

## Case 7: Gazing into an Abyss

When Sarah went out with friends the night before her mid-semester psychology of marketing exam, she took the usual selfies with her phone, and posted them on Facebook. She indicated where she was, and tagged various friends. The next morning, as soon as she woke up, she checked her iPhone for Facebook and Instagram notifications. She checked her various social media accounts surreptitiously during the early class to see what her friends were doing. All morning long she received push notifications when someone had liked one of her posts. These notifications appeared on the screen of her laptop while she was typing or reviewing notes for the test.

Jason was taking the same class as Sarah, and the two of them were studying with three others at a large table in the learning commons before the test. Jason had lost a lot of sleep the night before. He liked to argue about political issues and had gotten into a dispute with a friend of a friend on Facebook. This person, whom Jason didn't know, had posted some ridiculous meme that Jason felt obliged to challenge. After posting a comment, he kept checking back every few minutes to see if others on the thread had agreed with him. Instead of agreement, the discussion spiraled into more and more insulting personal attacks by total strangers against him and his friend. Even after he went to bed, he couldn't keep from going over the various comments in his head.

At the study table, Jason noticed how often Sarah closed her book and checked her smart phone. Sarah noticed Jason looking at his phone every time it dinged and shaking his head in disgust. At one point, he opened his laptop and started typing furiously. Soon, all five people at the table were engaged with one device or another. Suddenly, Sarah says, "Oh my gosh, it's time for class."

Books slammed, laptops closed, everything went into backpacks, and they all rushed to class. "I'm so not ready for this exam," Sarah said. "I thought I had plenty of time." Among other topics, the test would cover psychological techniques for stimulating and prolonging user engagement with websites.

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