



# Australian Academy *of the Humanities*

## Trust and its discontents

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# INDIGENOUS AUSTRALIANS AND INFORMAL NETWORKS OF TRUST ON SOCIAL MEDIA

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“Basically, there are two things wrong with Facebook: how it works and how people use it”.

Vaidhyathan, S. (2018). *Antisocial Media: How Facebook Disconnects Us and Undermines Democracy*. Oxford University Press.

# Networks of Kin

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- Social and Cultural Connectivity
- Kinship Mapping
- Intergenerational Relationships
- Sharing Culture – Language and Knowledge
- Learning about Culture and in some case 'being' Aboriginal
- Koori Grapevine – News and Information
- Death, Dying – Sorry Business
- Political activism-#SOSBlakAustralia, #IndigenousDads



*“I challenge anyone to say this wasn't the first real Indigenous Social media defeat of Mainstream media - This whole campaign was a massive historical marker. So many elements to it have been replicated since.”*

– Sam Cook (2017)

# Platformed Racism

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# Social media & help-seeking

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## The affordances of social media

Social media provides pathway between help-seekers and help sources—both formal and informal.

It enables different forms of help seeking:

- Directly connecting with help-sources (friends, family, services)
- Producing groups focused on different topics
- Producing safe spaces for discussion and connection

# Indigenous people & help-seeking

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## Need of services

- Statistically Indigenous Australians are in need of more services than non-Indigenous—across all sectors, education, health, legal, family, employment, etc

## Barriers to formal help

- Mistrust of government services
  - Intergenerational trauma related to past policies of removal
  - Systemic racism, discrimination
  - Not culturally appropriate
  - Lack of access
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander help-seeking is typically more informal than that practiced by non-Indigenous people. The onus typically falls to family, kin and other social networks.

# Distrust on Facebook

- *“Because like murder. Like, it can lead to murder and stuff. Like, facebook. Yeah, because apparently, some people pretend to be other people. Like, it can lead you to them, and then they might murder you or something.”*
- *“Well the most obvious one is, [personal information] could fall in the wrong hands. Like if you were to put a provocative photo of yourself, someone could easily take that photo download it and then share it to everybody. That is, to me, is the scariest thing that can happen.”*
- *“I was gonna say some of these facebook pages are a bit too vague for me sometimes. It just depends who’s running it. ’Cause anyone can open up a page and say that they’re, they represent this, and they, but they don’t. You can get anyone, you know, and put up, false information about stuff.”*





# Informal networks of trust

## WELLBEING

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- *“I suffer with anxiety and there’s a lot of groups on facebook where you can go and read about other people like ... like their anxiety, so I go on and have chats with other people that are suffering from anxiety and depression. And there are a lot of groups that are on facebook too, that you can just go and read people’s stories and they give you little memes for the day, just little quotes and stuff”*
- *On facebook, you can say stuff. You’re not talking to anybody, but you’re putting that forward out there. You know, feeling so depressed, I don’t wanna get out of my, I wanna stay in my room forever, or something like that. And people will respond, people do respond, they’re very reactive to, to stuff like that...And when you see that collective support, that makes a difference.*

# Informal networks of trust

## SUICIDE IDEATION

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- *“So around 2007, 2008 and 2009, I was coming off withdrawal from heavy drug use, and so was experiencing temporary psychosis. On top of that was suicidal ideation and um several attempts of suicide as well.*
- *But i was reaching out to friends via social media at that time. And I was, i’ve gone back through it and read it, and a lot of it’s incoherent but [...] it did serve like a purpose in, um, friends being able to call ambulances for me and that kind of thing. [...] Um, i had a friend on social media who i didn’t actually know, i’d just randomly added, and we’d been talking for years, and ... i actually wrote my frigging suicide note to this bloke as well. And he was like what the hell is going on?. Um, but he was actually quite supportive during the hospital visits and stuff as well”*

# Informal networks of trust

## SOCIAL SUPPORT

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- *“i’m gay as well... so I go on there and there’s a lot of gay people I can ... you just read their comments and like I say, I keep in contact”*
- *“You talk to people, like, things that you couldn’t talk to your family about, do you know what I mean? There are other people going through the same stuff as you’re going through.”*
- *“Some of ... some groups that you do join are good. [...] Yeah. Like, because me being gay, I share a lot of things about gay people and that, and with my family and that, they all support it and... yeah. So, yeah, it is. It is supportive. [...] And there's things on there where you can just ... like, just to let your family know about things, because some families don't really know about being gay and ... so you can just share things so they can read it, do you know what i mean?”*

# Closing

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- There is a politics of trust playing out on social media
  - Participants actively navigate the complex terrain of Facebook to make it work for their own ends
  - The online/offline distinction is too simple
  - The formal/informal help-seeking distinction is also too simple



**THANK YOU**