one of the aspects that allows them to maintain power is not just simply "Big Road," if you want to call it that. It's land use planning, which is a local issue. It's when you plan, require, or mandate at the local level that land uses be just one use at a time, like everybody lives in this zone, works in that zone over here, eats in that zone over there. You're forcing everyone to have the single-occupant vehicle, basically a personal car, as the only viable way to get around.

So that, I think, over decades, is a huge factor in how they're able to maintain dominance, more so than buying influence with the builders of roads. It's the influence at the local level of how we're restricted in our day-to-day lives.

It's also the reason why I'm so optimistic about the future, why I'm so hopeful about the future. Because since it's at a local level, it doesn't matter who's president, it doesn't matter what your U.S. Congress people think about an issue. You don't have to persuade millions of

people. You're talking about three or five people at the local level to convince. Look, we can plan our land use differently so that we don't have to rely on an automobile.

Allen Huang

So how would you describe the availability and efficiency of public transportation in your area compared to automobile use?

Participant 1

I'm fortunate in my area; I'm in Richmond, Virginia. Richmond, the city proper, has decent coverage with public transportation. But like every other place in the US that does, or most places that do have coverage, even with the coverage, there's still so much that needs to be done because the streets that the buses run on are prioritized for personal car travel. And so buses are stuck in the same traffic that everybody else is stuck in. The routes, the timing, is not reliable for a lot of them. It's the same complaints that you would hear anywhere in the USA that people say, "I can't trust that the bus is gonna get me where I need to go when I need to get there." And to a large part, that's because - it's a cultural thing - people are so used to car traffic being able to get zero delay, minimize delay, pick up speed at the expense of transit.

Allen Huang

This will be a very interesting question. In what ways are you using social media to highlight the down sides of automobile dependency and advocate for more sustainable mobility options?

Participant 1

It's one of my happy places, specifically Twitter and LinkedIn. Those are my two favorites, and I use them in slightly different ways, same content though, because... Most people watch it. I like this stuff about the built environment; it fascinates me. Twitter I use to spotlight buffoonery, mock, ridicule the same people that are doing terrible things and just point it out. It's like the old fable of the emperor's new clothes. I want people to be able to see what's right in front of them that they don't yet see.

Once it's revealed, they're like, "The emperor isn't wearing any clothes." Or, I guess another better analogy is probably The Matrix. Like, once you see the code, you see it everywhere. Once you see, for example, these issues of land use planning, these issues of single-use

zoning and the destruction that causes on the landscape, and how it forces people from being able to do stuff with their... Their home is forced... It prevents people from having a smaller house. It requires a large house on one standard lot. When you see that stuff, you start to see it everywhere.

And so I use social media to point these things out. I also use it to connect with people because the internet is amazing. I've made so many great internet friends that have later become, I would call them, sometimes "in real life" friends. But even if we don't meet in person, having connections is important.

Allen Huang

What kind of messaging content best resonates with your target audience? Do you think it's statistics, visuals, personal anecdotes, or others?

Participant 1

It's a blend of all these things. So one thing that I am... Over the years, I've been fascinated with propaganda and advertising, and something that advertisers have known for over 100 years is that facts alone do not move people to action. Facts alone or data alone is not enough to persuade people to do anything. There have to be stories that are wrapped up in that. And it could be personal anecdotes, it could be absurd stories. The type doesn't necessarily matter; different stories, different types for different audiences.

It has to be rooted in real information, real data. For example, missing middle housing or how intersections are analyzed. Whatever your topic is, dealing with the built environment related to personal travel, you have to start from a place of facts.

And then when you highlight buffoonery, for example, you take those facts and you present them in a way that is either uplifting and joyful and gets people rallied in that sort of sense, like tugging on their positive emotions, or tug on their negative emotions and say, "This

should outrage you." Traffic safety, for example, Vision Zero goals... These are preventable crashes. It should outrage you that people continue to lose life and limb on public streets.

Allen Huang

So how do you perceive the role of social media in amplifying voices that traditionally had limited access to mainstream media platforms?

Participant 1

Here is the transcription with some minor corrections for clarity:

I'm very bullish on it. And this is another thing that gives me hope. As much awfulness as is out there on social media sites, specifically Twitter again, people who would have been just kicked to the curb can access anybody. They can access a city manager, they can access city councilors, they can access a consultant, they can access me. They can access people who have either influence or experiences or something to teach, some other anecdotes to share, pictures to share, case studies to share.

These are things that just being aware of this stuff is something that social media makes possible.

And the fact that the sort of legacy media outlets are falling by the wayside, I think, is frankly fantastic for information sharing because there was such a monopoly on what gets shared and how it's presented in the narrative structure. Even to this day, you see this happening with how preventable crashes are reported as "accidents," like it's a "whoops-a-daisy" that somebody drove 50 miles an hour.

Allen Huang

Yeah, it's definitely a framing issue. So can you discuss a moment when you are motivated to take action or join a movement because of something you saw on social media?

Participant 1

Some... I don't know about something that I saw, because I'm so targeted in the content that I do like. Everything that I am sharing on it... I don't use social media as a "Here's what I had for dinner. Here's a picture of a duck I saw in my neighborhood." I use it specifically around the built environment, how... Because I wanna... I'm interested in how we move around, how we get from here to there, how to make delightful, healthy neighborhoods.

So I'm always... There are times that I'll see something that motivates me to try a different thing. If I see something, for example, I see somebody else's propaganda and I go, "That's a good idea. I want to take that idea and run with it." Or I see somebody's quote and I think, "That quote gives me an idea for a story. I'll run with it." I wanna be with a person or one of the people... There are many. I wanna be one of the people who is motivating others to make change.

Allen Huang

Yeah, so can you share an example of a time when social media brought attention to an issue that you felt like was previously underrepresented?

Participant 1

I think missing middle housing is a great one right now. It is on fire.

That's probably a terrible thought.

Allen Huang

I understand.

Participant 1

It's the kind of thing that people... People just have enormous... They had no idea that it's against the law to do things like have a small house on a piece of property, or that it's against the law to convert a shed to an apartment, or that it's against the law for your grandmother to come live with you and give you rent. Like, there are so many things that if you put it in plain

language that's simple enough for a child to understand, but it's real, it's based on data, people freak out. They're like, "You gotta be kidding me. It's illegal to do this."

And this is why you're starting to see the missing middle movement transcend politics or traditional politics in the sense of red versus blue. Because both parties, for different reasons, are realizing this stuff sucks for humans, regardless of what political games they may or may not play.

Allen Huang

Yeah, exactly. That's how I've been feeling about this the whole time. How do you think social media platforms create narratives that fight against established power structures?

Participant 1

It's not so much the platform itself. It's how people use them. And there will always be, there will always be a percentage of people, I don't know... And I have no idea what this percentage is. It's greater than... It's greater than zero, though, who needs to be... They just, on different topics, want to be told what to think. And that's just human nature. They will trust people in their circles to guide them and tell them what the things are.

Then there are other people who are critical thinkers about issues. This is a benefit. One downside is that you'll see a kind of mob mentality about anything. You'll just see people piling on any topic, just regurgitating information that may or may not be true or may not make any sense.

But then you'll also have the opportunity to sort of shine light into something and say, "No, here's what this means." And you can take those nuggets and articulate them in such a way that it gets amplified.

Allen Huang

So in your experience, do you think online social media movements can translate into tangible, offline actions?

Participant 1

Yeah, definitely. Again, with the missing middle housing, that's one where you're seeing people show up to meetings, in-person meetings about land use, that they never would have gone to before. More people are, I'll say, small-scale developers, but I like to call them... I didn't come up with it, but I like to call them "housing providers," not big corporations, not like BlackRock or something like that, but just a regular person who maybe, when they were into real estate, purchased a home, does some construction, converts it into a duplex.

And then they realize they're breaking the law by making a duplex out of a single-family house.

And then you're seeing a lot of this happen where people are discovering the process of development and review of traffic studies and what's necessary, what's required of you by the local government agencies by doing. And then they're sharing these things on social media. It's rallying people who get fired up, like, "This is awful. You gotta make a change." And then, again, like I said before, they're local issues. So then they go, "How can I fix this?" There's only five people on the council, or seven or nine, or whatever it is. So they show up to these meetings and say, "Local leaders, you've got to change. This is ridiculous that you have... You've outlawed front yard businesses, you've outlawed duplexes, you've outlawed accessory dwelling units, you're requiring..." And then on the transportation front, "You're requiring us to build parking for car travel. We don't want people to drive here. We want people to walk here, ride bikes here."

And so that's all this kind of stuff in the urbanism world. It's very quickly moving from just social media rants to in-real-life action.

Allen Huang

Yes, I've been seeing that with the congestion pricing and daylighting laws and stuff like that. So what strategies have you found useful in countering opposing narratives or resistance on social media?

Participant 1

One of my favorite resources that I point people to, it makes them uncomfortable, but I'll do it anyway, is Saul Alinsky's book "Rules for Radicals." You can... It upsets people because whether they consider themselves left or right, he is just... The fact that he is saying the word "radicals," like, "I want to train you to be a radical," back in the '60s and '70s where there was a whole lot more violence on streets than we're experiencing today in protests and that sort of thing.

But he goes through these different strategies, 13 specific strategies of how to be an influential radical. And you can apply these to any movement. It could be social reform, it could be land use policy, it could be transportation policy, it could be any issue. But what's fantastic about that is that it takes human nature and understanding of human nature, and then it helps you be persuasive and understand when to engage someone and when to not engage someone.

So, for example, I said at the beginning of this conversation about how I use social media sometimes to mock and ridicule people. And one of his rules is about that, is how to use mockery. Because that's an important thing, that if somebody's idea or a policy is just causing so much harm for no reason, then point that out, shame that thing. So that people are laughing at it and scoffing at it. So that's one resource.

Allen Huang

So how do you respond constructively to views you disagree with to dissenting views?

Participant 1

Sometimes there is... I can't do mind reading, so I can't know if somebody has good faith or bad faith, but they have good intentions when they're asking me questions or when they're criticizing. So I will typically, if it's in person, then I will be even more patient. But if it's online, I'll typically give one or two chances for a person to demonstrate that they truly want to know why a thing should work.

So for example, traffic calming. Why is speed management for saving lives? And they may push back... They may just, like, for example, roundabouts. They may hate roundabouts. So I'm not gonna discard them because they dislike intersection treatment. But if their motivation is, it's really human flourishing, to protect people by any mode of travel, I'll be able to see that very quickly in how they respond to me. That's a case where I will directly go back and forth and help somebody see, "Here's how I've got to this point. I believe this thing to be a good infrastructure idea."

Other times, somebody will come at me and I'll see very quickly, this person is not coming at me in good faith. I'm not gonna respond directly. I may take that thing that they said and use it, like amplifying it to shame their idea, not them as a person, but look at this idea so that you can see just how ridiculous it is.

Allen Huang

So in your opinion, does the wide outreach of social media generally lead to a more informed public? Or does it contribute to misinformation? And polarization?

Participant 1

It's not the platform itself, but overall, it is a net good, it is a net positive. The more information that we have access to, the better. One of the things in the US that people misunderstand constantly is freedom of speech. And the whole purpose of freedom of speech to begin with was freedom of uncomfortable speech, dissenting views. And so that's very

important. The hard part is when you have access to all information everywhere, it gets harder. It takes more work to figure out what's not right, what is a gray area. And that takes effort.

But if the alternative is what we had just pre-social media, where you had to physically walk to a library or probably drive to the library and know what to research and then find that reference material in the library, that would take months for just little topics. Like speed management, for example. How do I design a neighborhood to calm down traffic? It could take me months to figure that out. But now I have such quick access, and I can very quickly vet sources and references and see what other people are saying about these things. I may not come to the correct conclusion, but it's so much easier with all the information out there, if I'm motivated to find the truth, to get to the truth.

And so I would never want to put guardrails on these things. I want people to have access so that they can find the truth.

Allen Huang

I think that is the best approach to this kind of stuff. So how do you navigate the balance between staying informed on social media and measuring ensuring your own mental wellbeing? Because everybody can experience information overload and stuff?

Participant 1

That is a great question and something that I tell people. And I follow this. I get on Twitter as an example. I use the mute feature liberally, and I tell people this all the time. Like, if I have thick skin and I enjoy banter on this stuff, I enjoy controversial exchanges in this context about built environments and earth, but I also have limits. So if the same accounts are gonna come at me, just basically with mindless attacks, I mute them.

And then from time to time, I will undo something just to see what somebody's replying to this thing, but I can't see what the original tweet was. And sometimes, then I'll go, "Right.

This is why I have them muted." So that I... I wanna live a joyful life. I don't wanna be down all the time. So muting, blocking, whatever you want, don't feel any shame in that. In fact, it's the opposite. You should feel proud, like, "I'm using the tool as it was intended."

So I use lists. I use... I subscribe to people's newsletters on Substack. Like, I am very deliberate in how I consume my information. And then when it comes to the exchanges on social media, I'm not interested in having a downer conversation. Exactly.

Allen Huang

I think that's right. So one last question before we go, how may you measure progress or impact in shifting social perspectives on this issue of automobile supremacy through your social media presence and campaigns?

Participant 1

That's a good question. I know also, as an individual, one way to measure these things is just feedback that I get. So something like being invited to speak more, being hired to do projects for writing for people, speaking for them, filming a documentary. There are things like that I can measure and say, "Because of social media, I was able to connect with people, broadcast the thing and then do this, like make work, find people, find clients, that sort of thing, be invited to speak and teach other people these things."

So at a very small scale, I can measure that. Broader, I think you can track a lot of these topics like the conversation around level of service as a way to measure intersection design, induced demand, which is, can you... If you keep adding lanes, will it get rid of traffic? These are wonky kinds of topics that social media is helping people get to. And I think it's hard to measure on a grand scale, like nationwide in the US, how exactly it's making change or how quickly it's making change. But I think all of these topics, the shifts are gonna come in two ways. I'm not the first person to say this, but it's slowly, then suddenly. Like before long, we're gonna realize everybody's making fun of the level of service. Nobody's using the

level of service. No state DOT is justifying their widening project with level of service anymore. They can't do it. That's what I really hope happens.

Allen Huang

Let's really hope that will happen in more places. Thank you so much for this interview. Thank you so much for squeezing your time. I know you are very busy. So this is great. It's been good.

References

Barberá, P. (2020). Social Media, Echo Chambers, and Political Polarization. In J. A. Tucker & N. Persily (Eds.), *Social Media and Democracy: The State of the Field, Prospects for Reform* (pp. 34–55). essay, Cambridge University Press.

Barthes, R. (1972). *Mythologies*. Hill and Wang.

Bates, T. R. (1975). Gramsci and the Theory of Hegemony. *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 36(2), 351–366. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.2307/2708933

Bellis, R., Osborne, B., & Davis, S. L. (2019). *Repair Priorities*. Transport for America. https://t4america.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Repair-Priorities-2019.pdf

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, *3*(2), 77–101. https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa

Bronner, M. E. (1996). The mother of battles: Confronting the implications of automobile dependence in the United States. *Population and Environment*, *18*(5), 489–507. https://doi.org/10.1007/bf02208910

Brown, J. (2005). A tale of two visions: Harland Bartholomew, Robert Moses, and the development of the American Freeway. *Journal of Planning History*, *4*(1), 3–32. https://doi.org/10.1177/1538513204272856

Buehler, R. (2014, February 4). *9 reasons the U.S. ended up so much more car-dependent than Europe*. Bloomberg.com. https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2014-02-04/9-reasons-the-u-s-ended-up-so-much-more-car-dependent-than-europe

Carnahan, D., Hao, Q., & Yan, X. S. (2019). Framing Methodology: A Critical Review. *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics*.

Choo, S., & Mokhtarian, P. L. (2004). What Type of Vehicle Do People Drive? The Role of Attitude and Lifestyle in Influencing Vehicle Type Choice. *Transportation Research Part A: Policy and Practice*, 38(3), 201-222.

Conger, K. (2023, August 3). *So what do we call Twitter now anyway?*. The New York Times. https://www.nytimes.com/2023/08/03/technology/twitter-x-tweets-elon-musk.html

Conley, J. (2009). Automobiles Advertisements: The Magical and the Mundane. In J. Conley & A. Mclaren (Eds.), *Car troubles: Critical studies of automobility and auto-mobility* (pp. 37–57). essay, Ashgate.

Cooper, R. (2019, June 7). Against Car Supremacy. *The Week*. https://theweek.com/articles/845442/against-car-supremacy

Davis, M. (1997). "How Eden Lost Its Garden: A Political History of the Los Angeles Landscape." In *The City: Los Angeles and Urban Theory at the End of the Twentieth Century*, edited by Allen Scott and Edward Soja, 160-185. University of California Press.

Entman, R. M. (1993). Framing: Toward clarification of a fractured paradigm. *Journal of Communication*, *43*(4), 51–58. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.1993.tb01304.x

EPA. (2023, June). Fast Facts on Transportation Greenhouse Gas Emissions. *Environmental Protection Agency*. https://www.epa.gov/greenvehicles/fast-facts-transportation-greenhouse-gas-emissions

Fernández-Zubieta, A., Guevara, J. A., Caballero Roldan, R., & Robles, J. M. (2023). Digital activism masked—the Fridays for Future Movement and the "Global Day of Climate Action": Testing social function and framing typologies of claims on Twitter. *Social Sciences*, *12*(12), 1–24. https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci12120676

Filion, P. (2018). Enduring features of the North American suburb: Built form, automobile orientation, suburban culture and political mobilization. *Urban Planning*, *3*(4), 4–14. https://doi.org/10.17645/up.v3i4.1684

Gagliardi, M. (2024, April 4). *Traffic deaths topped 40,000 last year as NHTSA looks to reduce distracted driving*. NBCNews.com. https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/traffic-deaths-topped-40000-last-year-nhtsa-looks-reduce-distracted-dr-rcna145818

Gaultney, I. B., Sherron, T., & Boden, C. (2022). Political polarization, misinformation, and Media Literacy. *Journal of Media Literacy Education*, *14*(1), 59–81. https://doi.org/10.23860/jmle-2022-14-1-5

Geels, F. W. (2005). The Transition from Horse-Drawn Carriages to Automobiles in American Urban Passenger Transportation (1860–1930). *Technological Transitions and System Innovations*, 445–476. https://doi.org/10.4337/9781845424596.00010

Gillespie, T. (2018). *Custodians of the internet: Platforms, content moderation, and the hidden decisions that shape social media*. Yale University Press.

Gitlin, T. (1980). *The whole world is watching: Mass media in the Making & Unmaking of the new left*. University of California Press.

Goddard, T., Ralph, K., Thigpen, C. G., & Iacobucci, E. (2019). Does news coverage of traffic crashes affect perceived blame and preferred solutions? evidence from an experiment. *Transportation Research Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, *3*, 1–7. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.trip.2019.100073

Haidt, J. (2024). *The anxious generation: How the great rewiring of childhood is causing an epidemic of mental illness*. Penguin Press, an imprint of Penguin Random House LLC.

Hallinan, B., Scharlach, R., & Shifman, L. (2021). Beyond neutrality: Conceptualizing platform values. *Communication Theory*, *32*(2), 201–222. https://doi.org/10.1093/ct/qtab008

Hasegawa, K. (2022, October 13). *Fridays for future: A Social Movements Perspective*. Global Dialogue, Magazine of International Sociology Association. https://globaldialogue.isa-sociology.org/articles/fridays-for-future-a-social-movements-perspective

Hemphill, L., Culotta, A., & Heston, M. (2013). Framing in social media: How the US Congress uses Twitter hashtags to frame political issues. *SSRN Electronic Journal*, 1–30. https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2317335.

Herrmann, C., Rhein, S., & Dorsch, I. (2022). #fridaysforfuture – what does Instagram tell us about a social movement? *Journal of Information Science*, *49*(6), 1570–1586. https://doi.org/10.1177/01655515211063620

Hozic, A. A. (1999). Uncle Sam goes to Siliwood: Of landscapes, Spielberg and hegemony. *Review of International Political Economy*, *6*(3), 289–312. https://doi.org/10.1080/096922999347191

Humes, E. (2017). *Door to door: The magnificent, maddening, Mysterious World of Transportation*. Harper Perennial.

Kim, J. Y., & Kiousis, S. (2012). The Role of Affect in Agenda Building for Public Relations: Implications for Public Relations Outcomes. *Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly, 89(4)*, 657-676. https://doi.org/10.1177/1077699012455387

Kye, S. H. (2018). The persistence of white light in middle-class suburbia. *Social Science Research*, *72*, 38–52. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssresearch.2018.02.005

Laird, P. W. (1996). “the car without a single weakness”: Early automobile advertising. *Technology and Culture*, *37*(4), 796–812. https://doi.org/10.2307/3107098

Lewyn, M. (2017, March 1). *The criminalization of walking*. Digital Commons. https://digitalcommons.tourolaw.edu/scholarlyworks/644/

Linton, J. (2024, March 7). *L.A. voters approve measure HLA, mandating city implement bus lanes, bike lanes, and PED safety improvements*. Streetsblog Los Angeles. https://la.streetsblog.org/2024/03/06/l-a-voters-approve-measure-hla-mandating-city-implement-bus-lanes-bike-lanes-and-ped-safety-improvements

Lundholt, M. W., Maagaard, C. A., & Piekut, A. (2018). Counternarratives. *The International Encyclopedia of Strategic Communication*, 1–11. https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119010722.iesc0201

Lutz, C. (2014). The U.S. Car Colossus and the production of inequality. *American Ethnologist*, *41*(2), 232–245. https://doi.org/10.1111/amet.12072

Lyotard, J. F. (1984). *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Vol. 10). University of Minnesota Press.

McCombs, M. E., & Shaw, D. L. (1972). The agenda-setting function of mass media. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, *36*(2), 176–187. https://doi.org/10.1086/267990

McEwan, B., & Fox, J. (2022). Before Methods: Social Media Research Considerations. In A. Quan-Haase (Ed.), In A. Quan-Haase & L. Sloan (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of Social Media Research Methods* (2nd ed., pp. 13–26). essay, SAGE.

Nau, C., Quan-Haase, A., & McCay-Peet, L. (2022). Defining Social Media and Asking Social Media Research Questions: How Well Does the Swiss Army Knife Metaphor Apply? In A. Quan-Haase & L. Sloan (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of Social Media Research Methods* (2nd ed., pp. 13–26). essay, SAGE.

Norton, P. D. (2008). *Fighting Traffic: The Dawn of the Motor Age in the American City*. MIT Press.

Nyst, A. (2023, July 17). *134 social media statistics you need to know for 2023*. Search Engine Journal. https://www.searchenginejournal.com/social-media-statistics/480507/

Page, R. (2018). Narratives online: Shared stories in Social Media. Cambridge University Press.

Pan, Z., & Kosicki, G. (1993). Framing analysis: An approach to news discourse. *Political Communication*, 10(1), 55–75

Poulsen, S. V., & Kvåle, G. (2018). Studying social media as semiotic technology: A Social Semiotic Multimodal Framework. *Social Semiotics*, *28*(5), 700–717. https://doi.org/10.1080/10350330.2018.1505689

Ray, J., Flemming, B., Higashide, S., Mangan, E., Lample, K., Lillehei, X., Noisecat, J., McElwee, S., & Cohen, D. A. (2020, March 17). Voters want A better transit system for America. Data for Progress. https://www.filesforprogress.org/memos/gnd-for-transit-polling.pdf

Rhee, L., Bayer, J. B., Lee, D. S., & Kuru, O. (2021). Social by definition: How users define social platforms and why it matters. *Telematics and Informatics*, *59*, 1–16. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tele.2020.101538

Scheufele, D. A., & Tewksbury, D. (2007). Framing, Agenda Setting, and Priming: The Evolution of Three Media Effects Models. *Journal of Communication*, 57(1), 9–20. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0021-9916.2007.00326.x

Schmuck, D., Karsay, K., Matthes, J., & Stevic, A. (2019). "looking up and feeling down". the influence of mobile social networking site use on upward social comparison, self-esteem, and well-being of adult smartphone users. *Telematics and Informatics*, *42*, 1–12. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tele.2019.101240

Sheller, M. (2018). Theorising Mobility justice. *Tempo Social*, *30*(2), 17–34. https://doi.org/10.11606/0103-2070.ts.2018.142763

Shill, G. H. (2020). Should Law Subsidize Driving? *New York University Law Review*, 498–579. https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3345366

Simms, A. (2009). *Ecological debt: Global warming and the Wealth of Nations*. Pluto Press.

Soron, D. (2009). Driven to Drive: Cars and the Problem of 'Compulsory Consumption'. In J. Conley & A. T. Mclaren (Eds.), *Car troubles: Critical studies of automobility and auto-mobility* (pp. 181–196). essay, Ashgate.

Urry, J. (2004). The 'System' of Automobility. *Theory, Culture & Society*, 21(4-5), 25-39.

Wassmer, R. W. (2008). Causes of Urban Sprawl in the United States: Auto Reliance as Compared to Natural Evolution, Flight from Blight and Local Revenue Reliance. *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, *27*(3), 536–555. http://www.jstor.org/stable/30163440

Wells, G., Horwitz, J., & Seetharaman, D. (2021, September 14). *Facebook knows Instagram is toxic for teen girls, company documents ...* The Wall Street Journal. https://www.wsj.com/articles/facebook-knows-instagram-is-toxic-for-teen-girls-company-documents-show-11631620739

Wernick, A. (1989). Vehicles for Myth: The Shifting Image of the Modern Car. In I. H. Angus & S. Jhally (Eds.), *Cultural politics in contemporary America* (pp. 198–216). essay, Routledge.

Wilson, K. (2020, September 14). *The other type of car pollution that harms us all*. Streetsblog USA. https://usa.streetsblog.org/2020/09/14/the-other-type-of-car-pollution-that-harms-us-all

Wu, H., Avner, P., Boisjoly, G., Braga, C. K., El-Geneidy, A., Huang, J., Kerzhner, T., Murphy, B., Niedzielski, M. A., Pereira, R. H., Pritchard, J. P., Stewart, A., Wang, J., & Levinson, D. (2021). Urban access across the globe: An international comparison of different transport modes. *Npj Urban Sustainability*, *1*(1). https://doi.org/10.1038/s42949-021-00020-2

Vitae

Allen (Xilin) Huang

Syracuse, NY 13210 allenxhuang@protonmail.com

Professional Summary

I've worked in content management and podcast production, but I also love to do newswriting and freelancing on issues across the socio-political spectrum. I have been an English editorial intern for Castbox, a production assistant for New Deal Studies Podcast, as well as an opinion columnist for the Daily Orange. Currently, as a master's student at Syracuse, I work closely with Prof. Ken Harper's Center for Global Engagement for interviews and research about official events and activities. I am bilingual in English and Mandarin Chinese and a member of the Asian American Journalists Association.

Skills

- **Complex Problem-Solving**
- **Producing Stories**
- **AP Style Expertise**
- **Interview Skills**
- **Qualitative and Quantitative Research**
- **Content Moderation and Production**
- **Bilingual Proficiency**
- **Current Event Knowledge**

Experience

Opinion Columnist **October 2023 – May 2024**

The Daily Orange | Syracuse, NY

- **Collaborated with editors and other journalists to create compelling content**
- **Developed story ideas and conducted interviews on issues related to American politics and society.**
- **Researched various topics to create engaging and informative columns.**
- **Composed regular opinion pieces on relevant and current events.**

Research Assistant **January 2023 – May 2024**

S. I. Newhouse School Of Public Communications | Syracuse, NY

- **Collaboration with Newhouse School Professor Ken Harper, the director for Syracuse University's Center for Global Engagement**
- **Helped organizing research materials for the Center**
- **Conducting and writing interviews for Newhouse School's official programs and activities.**

Production Assistant **August 2021 - April 2022**

New Deal Studies

- **Helped co-create and launch the series, responsible for the design of the website, logo and parts of the content of the podcast**
- **Operated the social media accounts for the podcast**
- **Assisted for commercial promotion of the podcast.**

English Editorial Intern **May 2019 - July 2019**

CastBox | Beijing, China

- **Co-operating Castbox's “Cuddle”-a new entertainment live App, in charge of content moderation, community order and comment guidance**
- **Monitored Castbox and Cuddle-two audio broadcast platforms for English speakers**
- **Wrote content specifications of Castbox and Cuddle according to relevant guidelines**
- **Managed related staff recruitment of Cuddle, selecting and interviewing MCN anchors**
- **Evaluated candidates' images and qualifications.**

Freelance Content Writer **August 2018 - Current**

Various Outlets

- **Independently created and operated the blog on Medium, uploaded in cooperation with the online publication of Dialogue & Discourse and Politically Speaking until 2022**
- **Responsible for the copywriting release, update, topic launch, interaction and improve the influence of the official accounts**
- **Responsible for analyzing and discussing a series of issues related to the political society of the United States and China.**

Education

Master of Arts (M.A.) - Media Studies **January 2023- May 2024**

Syracuse University Newhouse School,

Syracuse, NY

Bachelor of Arts (B.A.) - American Studies **September 2017- November 2021**

Skidmore College, Saratoga Springs, NY

Personal Portfolio

- **Https://linktr.ee/allenxhuang**
- **Https://www.linkedin.com/in/allenxhuang/**

Language

Mandarin Chinese

Native

English

Fluent