Photo of the Day



The semester is in full swing in Storrs, Conn. on Feb, 3. 2026. Students studied in the Connecticut Hall lounge. PHOTO BY SYDNEY CHANDLER, STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER/THE DAILY CAMPUS

Scroll, Epstein, Scroll: Who controls the narrative

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The release of the Jeffery Epstein documents should have detonated the socio-political sphere.

When stories like this break, we like to believe the significance will speak for itself; that the scale of the crime, the power of the people involved or the sheer volume of evidence will force sustained attention. We assume that some truths are simply too big to ignore. The Epstein case proves that assumption wrong.

In a media environment that claims to prioritize transparency and honesty, it would be reasonable to assume that the significance of this case alone would be enough for lasting discourse and scrutiny. Instead, the Epstein investigation has unfolded into fragments, with documents released and withdrawn, names circulating without context and memes spreading across the internet. The public has encountered Epstein less as a systemic crime than as a recurring reference; endlessly resurfacing but increasingly unserious. This isn't because the story lacks importance. It's because importance no longer determines what survives in public consciousness due to the way social media is designed.

Over the past decade, social media has replaced traditional journalism as the primary way many people encounter news, especially younger generations. Information no longer arrives through a broadcast or front-page headline — it arrives through short-form content and screenshots. News is no longer something we sit with in silence. It's something we swipe away, often without processing what we've just seen.

This shift matters because these platforms do not merely transmit information. They design and deploy algorithms to keep audiences engaged. These systems determine what is given exposure and what ideas will circulate long enough to register as meaningful. These decisions are rarely deemed political. Instead, they are justified through language about safety, community standards, or harm reduction.

The question is not simply how the Epstein story has been discussed, but who has the power to shape the conditions of that discussion. Narrative control in the digital public sphere is concentrated in the hands of a few platforms with massive audiences. Meta's Facebook and Instagram, Elon Musk's X and TikTok all present themselves as neutral hosts for expression. However, their policies, algorithms and moderation practices all function as a form of soft governance over public attention.

Take, for example, the wave of account removals Meta implemented last year. These bans targeted more than fifty organizations providing abortion advice, reproductive health information and queer support around the world, even in places where abortion is legal and their work is entirely lawful. Campaigners tracking these takedowns called it one of the largest waves of censorship in years, and the reasons given were often vague policy violations.

Another instance comes from a 2023 Human Rights Watch report on Meta's handling of content related to Palestine on Instagram and Facebook. After reviewing over 1,000 cases of content takedown, HRW found that nearly all the censored posts were peaceful expressions of support for Palestine or critical commentary about human rights abuses.

These are not glitches or bugs in their code. Peaceful political expression has been silenced under standards that have never been clearly explained, while other types of content, oftentimes harmful, continue to spread freely. Ideas like white supremacy, sexism and violence are rampant on many of these platforms. The result is not just the absence of certain views, but the reshaping of the public conversation.

Now consider how this dynamic played out around the Epstein case. On TikTok, for example, attempts to share direct messages containing the word "Epstein" were blocked with automated warnings claiming guideline violations. Meanwhile, ironic references and meme-ified takes on Epstein are proliferating on the platform.

Social media sites have not needed to ban conversations about Epstein outright; they only needed to introduce friction for serious discourse. Here, silence functions as control. Restricting earnest conversation while allowing memes and irony to dominate the space doesn't make the problem mysteriously vanish.

The Epstein case is not a joke. It's not bizarre internet lore. It's not a collection of conspiracy theories. It is a record of sustained sexual violence enabled by wealth, power and institutional failure. It implicates systems that still exist and people who still hold massive influence. Treating it seriously requires sustained attention, clear language, and for people to actually care. Public pressure for accountability is step one — exactly the thing that platforms are trying to prevent.

So why silence critical discussion while amplifying jokes? Why does seriousness disappear while irony thrives? Why does a case involving mass sexual abuse and human trafficking circulate most easily as a meme? These are not questions with simple answers, but they are questions worth keeping in mind when scrolling.

Platforms do not need to dictate what users think. They only need to shape what they are most likely to see. When critical conversations are made harder to access and unserious content is rewarded, it sends a message about what kinds of attention are acceptable. The result is a public that is informed just enough to recognize the name, but not enough to stay angry.

That should make us furious. If the most disturbing story of our generation can be flattened into jokes, then no issue is immune. The question is no longer what we are being shown. It's what we are being trained to scroll past, and why.

X-Men and the allegation of queerbaiting

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The problem of queerbaiting in media is prevalent. Oftentimes, media features an especially close "friendship" between two people of the same gender, including jokes recognizing the implied homoeroticism but never making them explicitly queer. Whether it's due to a lack of well-done representation of queer relationships, or a genuine intention on the part of the creators to avoid losing the audience made up of bigots, there is a tendency for these friendships to be interpreted as queer, despite the lack of overt admittance that the relationship is romantic. While some people feel upset at instances such as those, some people don't mind or even prefer those types of relationship representation (like me). That isn't to say overt queer relationships should be removed from media. At this point, I've found better representation in those considered queerbaiting, than in those where the queerness is overt, but that doesn't erase the importance of openly queer characters. When the characters are approached as neither straight nor gay, their dynamics, love and personality are the focus, allowing for more nuanced and interesting characters. All of the expectations and societal norms that surround romantic relationships can be tossed aside, allowing for what makes the most sense for the characters and their dynamic to take the wheel.

The X-Men films are a great way to explore the issue of queerbaiting. The subject matter of the films is focused on combatting bigotry and expressing pride in your identity, despite what prejudice others may hold. While the two most commonly shipped main characters in the films, Charles (Professor X) and Erik (Magneto), are not canonically queer, there is hard-to-ignore chemistry between the pair. While there is explicit love, admiration and connection established, it's never stated as being romantic. This is not surprising, given the Marvel franchise is far from independent filmmaking and wants to maintain its popularity. By implying a queer relationship or creating one that queer audience members can relate to, they are playing both sides, appealing to queer audiences who yearn for proper representation without pushing away viewers that are opposed to explicitly queer characters.

The intention behind queerbaiting, as detailed above, is less than admirable. Despite this fact, I still find that relationships that are generally classified as queerbaiting are more meaningful. This is not because of the intention of the creators, but by removing the boundaries enforced by certain labels, love can be shown in new and distinct ways. This is apparent in the X-Men films, primarily in "X-Men: First Class" where Charles and Erik first meet and work together for a large portion of the film (unlike the many where they're on opposing "sides"). It's made clear immediately that the two share a special bond and despite some crucial differences leaving them with opposing methods, neither wants to hurt the other. This is made apparent in the notorious beach scene where Erik unintentionally deflects a bullet into Charles' back, resulting in him being paralyzed from the waist down. Erik holds Charles and states explicitly that the last thing he wanted was for them to fight. Both characters are very well-developed individually, and when brought together and viewed as a duo, their dynamic works even better. Audiences can relate to the depth of the characters as well as how they love and care for one another, despite their differences. These characters placed in a story that revolves around fighting prejudice and being proud of who you are makes for a strong draw to queer audiences.

I have little interest in arguing that Charles and Erik are, or should be, romantically involved (they are). I understand why some are, but what I think is most intriguing about the characters and their dynamic is the love they share. While the intention of leaving that love ambiguous is not great, the result is. It allows for numerous interpretations, letting people of all walks of life relate to and feel seen by the characters, queer or not. While it would be nice to have the comfort and security of seeing such well known characters represented as explicitly queer, pride is at the forefront of the X-Men films, and it would be silly to imply that the lack of an explicitly queer character takes away from the message so crucial to and present in the films.