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## Addressing the Accessibility of Social Media

**Cole Gleason**  
**Patrick Carrington**  
Carnegie Mellon University  
{cgleason,pcarrington}@cmu.edu

**Benjamin M. Gorman**  
Bournemouth University  
bgorman@bournemouth.ac.uk

**Andrés Monroy-Hernández**  
Snap Inc.  
amh@snap.com

**Garreth W. Tigwell**  
Rochester Institute of Technology  
garreth.w.tigwell@rit.edu

**Lydia B. Chilton**  
Columbia University  
chilton@cs.columbia.edu

**Hernisa Kacorri**  
University of Maryland  
hernisa@umd.edu

**Meredith Ringel Morris**  
Microsoft Research  
merrie@microsoft.com

**Shaomei Wu**  
Facebook  
shaomei@fb.com

### ABSTRACT

Social media platforms are deeply ingrained in society, and they offer many different spaces for people to engage with others. Unfortunately, accessibility barriers prevent people with disabilities from fully participating in these spaces. Social media users commonly post inaccessible media, including videos without captions (which are important for people who are deaf or hard of hearing) and images without alternative text (descriptions read aloud by screen readers for people who are blind). Users with motor

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**Figure 1: Common types of image content on Twitter that lack descriptions (as detailed in [16]). Left column: picture of text, graph, meme, screenshot. Right column: image with embedded text (ad), quotation, unofficial retweet, photograph, drawing.**

impairments must find workarounds to deal with the complex user interfaces of these platforms, and users with cognitive disabilities may face barriers to composing and sharing information.

Accessibility researchers, industry practitioners, and end-users with disabilities will come together to outline challenges and solutions for improving social media accessibility. The workshop starts with a panel of end-users with disabilities who will recount their *Perspectives of Successes and Barriers*. Industry professionals from social media companies (e.g., Facebook and LinkedIn) will detail their *Design Process and Implementation Challenges* in a panel with questions from attendees. The attendees will share their work and tackle *Open Challenges and Future Research Directions*. This workshop will forge collaborations between researchers and practitioners, and define high-priority accessibility challenges for social media platforms.

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#### WORKSHOP DESCRIPTION

Social media platforms have quickly evolved from niche online gathering spaces to teeming public forums for all manner of discourse. These spaces host critical discussions regarding international news, local happenings, and activism, yet they are often inaccessible to people with disabilities. As a society, we have used both policy and technology to make physical and online spaces accessible, but social media platforms present unique challenges for accessibility that remain unsolved. The high prevalence of user-generated content [4] makes it harder to ensure images and videos are accessible to users with vision or hearing impairments. The interfaces for social media platforms are more complex than many standard websites, and people with vision, motor, or cognitive impairments find them difficult to use.

Recent research observing social media platforms and speaking to users with disabilities about their interactions with social media has revealed that these platforms often become more inaccessible over time. For example, as of June 2015, the increase of graphical media present on Twitter resulted in 28.4% of content being inaccessible to blind users [16]. Twitter has tried to address this problem by asking users to add alternative text descriptions to their tweet images, but only 0.1% of images currently have this [7]. Even content surrounding accessibility topics, such as the #HandsOffMyADA campaign, only have 6.7% described images and 2.4% captioned videos [1]. In contrast, other high-traffic websites often have alternative text on 40% to 70% of images [2, 8]. Social media platforms have the clout and potential impact to substantially improve content accessibility by introducing new standards and

**ORGANIZER BACKGROUNDS**

**Cole Gleason** is a Ph.D. student at Carnegie Mellon University who develops assistive technology for people with vision impairments. His research focuses on navigation tools for physical spaces, as well as accessibility tools available on social media platforms. Website: <http://colegleason.com>

**Patrick Carrington** is an Assistant Professor at Carnegie Mellon University. His research focuses on augmenting interactive assistive technologies, like wheelchairs, to support the broad needs of people with disabilities. Recently he has been exploring the accessibility of media and imagery on the web. Website: <http://patrickcarrington.com>

**Lydia B. Chilton** is an Assistant Professor at Columbia University. Her research is on computational design and how meaning is conveyed through images and humor, which are often shared online. She is broadening her research to include how this meaning can also be shared in accessible ways. Website: <http://www.cs.columbia.edu/~chilton>

**Benjamin Gorman** is a Lecturer in Computer Science at Bournemouth University, and his research focuses on technology to help people with hearing loss. Recently he has been studying accessibility challenges faced by people with visual impairments interacting with emoji on social media, and personalizing the user experience of subtitles on streaming websites. Website: <http://benjgorman.com>

**Hernisa Kacorri** is an Assistant Professor at University of Maryland, College Park. She leads the Intelligent Assistive Machines Lab, a research group working at the intersection of artificial intelligence and accessibility. Her research has previously studied how the disability community mobilizes through social media for advocacy, activism, and social change. Website: <http://hernisakacorri.com>

approaches. Morris and colleagues explored the design of alternative text for images, finding that it has been stagnant since its introduction in 1995, and that richer representations can be designed to take advantage of modern computational abilities [15]. Facebook and Instagram have recently introduced automatic description of images [21], leading to high coverage, although users must have high trust in these automatic systems to add value [14].

Although platforms struggle to ensure their user-generated content is accessible, their interface design is more under their control and can have a comparable impact. Researchers have found that although blind Facebook users are able to participate in many of the platform's core social activities, including posting status updates and sharing photos [19], they also hit usability barriers completing other core tasks, including creating a user profile or searching for other users [3]. Researchers also found that when blind people reach accessibility barriers, they either find non-standard workarounds (i.e., using the mobile interface on a desktop computer), or avoid the inaccessible features entirely.

Prior research with people with physical or communication disabilities who access Twitter through augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) devices found that these users enjoy social media platforms in close-knit networks and exhibit different posting and sharing behavior that might be linked to their method of accessing the platform [9–11].

Interface design presents an opportunity for social media platforms to assist people with disabilities, such as ensuring graphics and icons used are readable and easy to understand [17]. For example, researchers found that Facebook users with dyslexia had difficulties with reading content on the site, but especially with writing content [18]. The researchers then designed and evaluated a writing assistance tool to help proofread their writing when posting [20]. The tool increased the confidence of the participants with dyslexia, showing how integration of this types of tools can improve the experience for many users with dyslexia.

While everyone should be able to access community, news, and other content on social media platforms, people with disabilities often rely on these networks for critical activism and support. On Twitter, groups of disability advocates have convened around hashtags like #CripTheVote [5] and #HandsOffMyADA [1] to organize political support of disability legislation. Online activism also can be a more accessible outlet for political advocacy than physical marches or protests, so people with a disability may turn to virtual activism more often [12]. These platforms are also a place to seek social support online about accessibility barriers and solutions [13]. Campaigns like #SayTheWord use social media to change the public perception and awareness of people with disabilities, calling for a unified identity and a recognition of a critical constituency of people (25% of US adults [6]).

Because social media platforms are an important venue for both daily communication and disability activism, barriers must be reduced so that they are accessible to all. This workshop brings together key stakeholders to discuss interface and content barriers, create design guidelines to dissolve these barriers, and propose research agendas to address the challenges in this space. We aim to have

**ORGANIZER BACKGROUNDS (CONT.)**

**Andrés Monroy-Hernández** is a Lead Research Scientist at Snap Inc. where he manages the Human Computer Interaction team focusing on building new technologies that enable people to connect and collaborate. He is new to the accessibility field but is excited by the idea of broadening access to social technologies. Website: <http://andresmh.com>

**Meredith Ringel Morris** is a Principal Researcher at Microsoft Research, where she manages the Ability research group, focusing on accessible technologies. She has studied accessibility challenges faced by blind users of Twitter, and challenges experienced by sign language speakers using social media. Website: <http://aka.ms/merrie>

**Garreth Tigwell** is an Assistant Professor at the Rochester Institute of Technology. Garreth researches situational impairments and supporting designers with tools to improve app & web accessibility. Garreth previously investigated the communication challenges presented by emoji, which are commonly used on social media, and he is now investigating their inaccessibility. Website: <http://garrethtigwell.com>

**Shaomei Wu** is a researcher scientist in Facebook AI, where she leads the AI for inclusion initiative to build AI-based technologies for people from marginalized and under-resourced communities. She previously worked at the Computational Social Science team at Facebook where she built temporal and structural models to study how information and behavior spread in the network.

researchers, practitioners, and the general public to benefit from the outcomes of this workshop, hoping to reach everyone who can make large strides in addressing these accessibility challenges.

**WORKSHOP GOALS AND OUTCOMES**

This workshop will tackle critical issues around social media accessibility, producing artifacts to aid both platform designers and researchers. Workshop participants will listen to the perspectives of social media users with disabilities, and practitioners who can describe their development workflows for accessible products. They will also share their work, form small teams, and be tasked with creating guidelines for researchers and industry practitioners. The guidelines will detail the highest priority accessibility challenges and solutions to ensure these platforms are accessible in future designs. After the workshop, we will publish and promote these guidelines and workshop papers on the workshop website and other venues. These accessibility guidelines will be useful artifacts not only for the CSCW community, but everyone developing or using social media platforms.

**WORKSHOP LOGISTICS**

Our proposal is for a single-day workshop on Sunday, November 10th. Other than standard audio/video equipment (projector and screen), we do not anticipate any special equipment or supply needs. We will publicize the workshop and provide access to its content at <http://accessiblesocial.media>. This includes publishing the call for participation, submission details, as well as the accepted position papers and any guidelines or calls to action produced as a result of the workshop's breakout sessions.

**WORKSHOP PARTICIPANTS**

We intend to limit the workshop to a maximum of 30 participants (not counting the organizers). Participants will have two ways to apply for the workshop. First, they may submit a position paper (up to four pages long) relevant to the topic of the workshop. This is especially relevant for researchers who want to detail their current or prior work. Second, they may apply on the workshop website through questionnaires about their experience with accessibility on social media. The application questions will be targeted at people with disabilities and industry professionals.

The workshop organizers will select participants on the basis of their papers or application responses, highlighting provocative position papers or unique accessibility perspectives. We will advertise the workshop and call for position papers via the workshop website, which we will share via email lists for SIGCHI and SIGACCESS, as well as on social media.

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