

Stalking the Character of Modern News

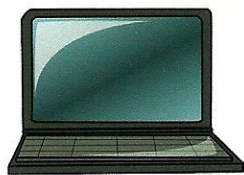
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I'd like to introduce you to Sally, a fictitious, confident, third-year journalism student. Just four years ago, she was confused about her future, because the digital revolution threatened all that was well and good about traditional news delivery. But Sally's high school journalism adviser convinced her to stick with it.

Today, Sally is happy. She can think critically, write a sentence, craft a paragraph, and weave a story. She enjoys cameras and recorders, and she can make good pictures, audio soundtracks, and video for the Student Media website. She eagerly learns new hardware and software. It seems like new types of communication jobs emerge almost daily, so she is carefully planning her senior year schedule for optimum impact.

However, since it's legal to stalk fictional characters, I can tell you that Sally has serious problems. She doesn't spend any quality time with newspapers or books, and wastes way too much time with electronic gadgets.

Just last night, I saw her using a fancy laptop. She squandered at least five minutes on Hulu — watching Jon Stewart mock North Korea. If you can believe it, she was also using e-mail, Facebook, Craigslist, and something called the Onion at the same time! She might as well have been reading a book, since she seemed to be turning pages.



Sally wastes waaaay too much time on Facebook, but I don't understand why, since she constantly clicks on links that take her off site to pictures, videos, and articles. I noticed that she "liked" a lot of stuff, including a new study guide link for her history class. She sighed loudly about her dad's suggested link to a nutrition guide for college students, but she clicked through all 10 tips, and lingered on a picture of a pizza. Sally's mom, Amanda, pinned a funny picture about college students, so Sally spent a few minutes reading cartoonish memes on Pinterest.

Then the laptop beeped. It was some guy named Adam on chat, warning her not to go to Mexico for spring break. Sally followed his link to a story about the latest drug-related shootings. She then opened a site called glitterguide and skimmed alternative spring break destinations.

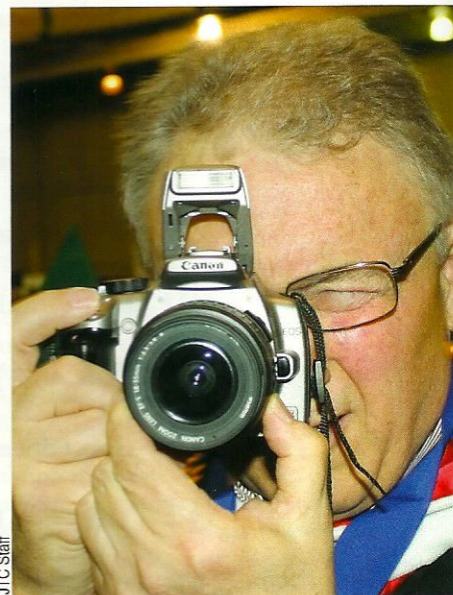


I think Sally's e-mail is a big problem. It's always packed with electronic newsletters and pesky advertising messages. She must have spent 10 minutes scanning those while she was deleting unimportant messages. Then, she noticed a Twitter alert. "Lady Gaga and Justin Bieber — caught together on video!" With a mild look of surprise, Sally Googled the clip on YouTube, then went to the Yahoo news page for details. She even wasted time on Snopes, where she discovered that the video was a hoax. In the process, a picture of a cute polar bear caught her attention, and she clicked through a slide show about global warming. I think she even read the captions.



As if the computer wasn't enough trouble, her smartphone gurgled with a text. It was her friend Rhonda, telling her that an interesting guy from their music class just blogged about being lonely. She read the blog, thought for a minute, and then checked the local online news site for entertainment schedules. A good band was playing just down the street. She quickly found the guy's number in the online university directory, then texted an invite to him and some other friends.

Before I could plan my stalking route to the club, Sally was talking to Luke, the interesting guy. Luke didn't appear overly interested in Lady Gaga and Justin Bieber,



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but he was delighted that she seemed to be a global warming expert. They laughed nervously about North Korea's nuclear arsenal. Then she suggested they break the college pepperoni habit and grab a nutritious pizza. Luke pulled out his phone, Yelped a late night pizza deal, and they ended the night over green peppers, mushrooms, and jalapeños, which Sally documented with Instagram.



The next morning Sally jumped out of bed to check Facebook, where Luke posted a vague note about no longer being lonely. Sally coyly responded on her timeline with the Instagram photo, and a smiley face. She seemed relaxed and when I took off to write this column, she was working through an online crossword puzzle.

I'm happy that Sally and Luke met, and like each other. But I think I'm going to quit stalking. As a journalism professor, it's just too discouraging that the kids these days don't seem to care about news and information.