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SOCIAL MEDIA

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An Analysis of Online Discussion Impacts on Adult Students' Learning

TAO WANG

Abstract

With the rapid development of digital technology, a number of online learning tools are applied in education. Currently there is an increase in the number of teachers and students using online learning. Online learning has become an essential part of modern education. Online discussion plays a significant role in online learning which provides an opportunity for students and teachers to communicate with each other without regional limitation. Therefore, it is necessary to look at how online discussion works and the impact of online discussions on teaching and learning.

This paper focuses on the features of online discussion as well as analyzes the positive and negative effects of online discussions for students' learning mainly through looking at students' interaction performance online and the design of online discussion as well as the script of online discussion. The findings indicate that online discussions have brought more benefits for education which enables students to understand knowledge more deeply and further provides some suggestions to improve online discussion.

Keywords

Online discussion, feature, interaction, performance

Introduction

Online learning plays a significant role in modern education. With the rapid development of digital technology, universities have invested a huge amount of resources to implement their Internet-based e-learning platform. Contemporary online student population is diverse due to their different profiles and experiences compared with traditional students living on or near campus. Moreover most distance education students are adults from 25 to 50 years old (Moore & Kearsley 1996, p.153). These students have significant differences in academic, psychology, and life from traditional students (Richardson & King 1998). Web-based online learning becomes a medium to be the subject of research program to test the effectiveness of education (Coomey & Stephenson 2001, p.37). The online discussion as a form of computer-mediated communication has been seen a successful tool to support instruction (Kang 1998). It resolves the problem of time and space restrictions (Barnes & Greller 1994; Kuehn 1994) and gives students more opportunities to raise an issue and participate in discussions. The asynchronous or delayed capabilities of these online discussion tools make participants have more control and flexible time to process the information and reflect their learning.

Studies of the designing factors of online discussion affecting students' learning are sparse. Learning is defined as a participatory social process where multi-stranded interpersonal transactions mediate the exchange of knowledge (Cole & Engestrom 1993). On this point, online discussion has become a main strategy of online education to honor the need to learn in socially negotiated environment (Carr-Chellman 2006; Berge 1997). The current research on online discussion pays more attention to the theory and ignores the empirical evidence. Also, the research results are based on laboratory experimental studies or surveys but little the authentic context of online learning and the performance of online adult students.

So, this article discusses the four common features of online discussion and examines the performance of online students based on the study by Hare, Bonk and Angeli (2000) to analyze the impact of online discussion on adult students' learning. The study examined the performance of the students in an applied cognitive psychology graduate level course, which lasts for 14 weeks and has 20 adult students with various educational backgrounds including special education, literature, educational psychology, counseling and instructional systems technology (Hare, Bonk, & Angeli 2000). This psychology class took advantage of the power of computer conferencing software system to develop online discussion as a partial replacement for traditional classroom discussion and students were required to contribute the weekly discussion online. In addition, the article compares the online discussion with the face-to-face class discussion of traditional education and shows the advantages and disadvantages of online discussion thereby giving some suggestions about improving online discussion.

Four common features of online discussion

In order to improve learning efficiency, most 'lessons learnt' emphasized on the importance of structuring the learning activity and designating the materials in order to encourage dialogue, positive involvement of the students, provide support and feedback for students' performances in order to make students to exercise the degree of control expected. Therefore, four features of online discussion are considered as dialogue, involvement, support and control which may determine the success of online discussion.

Dialogue

Dialogue is the typical form of communication in online discussion such as group discussion, debate, synchronous chat, and asynchronous chat. The literature supports the idea that any type of dialogue must be carefully structured into the course because the instructors and course designers cannot assume that students will be able to adjust to group discussion very well, argue in online debates, and answer the question posed online when they are only told to participate (Bonk, Angeli and Hara 1998; Funaro 1999). Also, the study from Gregor and Cuskelly (1994) state that if interaction between students is not structured into the course, they will not volunteer to do it. In addition, according to Beaudin and Bonk (1999), it is important of frameworks for dialogue in which a responsive moderator with a list of clearly defined questions conducts the dialogue and makes the chat on topic. Asynchronous dialogue is an opportunity for active participation and for in-depth reflection and thoughtful responses (Doherty 1998).

Involvement

Involvement includes active engagement with discussion, responses in structured tasks, student collaborations and student direction. Chan and Repman (1999) show a state of complete absorption by the student in online learning actives as 'Flow'. They state that 'Flow' is associated with challenge, clear feedback, learner control and concentration. According to Wilson and Whitelock (1998), it is necessary to structure learner involvement into the system. They show that most students did not collaborate online with other students or become involved in extra work that was available to them due to that it needs an amount of time and energy for them.

Support

The support of online learning for students is very important. Support includes peer support, advice from experts, and feedback on performance, as well as support services and software tools (Alexander 1999; Ewing 1999; Funaro 1999). In most cases, students say that effective procedures for instructor, tutor and peer feedback are the most significant features of a successful online discussion. Students used to expect the relevant feedback and may be upset if they do not receive the level of attention they anticipated. For tutor support to be effective, the structure should enable the role of tutor be 'clear' and distinct' (Lewis and Vizcarro 1998).

Control

Control, in this context, means that adult students should have the control of key learning activities to some extent and the students are encouraged to exercise that control to some degree. Control can cover responses of question, pace and timing, choice of content, management of online discussion, learning goals and results, overall direction and assessment of performance. According to Oliver (1998), students with little prior experience with carefully structure are should not be given control. As McConnell (1995) finds, that Masters students in an online learning course have limited control over the time expended on the course. As one student said hat "It is just sort of eaten into my whole life." Some students may not appreciate the different teaching style and prefer the traditional learning and discussion which is controlled by teachers although online discussion may have more potential for effective learning (Oliver 1998).

Review of adult students' performance in online discussion

There have been many discussions about the advantages of using technology to create a shared space among learning participants (Schrage 1990). Therefore, it is important to look at the performance of online discussion for students and how online discussion facilitates students' cognitive development and improves learning efficiency.

In this article, using the result of the study by Hare, Bonk and Angeli (2000) the adult student performance of online discussion is shown. The study happened in an applied cognitive psychology graduate level course which lasts for 14 weeks and has 20 adult students with various educational backgrounds such as special education, literature, educational psychology, counseling and instructional systems technology (Hare, Bonk, & Angeli 2000). This class used computer conferencing software system to develop online discussion as a partial replacement for traditional classroom discussion. Students in this class were required to contribute to the weekly First Class discussion based on required reading which occupies the ten percent of total assessment.

The results of this study showed a wealth of interesting electronic participation issues here. Firstly, students dominated the discussion, not the instructor. The instructor was just creating a learning environment wherein students were responsive to each other and responsible for their own learning. Participants must complete the weekly readings in order to engage the discussion and provide relevant arguments. Secondly, it was found that most students just posted one message per week in order to satisfy the minimum course requirement. Most students did not make extensive use of the discussion tool, but participated in this online discussion to meet their course requirement (Hare, Bonk, & Angeli 2000). Therefore, student interactions were more reflective of one way than two-way interactions.

In addition, the study analyzed the average of length of a student' post, for example, in the second week, participants wrote around 293 words per post or about 17.4 sentences with a range of 33 to 1,058 words. By comparison, in the fourth week, participants wrote less or around 252 average words and about 14.5 sentences per post. In week 8, participants contributed to an average of 335 words per post and about 20 sentences. In Week 10 there were higher text productions, with two students writing more than 1,000 words in their posts (Hare, Bonk, & Angeli 2000). Looking at these four weeks, participants

wrote an average of 317 words per post. It is suggested that the depth of students' electronic interaction and electronic writing device enabled students to reflect on and discuss their ideas after finishing the readings.

At the same time, during the first six weeks of the discussion, there were 0.88 peer references per post, while in the second six weeks there were 1.04 peer references per post (Hare, Bonk, & Angeli 2000). It may indicate that students were reading each other's messages and that computer conferencing outside of class time was a way for encouraging student interactions.

Furthermore, this study revealed that most of the messages were fairly deep in terms of information processing. According to the four weeks of analysis, 33 percent of student messages were at the surface level, while 55 percent were at an in-depth level of processing and 12 percent included both aspects of surface and deep processing (Hare, Bonk, & Angeli 2000) There are about 70 percent of participants electronic dialogue in this online discussion was at a cognitively elaborate level with combining the messages labeled as in-depth processing with those including both levels. With the amount of text and idea production, the electronic writing activity online may have been a tool to restructure students cognitive representations of information and foster students knowledge gains.

This study is a typical example to show the adult students' performance on online discussion and it may not entirely show all the performance of adult students when they participate in online discussion. However, it provides good evidence about the performance for adult students using web-based interactive tools for further research.

Advantages and disadvantages of online discussion

According to this study (Hare, Bonk, & Angeli 2000), it is more likely that this online discussion enables students to have more time to reflect on course content and makes in-depth cognitive and social contributions to the class, with comparing with a traditional class discussion. Although this is asynchronous discussion, each student becomes a regular contributor to the class content. From a learning environment standpoint, students have greater opportunities to share knowledge and interact with their peers and teaching by using this electronic tool (Lave & Wenger 1991). Also, the result of this study shows that students have a high cognitive level when they processed course information and they referred to electronic comments of their peers in their posts. These cognitively deep student posts indicate the success of online discussion to some extent. Moreover, students are allowed to have more time and choices to participate the course discussion and study outside the normal class time. In addition, Newman (1992) states students are given enough time to think and cultivate classroom thoughtfulness. These interactivity and asynchronous natures of online discussion stimulate the students to express their own opinions (Harasim 1993) and learn from the content of the interaction itself (Henri 1992). Also, such technology provides a record of individuals' thoughts for later students' reflection and debate. In addition, the computer logging devices and dialogue transcript records provide researchers with useful tools for tacking student development both over extended periods of time and with a single online session. At the same time, they can help determine the factors which assist the development of learning communities.

However, there are limitations to this online discussion. For example, most students only post one message every week just to satisfy the course requirement (Hare, Bonk, & Angeli 2000). Moreover, there was never a sense of real heated discussion with students negotiating meaning, taking sides on issues, or coming compromise (Hare, Bonk, & Angeli 2000). Moreover, no limitation on time and space of online discussion may require overload for instructors and students with interminable opportunities to work and learn. At the same time, currently most online discussion limited to text generation and lack of visual communication (Kuehn 1994). For example, when there are no cues such as smiles, tone of voices, and gestures, participants have to make certain assumption about their audience. Another

advantage of online discussion is that the participants may fail to recognize lurkers who might read but not respond to the messages (Shapard 1990). The participants may not know if these lurkers agree with the discussion or to what degree they are even reading messages.

Conclusion

As Bonk (1999) observed, “web-based learning offers a chance for students to enter into dialogue about authentic problem, collaborate with peers, negotiate meaning, become apprenticed into their field of study, enter a community of experts and peers and generally be assisted in the learning process.” The online discussion helps teachers re-create their normal pedagogical stance and it changes the traditional didactic modes into more learner-managed learning modes. The most significant feature of online discussion learning is likely to take learners beyond the provision of their teachers and to engage with a great variety of materials, learners, experts, support tools and field (Coomey & Stephenson 2001). Online discussion has the potential to become a powerful learning environment (Bonk & King 1998).

Due to the disadvantages of online discussion, there are some suggestions. For example, the technology designers and instructors could provide additional structure to student online discussions encouraging student electronic interaction and debated though adding tools for student profiles, peer commenting, cross-linking message and debate. At the same time, different forms of discussion software and features serve the different types of instructional purposes. And synchronous chat tools may be used to apprentice students into a real world environment which is similar to traditional class discussion, handle course matters, talk to classmates and guest experts, and get ideas for later asynchronous discussion. However, cognitively deeper discussion may be obtained with asynchronous tools due to their features such as an issue-based forums and alternative views of argument structure (Duffy et al 1998).

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Are We Living in the Same World?

Social media platforms in Australia and China compared

KAI TANG

Abstract

Unsubstantiated, modern science and digital technology change the world into a ‘global village’ (Mcluhan 1992). In this village, the contact in virtual world between people of different cultures becomes more and more frequent. However, is it a reality that we are using the same platforms, existing in the same virtual space and sharing the same information? Of course not. There are distinct digital formats that gain mainstream popularity, and even act as a denominated role in the virtual worlds of different countries. There are three main aspects of these differences that are examined. Differences in governance structure is the first category since political and economic issues mean that some platforms are priorities over others. The second aspect is: the users of these platforms will normally choose the one favorable according to their local cultures which is easier to operate or offers them more efficient information and reflects similar cultural values. Some platforms have distinct features that are sought after by certain user groups, while not that popular in other contexts. Thirdly, in virtual world, habit of using certain formats would be replicated, sharing with users’ friends, relatives or other concerned bodies. This leads to form various virtual communities which are very durable.

Keywords

Internet, Digital media platforms, Communication, Virtual world, World village

Introduction

I knew a friend in China who came from Greece several years ago. He asked me for my MSN account. I answered that I didn’t have a MSN account but did have a QQ account. Told me that he had never heard of QQ. This is a very common phenomenon which happens between different countries in which people are using different kinds of media social platforms, especially between eastern countries and western countries. In other words, people who come from different social orientations are living in different virtual worlds. Since I arrived in Australia from China, this phenomenon is more evident. I have to use different social media platforms to communicate with my friends in China and Australia respectively, search cross-cultural on-line resources, download study materials. I started to wonder why this happens despite the promise of a universal, single “global village” (Mcluhan 1992) thanks to the rapid progress of Internet technology.

State again what the phenomenon is by comparing popular social media platforms in Australia and China, such as MSN & QQ, Google & Baidu, and these distinctions will be illustrated and analyzed

concentrating on three parts: governmental governance, cultural features and users’ habits.

Governmental Governance

As we know, the internet is a global medium, providing information and connections around the globe. However, in the book “Who controls the Internet? Illusion of a borderless world”, Goldsmith and Wu (2006) called the global network “a collection of nation-state networks—networks still linked by the Internet protocol, but for many purposes separate”. In addition, they believe that one reason for this phenomenon is “enforcement of national laws”. Indeed, governmental governance is not only the main factor in terms of economy and policy, but also embodied in people’s daily life, as well as Internet strategies. Domestic Internet Laws are the important foundations for effectively governing the social media platforms. Malcolm’s (2008) book suggests that there are five governance mechanisms: means of rules, norms, markets and codes and networks. He also points out that means of rules, in the other words, laws or hierarchies, especially “domestic regulation” is an essential governance mechanism for the Internet.

Recently, the Internet has been a widely used tool for exchanging information and economic and social developing. In order to make sure the security of Internet and countries, governments should play the dominating role in terms of making policies to govern the processing of Internet (Tang&Liang 2005). No matter in China or Australia, there are some similar legislations in terms of the Internet governance, such as State and Territory Legislation, Commonwealth Legislation and so on to strengthen national defense and protect individuals’ privacy. However, in Australia, people are able to surf the Internet freely, but by contrast, in China, Government Online Project prohibits citizens from surfing some certain websites.

Goldsmith and Wu (2006) in their book he calls this kind of Internet governance as ‘closed national networks’. In China, the government creates a domestic firewall screening which enables the real-time surveillance and control system based on COM of URL to filtrate the URL; record the URL and the title of the website; manage and look up these information. It is similar to a huge local area network, citizens could not open some web pages which are very popular in Australia through regular channels without using Internet agents to log on, like Facebook, twitter and so on. This policy law directly leads to the consequence that few Chinese people are able to use these social media platforms. The possibility of development has been eliminated at the grass-roots level while still in the embryonic stage.

In terms of other effects towards the development of social media platforms which are caused by government policies, Google is a symbolic example, on 23rd March 2010, Google issued a statement to exit the Chinese market (David Drummond 2010). In this statement, Google corporation said there are two reasons for leaving the Chinese market: Firstly, “targeted attacks from China hacking”; the second reason is they do not want to reexamine their search results which are required by Chinese government. This controversy not only influenced the Internet-related issues, but also affected the relationship of Chinese and American governments. From this statement, we can clearly see that Google asserts there is “non-market competition factors” (David Drummond 2010) are involved and repeats several times that the main reason is because of contradictory to Chinese Internet laws. By Malcolm’s (2008) theory, he suggests that the Internet architecture would imprint onto users’ communities. From this perspective, users’ range of options of using social media platforms has been selected and Internet resources has been influenced and divided by geographic areas which are controlled by government policies.

Cultural Features

In the article ‘Users of the world, unite! The challenges and opportunities of Social Media’ written by Andreas and Michael (2009), the authors offer five suggestions of how social media platforms could be utilized to adjust consumers’ needs, that is: be active, be interesting, be humble, be unprofessional, and be honest. However, the definitions of these evaluation criteria are very subjective which come from

individual practitioner judgments. People who are living in different countries, belonging to different nations, having different cultural backgrounds would form different concepts, speak different languages and show different favors. In the same way, when using a medium to surf the Internet to accomplish a purpose, people tend to use one which could maximum fit their personal and cultural favors. Cultural features lead to popularity of certain social media platforms in some degree; but in return, these platforms would reshape people's way and sphere of online activities.

High-context Culture & Low-context Culture

According to Edward T. Hall's (1976) theory of cultural factors, he divided cultures into high-context culture & low-context culture. High-context culture "relies heavily on subtle, often nonverbal cues to maintain social harmony" and in low-context culture, "Language expresses thoughts, feelings, and ideas as directly as possible". As Hall's theoretic structure, Australia belongs to high-context culture and China is a typical low-context culture country.

Given Instant Messenger Software in Australia and China as an example, MSN is the most popular IM software in Australia, whereas in China, QQ occupies the main market quota of that realm. In another paper, "Cultural differences in the use of instant messaging in Asia and North America" (2006), the authors consider that cultural differences should be taken into consideration when analyzing cross-cultural communication medium. In addition, he gives results from the present investigation of IM which suggest that when comparing with high-context culture countries, multi-party chat, audio-video chat and emoticons were much more popular in low-context culture countries, especially in Asia countries. Indeed, from my personal experience of using QQ and MSN, QQ pays more attention to developing its entertainment features. While MSN which is making better and richer use of literal functional development, QQ has developed many sub features and could provide more than hundred categories of QQ games, user-defined virtual avatars & virtual pets, Q-zone services (similar to MSN space), micro blogging, on-line shopping center, online stock and etc. The main function of text transmission has been slightly diminished and transferred into a multi-functional tool to gain Chinese consumers' preferences.

Individualism-Collectivism Values

According to Edward T. Hall's (1976) theory of cultural factors, he divided cultures into high-coAccording to Hofstede (1991), Australia shows the individualism value while China is a high-collectivism country. People who come from individualism always show 'I' consciousness whereas those who belongs to collectivism context shows 'we' consciousness. Ting-Toomey (1999) explores this point as individualism refers to people tend to stress the 'individual identity' over 'group identity' and vice versa.

Returning to the examples of QQ and MSN, it is easy to detect that the functional design of MSN is more private than QQ. QQ is advocating extensive participatory, providing several functions to combine users as groups: everything a user do would be shown in the Q-zones of every his/her QQ contacts as new messages; QQ would automatically search potential contacts for users' who may be known in the real life by comparing users' enrollment information; group text, audio and video chats. By contrast, MSN is focusing on point to point communication, even though there was no the function of group text chat before the year of 2009. In carrying out the individualism-collectivism cultural values in Australia and China, it is understandable that MSN and QQ could gain further popularity in these two respective countries.

Languages

Language plays a very fundamental role in the selection and use of social media platforms. Google has exited from the Chinese market, whilst this event did not bring serious influences to most Chinese users. Because Google was not the most widely used search engine in China. Its counterpart, Baidu, is the most popular one. As a indigenous search engine, it has access to search more domestic information for users when compared with Google. However, in terms of the function of searching English information, Google far more surpasses Baidu. Therefore, in the global market, Google still occupies the mainstream position which Baidu cannot match with it.

In order to attract the largest numbers of users, social media platforms would pay much attention on adapting users' demands and focus on localized modeling designs. As a result, localization of these platforms directly cause the virtual world to be separated and consumers to be grouped.

Users' Habits

In the Internet sphere, there is a specific mode of transmission 'Cultural memes' (Malcolm, 2008), which is a kind of replicable 'unit' similar to genetic gene. As the essay mentions earlier, the architecture of the Internet and various online communities reflect the inherent values of the user. Particular objective and subjective reasons lead to someone's habit of using certain social media platforms, once a habit has been formed, it will gain the property of long-term and durable (David, 1855). After that, his/her friends, relatives or other relating people in this social circle would likely be "infected".

Try to think about it, you are a new user of Internet, what tools and services will you start to use? Perhaps you will choose to use the tools which have been used by your peers. When you become accustomed to use the tools what they are using, this long-term habit has been formed and would duplicate by other users. For instance, I have used my QQ account for eleven years, and it is a very common appearance among my peers. In this account, I have more than two hundreds people's contact details and it is my responsibility to keep those details private. In China, when getting to know new friends, people usually prefer to exchange their telephone number as well as their QQ, RenRen or T.Sina accounts. After exchanging these accounts, people are able to broaden their online and offline social circles. As a result, they would become one of the members of specific virtual communities unwittingly.

As a member of different social networks, everyone is contributing to build these unique virtual worlds. At this point, geographic and cultural elements mentioned before act on usage replication. As a result, Internet culture duplicates itself 'memetically' and is shared by involved individuals, numbers of distinct communities are turning to be bigger and bigger and are shaping the virtual word into a great deal of united parts.

Conclusion

Humans are now closer than ever, thanks to the development of technology, especially the Internet. The term bring into introduction "global village" (McLuhan, 1992) is not a fresh concept any more. However, is it the truth that all of the Internet citizens are living in the same virtual world? Maybe the answer is no. Actually, the Internet has been separated by artificial and natural evolution reasons. By comprising distinctive social media platforms in Australia and China, this essay explores this phenomenon in three categories, they are governmental governance which is particular focusing on Internet laws and governance polices; cultural features in terms of High-context & Low-context Culture, Individualism-Collectivism Values and languages aspects and users' habits which could lead to cultural memes.

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Choose Your Own World: The convergence of hypertext, literature and gaming

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Abstract

The popular understanding of narrative is a story with a beginning, a middle and an end – but in reality, a narrative need not follow a single path through time dictated by the author. Novelists as early as Sterne have forced the reader to choose their own narrative, while 20th century literary writers such as Borges and Joyce were still more demanding of reader interaction.

Experimental writers in the 1960s created complex multi-linear narratives, but the limits of book technology left these as interesting concepts rather than readable works. The emergence of the computer game was the first manifestation of unequivocally multi-linear stories. Early computer game narratives were simplistic, but the complexity of plotting and writing within modern narrative-led computer games is at least as great as in any linear story.

While the importance of narrative in computer games grows, the economics of digital media are sidelining the traditional paper book and the limitations that it imposes on writers. These two effects of digital media are both serving to breaking down the distinctions between

Keywords

narrative, interactive, multi-linear, hypertext, literature, computer games

Introduction

The novel has been slower to migrate to digital platforms than other kinds of text previously delivered in print form. It has been suggested that this is because reading narrative content online is less enjoyable than reading it in book format, without compelling advantages to make up for the inconvenience. However, the concepts that we now associate with hypertext have always been an important element in creative writing. It is the form of the book that has held authors in a straightjacket of linear narrative, not artistic vision.

Digital culture changes this paradigm. On one side, hypertext narratives have become increasingly important in recent years – while at the same time, an increasing shift to digital media is inevitable for traditional narrative fiction, driven by the economics of the publishing industry. This article argues that as the constraint of technology is removed from authors – and as fiction writers increasingly spend time writing multi-linear narratives – the distinctions between the two types of narrative will break down, and that writers of the different types will no longer be considered distinct.

Defining the narrative

Before we can follow the evolution of narrative across different media, we need to understand what ‘narrative’ means, since otherwise the term can lead us to make assumptions based on traditional media forms. For Thomson (2005, p325), narrative is a straightforward concept, involving an “extended story with a beginning, a plot of some kind, and an ending”. With notable exceptions, this is an adequate definition for the purposes of published book-based media. However, it becomes troublesome as we approach some postmodern literature, and cannot accommodate hypertext narratives.

Manovich (2000, p179) suggests that the traditional narrative that Thomson describes is a subset of the wider set of interactive narratives (or ‘hyper-narratives’). An interactive narrative is the “sum of multiple trajectories through a database”. Ryan (2004, p417) suggests the related concept of a ‘narrative script’. A narrative script must create a world with a conception of time; it must have at least one intelligent agent; and it must feature different, changing states of the world with the change caused by concrete events. The reader must be capable of understanding or imagining the motives driving any ‘perceived-as-deliberate’ actions of beings in the world, and some degree of understanding why ‘perceived-as-accidental’ events occur. Finally, there is some concept of chronology and progress, although this does not imply a linear progression through time, or even a single linear narrative that jumps through time. In this article, ‘narrative’ is used in Ryan’s sense.

‘Hypertext’ is another important concept, used here to describe both online and offline narratives. This should not be understood in the sense where the term refers to content navigation systems, where the user of an online system follows links embedded in the text to jump to other areas of content. Rather, the concept goes beyond the form; the key concepts for a hypertext are that it is associative, multi-pathed, and multi-linear. Miller (1995, p38) adds that “a hypertext demands that we choose at every turn and take responsibility for our choices”.

Proto-hypertext in literature

“But I get ahead of myself - I am not yet born” – Tristram Shandy

Long before the concept was defined, novelists have created works that can be seen as hypertexts, with Sterne’s *Tristram Shandy* (1767) perhaps the first. As Bolter (2001, p26) suggests, the use of an unreliable narrator making endless chronological digressions forces the reader to evaluate the truth of all Shandy’s stories, moving from passive readership to making active choices about what the ‘real’ story is. In Charlotte Brontë’s *Villette* (1853), the reader is explicitly forced to choose the narrative path. After a vivid description of the terrible storm in which the heroine’s sailor lover M. Emanuel is caught and the many deaths it causes, the novel concludes with this address to the reader:

“[L]eave sunny imaginations hope. Let it be theirs to conceive the delight of joy born again fresh out of great terror, the rapture of rescue from peril, the wondrous reprieve from dread, the fruition of return. Let them picture union and a happy succeeding life”.

Implicitly, while sunny readers can imagine M. Emanuel’s survival and reunion with *Villette*, gloomier readers are free to assume that he drowned horribly. This has an obvious parallel in subsequent choice-driven narratives.

In the 20th century, many writers have flirted more directly with multi-linear storytelling. James Joyce an obvious precursor, as Groden (2002, p359) explains:

“The terms used to describe hypertext... echo Joyce’s interior monologue techniques in *Ulysses*, in which details connect across hundreds of pages and readers progress through the masses of information

in various ways.”

Another precursor is Borges, who describes the concept of a hypertext novel in his short story *The Garden of Forking Paths* (Borges, 1941). The story includes a Chinese governor, Ts’ui Pên, who writes a book in which every possible outcome of every narrative event actually takes place. The first true multi-linear narratives, however, appeared in the 1960s. Saporta’s *Composition No. 1* (1963) is a novel consisting of loose pages in a box. The copy on the box says:

“The reader is requested to shuffle these pages like a deck of cards; to cut, if he likes, with his left hand, as at a fortuneteller’s. The order the pages then assume will orient X’s fate”.

The pages are written so that they can be read coherently in any order. Although there are obviously strong commonalities in the narrative across different orders, the reader’s understanding of the characters’ motives and behaviours is shaped strongly by the order in which they read the text.

Cortazar (1966)’s *Hopscotch* is similar, although published in traditional book form. The reader is given the option of reading through the narrative in a conventional fashion, or of skipping through the chapters in a different order set by the author. Queneau (1967)’s short story, *A Story As You Like It*, features multiple narratives in the now-familiar sense of ‘if you choose A, turn to page 4’. The popular children’s novels published from 1979 by Bantam as the *Choose Your Own Adventure* series generally featured action, fantasy or sci-fi settings, but followed the same conventions as Queneau’s text.

Narrative in computer games

“Here you can find everything from immortality, to unnervingly good mushroom wine” – *Echo Bazaar*, 2010

Computer games evolved in parallel to multi-linear literary texts, with little involvement from conventional fiction writers – much less literary theorists – until late in the medium’s evolution. The programmers of *Pac-Man* moved in different cultural circles from Saporta, Cortazar and Queneau. However, even the earliest computer games can be viewed as a narrative medium, as Kennedy (2010, online) argues:

“Space Invaders has an extrinsic narrative: you’re the last spaceship defending earth against waves of aliens. You also create an intrinsic narrative with each playthrough: you killed some bad dudes, then you killed some more bad dudes, then a bad dude killed you. It’s the same core story as *Beowulf*, and it’s more compelling because it stars you.”

Not even the scripted back-story of *Space Invaders*, where a human-piloted spaceship fights alien invaders, is required to create a narrative medium. An anonymous short story written from the point of view of a Tetris block (*Where Am I?*, 2011, online) makes this point:

“Below me sat a monstrous pile of blocks of every color possible, coming closer and closer to me every millisecond. At first, I saw things at a blur, and when I started to see things more clearly, I felt that strong tug again. I was pushed to the left side completely, leaning up against a brick wall. With a hard “thump”, I dropped onto a long, orange rectangle.”

As computer games evolved, a more consciously literary narrative began to take hold, directly taking cues from traditional fiction. Text-only adventure games such as *Zork* or *Leather Goddesses of Phobos* became popular in the 1980s, navigated by typing simple commands. Inventive plots and writing were crucial for success, given the lack of visual or multimedia content. An early example of convergence between computer games and literature was Infocom’s *Hitchhiker’s Guide to the Galaxy* game, based on Douglas Adams’ series of radio plays, books and TV shows. This text-based adventure world featured Adams’ characters, and Adams also had a significant part in writing and planning the content.

Improvements in graphics and physics over the 1990s and 2000s shifted the focus of complex-narrative computer games into a primarily filmic medium, as Bolter & Grusin (1999, p103) note. However, there has always been an important subset of computer games driven by interactive narrative. In the early 1990s, *Myst* combined a fantasy narrative heavy in literary references with multimedia sound and graphics, while *The Secret of Monkey Island* followed a similar route with a pop-culture narrative.

As technology evolved, games such as *Halo* relied on advanced rendering of graphics and physics for their playability. However, there has been a recent shift toward epic narrative games. Titles such as *Grand Theft Auto IV* and *L.A. Noire* feature immensely complicated, tightly-written plots and dialogue. Brooker (2011, online) contrasts these games' ambitious interactive fictional narratives with the artistic failure of modern Hollywood, and concludes that gaming seeks to appeal to the imagination of intelligent viewers in a way that the mainstream movie industry no longer attempts.

Hypertext-driven adventure games also continue to exist, boosted by the emergence of casual online gaming. One example, a hybrid of a command-line adventure game and a *Farmville*-style social game, set in a steampunk version of Victorian London, is *Echo Bazaar*. Others include *Choice of Games*, whose offerings resemble an adult version of a Choose Your Own Adventure narrative, delivered in a more appropriate medium.

There is a growing convergence between the kinds of authors who write for such game content, the authors who write conventional fiction, and the authors who write multi-linear non-game content. A current example comes from writer Erin Morgenstern, as part of the release of her novel *The Night Circus*. An interactive online text-based game has been created as part of the novel's launch, with the game story determined jointly by Morgenstern and a games developer (Williams, 2011, online).

eBooks and convergence

"The book is dead (long live the book!)" – Sherman Young, 2008

Prior to the advent of digital media, proto-hypertext works occupied a small market niche – either considered avant-garde, or a gimmick suitable only for children, depending on context. Joyce's abstract style is seen as too complex to attract a mainstream audience, and works such as Saporta's and Cortazar's are interesting artworks because of their concept rather than their readability. In general, the experience of reading a book – which is well suited to a single linear narrative – is not conducive to multilinear hypertext works.

But it is becoming clear that – while not altogether obsolete – the paper book is losing its importance as the canonical form of literature. Novelist, virtual world writer and blogger Andrea Phillips writes "Books will still be printed as a specialty market, but the bulk of fiction will be eBooks, sold online for a to-be-determined price point" (Phillips, 2010, online). Similarly, Grossman & Sachs (2009, online) predict that "books [will] rise to fame and prominence YouTube-style, in the rough and tumble of the great Web 2.0 mosh pit".

Some writers view this development as artistic impoverishment, notably Thompson (2005, p326):

"Whether... the kind of value that can be added in an online environment would be sufficient to outweigh the disadvantages and inconveniences involved in accessing extended texts online is by no means clear".

This pessimistic analysis neglects the point that hypermedia narratives have been an artistic goal long before there was a technology that could deliver them. As Ryan (2004, p418) says, "artists in many media have been obsessed with the idea of making the text endlessly self-renewable". The coming of the eBook can empower writers to follow the paths that the technology of the book had previously denied them. According to Bolter (2001, p26):

"The qualities that distinguish electronic writing from print, flexibility and interactivity, become the bases of the enthusiasts' claim that the computer can improve on the printed book... To say that electronic writing is flexible and interactive is to say that it is hypertextual".

Rather than being an inferior way of presenting narratives, digital media allows new modes of content to flourish. The reason the vast majority of 19th and 20th century literature existed as a linear narrative is not that this is the only, or even the best, way to write fiction – it was because the medium of the book dictated a linear narrative. Digital media means that we are no longer forced to submit to this constraint, and that narrative fiction can take on whatever form the author chooses.

Conclusion

The result of the process outlined in this article is a convergence between the textual narrative end of computer gaming, and the online hypertext end of literary writing. It is increasingly hard to come up with a definition that splits a game, from a virtual world, from a hypertext literary project – all are interactive narrative projects; and all encompass the key aspect of hypermedia, that we choose and take responsibility for our choices.

The shift of content online will lead more writers to work in hypertext, particularly as business models are devised that allow the commercialisation of hypertext concepts without compromising artistic visions. The computer game element should not be neglected by writers – although many of the key hypermedia works are either sponsored content or devices that promote conventional books or movies, the games considered here are profit-making ventures that operate without sponsorship.

Example games and narrative worlds

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Digital Evolution: The changing face of video game journalism

NICHOLAS BARKL

Abstract

Video game journalism is an excellent example of a niche branch of journalism that has developed significantly in the face of digital publishing and culture. In the past, magazines were the dominant medium for the distribution of news and reviews of new game, however the internet and related media has changed both the content and the delivery system for video game journalism. The article looked specifically at the ways in which multi-modality, globalisation and social tools (such as Web 2.0 tools) have changed the way that news about video games is reported. Information was sourced from services providing internet statistics, interviews with journalists and articles from academic journals regarding digital publishing and culture. The ability for online-based journalism to create a dialogue between journalists, developers and their worldwide audience through social tools (such as tagging and forums) has lead to a more socially-oriented form of journalism. The article concluded that it will be the expansion of these social capabilities that will form the bedrock upon which video game journalism will build upon in the future.

Keywords

Video game, journalism, globalisation, multi-modality, Web 2.0

Introduction

Video games are an important part of digital culture. As a medium of expression that has only become established (in comparison to other mediums such as literature or film) in the last decade, it is understandable that there is a variety of journalistic sources that cover changes in the video game industry. However, the increasing availability and flexibility of digital media has caused dramatic changes in the reporting of games. Since the development of Web 2.0, there has been a torrent of academic writing produced analysing the benefits of digital journalism in general, but very little has been written about the niche subject of video game journalism. This article will analyse how globalisation, multi-modality and the development of online social tools have influenced video game journalism, and what benefits these changes offer over traditional print media. For the purposes of this article, 'video game journalism' will refer to coverage of video games and hardware in the media. This includes magazines, television shows, websites and podcasts that provide information such as reviews, previews and developer interviews. Journalists who participate in these fields will all be referred to as 'video game journalists'.

Although the medium is still young, video game journalism has been subject to several dramatic

changes. From 1980 until the mid-90s, the market was dominated by magazines. These magazines would usually have a permanent staff of writers and cover a specific format (for example PC, Console), region (UK, America) or company's output (*Sega, Nintendo*). The content of the magazines would be varied, with sections devoted to fan-mail, cheat codes and international news as well as reviews of new games. In the mid-to-late nineties, where the number of internet users worldwide increased from 16 million in 1995 to 248 million in 1999 (InternetWorldStats.com), the market-share previously enjoyed by magazine-based journalism was threatened. Many sections of old magazines became redundant in the face of the increasingly-convenient gaming-related websites. For example, international news could be read as it broke over the internet, whereas magazines were forced to wait for their next publication which could be a month later. Considering a significant number of major video game companies (such as Sega and Nintendo) are based in Japan, this dealt a significant blow to print media. Website tools, such as forums and comment systems, superseded the less convenient fan-mail. These sorts of changes were seen across many different areas but with the interests of the target market for video game journalism directly related to, this sped the process along.

Currently, all popular magazines about video game news have an associated website or have even ceased their printed output to focus on an internet-only presence. A recent example is the long-running magazine *Electronic Gaming Monthly*, which was cancelled in 2009 but whose associated website, *Iup.com*, was spared by its new parent company *UGO* (Gamasutra 2009). Despite these changes, the industry is still struggling to adjust as can be seen by *Future Publishing's* current financial difficulties. Patrick Garratt, business development manager for the *Eurogamer Network*, supports the argument that print media is being usurped by technology with relation to journalism:

“...my background has seen me work at EMAP, Dennis, Computec and Future, and even though I was involved in Internet projects at two of these companies, there was never a time where print publishing wasn't the primary revenue focus for any of them. That the situation will shift isn't debatable any more: it's screamingly obvious.”

(Garratt 2006)

Interfaces and Multi-Modality

One of the biggest benefits provided by technology is the potential for varied interfaces to be used for the provision and distribution of information. This concept can also be described as 'multi-modality'. Multi-modal interfaces can make use of a variety of different senses and actions on the part of the individual: modern functionality such as voice-controlled mobile phones and touch screens are good examples of multi-modal interfaces. Different interfaces carry different properties, so information should be tailored to the modal form it will eventually be transmitted through, as is explained by Archambault and Burger:

“...information have to be adapted to fit the alternative device, that is information should be converted in order to fit the specific presentation rules which are associated with each modality. Therefore the data model should include all the elements which are necessary to correspond to the specific presentation rules of each modality.”

(Archambault and Burger 2001)

These different methods of interacting with information give journalists and publishers a variety of ways with which to convey information to their audience.

New forms of modality have changed the way that video game journalism is delivered. Traditionally, most journalism of video games in magazines was provided in text form and supported by screenshots of new games and hardware. Attempts were made in other mediums, such as television shows, but with

limited success. The staff cutbacks, restructuring and eventual collapse of *G4TV* is an excellent example of a failed attempt at bringing video game journalism into a new medium (Richey 2006). It has only been since the internet has become widely used and smartphones have become commonplace that video game journalism has found other successful ways of delivering news to their audience. The convenience and speed with which news can be delivered through these mediums knocked magazines from their position as the dominant form factor for video game journalism, which is representative of the impact of these technologies on journalism in general. This is supported by data from the Yankee Group/Comverse research in multi-modality, where focus groups from Germany, England and America representing multiple age groups (18-25, 25-35, 35-50) praised the concept of different interfaces and formats for the delivery of information: “Some of the benefits they drew from the concept included improved time management, greater connectivity, more choice, “freedom and fun,” officials said.” (Woods 2002)

Due to the high level of technical competency in the target audience, video game journalists have found particular success in adapting to multi-modal output. Different forms of journalism are directly tied to breakthroughs in technology, with an excellent example being the way journalism is delivered through 'smartphones' such as the *iPhone*. The *iPhone* especially appeals to the same age group as the primary market for video games: a survey by Rubicon Media in 2008 revealed that more than half of iPhone users are under thirty years old and 16% of users are students (Rubicon 2008), which matches the general age of a player. These modern mobile phones are capable of connecting to the internet in the same way as a traditional computer, but their size and form factor encourage data to be created specifically for the dimensions of the phone. As such, many popular websites, such as *Kotaku*, create 'mobile' versions of their website or specialised RSS feeds. These forms of journalism are often shorter to read (sometimes being only headlines) so that they fit on the small screen and are easy to scroll using a touch-screen interface. Podcasts are another form of communication that video game journalists have made great use of. By putting news in the form of a podcast, individuals are able to listen through their phones or mp3 devices whilst still on the move. *Giant Bomb* runs a weekly podcast called 'The Bombcast', which has recently celebrated its 200th episode delivered through *iTunes*. It is even possible to access news through the interface of the consoles themselves, such as the news 'channel' available on the Nintendo Wii. These are some basic examples where technology has helped provide an outlet for news that is more convenient for the target audience.

A more complicated example has come about through the increased use of streaming video through the internet. This has allowed journalistic websites such as *Giant Bomb* to run sessions where the journalists will stream a video feed of them playing through a new game whilst viewers can use a chat room to speak in real time to both other viewers and the journalists themselves. Whilst podcasts and RSS feeds can be seen as simple reductions of existing forms of journalism, this particular use of the internet in conjunction with streaming video provides an experience unique to the technology. It utilises video, audio and text-based interfaces at the same time to increase the interactivity possible between the journalists and their audiences in a way that could not be achieved with earlier forms of technology.

Internet Tools and Functionality

One of the major changes in internet culture has been the exponential increase in social interaction online. There are two main reasons for this. The first is the ever-increasing number of people with both the knowledge and technology to access information on the internet. The second, and most important with regards to this article, is the internet technology that has stemmed from the concept of 'Web 2.0', such as blogs, wikis and social networks. Quiggin argues that these developments are helping to achieve the outcomes that the internet originally promised:

“...there were enthusiastic predictions that it would make everyone their own publisher, with the capacity to broadcast their thoughts on any topic, share their creative contributions and

talk about whatever was important in their daily lives...In the past few years, however, the original vision has re-emerged, thanks to such developments as blogs and wikis.”

(Quiggin 2006)

‘Web 2.0’ is a blanket name given for modern internet technology that focuses on (amongst other things) collaboration and user-generated content. The purpose of the technology is to build a greater bond between the person (or people) behind the website and their audience. Many of the most popular websites on the Internet were born out of this style of thinking, such as *Facebook* and *Youtube*. However, these tools can also be implemented on top of existing websites to add additional functionality to the site.

Video game journalism uses Web 2.0 tools to build a sense of community within their readership. Various sources of video game journalism have taken these social tools and integrated them completely with the way in which their information is presented. An excellent example is *Rock, Paper, Shotgun*. This website is run in the form of a blog, with news being presented in the form of diary entries. Every article makes use of ‘Web 2.0’ functions: users can comment on news and use tags to navigate through stories. They can also sign up for a personal account, allowing them to contribute to the forums and join in on website-exclusive discussions with industry figures. All of these options serve to enhance the sense of community offered by the site in a way which print media cannot match. The ease with which readers can move from one related story to another is also important. As mentioned earlier, sites such as *Rock, Paper, Shotgun* utilise ‘tagging’ when publishing news. To ‘tag’ something means to assign a keyword to a section of data (such as a blog entry). It serves as a form of online filing system, allowing users the ability to find related stories quickly and easily.

The integration of existing social networking sites, such as *Facebook* and *Twitter*, into the main websites for video game journalism also helps to build a community. On *Rock, Paper, Shotgun*, users are able to ‘retweet’ the news article to their profile on *Twitter* with the click of a button. This can raise the profile of the story, as well as indicate what that particular individual is interested in and their opinion on the subject at hand. These features cost the journalists virtually nothing, as the social networking websites are external and carry the financial load by themselves. It is as if journalists have received a free slate upon which to promote their web presence through their audience.

Web 2.0 features are particularly important with regards to video game journalism. Providing a sense of community has become a primary concern to video game companies: services such as *Xbox Live*, which had more than 20 million users in 2010 (Grant 2010) are designed to promote social gaming. These communities are comprised of individuals who form the primary market for video game journalism. As such, the best way to build a community around the hobby is through the use of Web 2.0 tools and social networking.

Globalisation

Tomlinson defines globalization as ‘complex connectivity’ (Tomlinson 1999). He is referring particularly to the connections between individuals in modern society and how these connections are mediated and made available, such as through technology. The deterritorialisation of cultures is a key factor in the development of most new forms of technology, such as mobile phones and the internet.

Globalisation has caused irreversible changes to journalism in general for two reasons. The first is that it is now possible for journalists to source information with greater ease. In the past, information from foreign territories would be difficult to obtain, and would often see the use of a foreign correspondent to interpret the report for a local audience. However, with information now available digitally to all parts of the world instantly, these older methods of journalism are becoming increasingly irrelevant. Knight expressed this in his article ‘Globalised Journalism in the Internet Age’: “Foreign correspondents are

in crisis: their role of independently recording, interpreting and transmitting news from distant places is at risk of transforming into that of mere actors in choreographed charades of ‘real’ news.” (Knight 2003) The second reason is that there are greater expectations from the audience than have been held in the past. With the public audience now having the ability to choose between looking at their preferred ‘local’ news outlet or finding the original source of information online for themselves, journalists have been forced to change the way in which they approach their audience.

These points are particularly relevant when looking at video game journalism. The video game industry has always been an international business: companies are based all over the world and usually have released their games and hardware in a variety of different regions and languages. Several of the major video game companies and hardware manufacturers, such as *Nintendo*, are based in Japan. Because of this, there has always been a need for games journalists to find and interpret news from overseas in order to provide the information expected by their audience. Traditionally, magazines devoted large sections of their monthly publication to news from overseas. However, the rise of the internet has seen video game journalism approach global news from different perspectives.

Kotaku is an example of a modern website that uses multiple short daily updates to direct the reader to the source of the news. These websites are often run as a blog and display news as brief updates. Usually, these updates are quite short and serve to point the user to the original source of information through hyperlinks. This is a form of journalism that has only become possible through digital means, as it relies on hyperlinks to provide substance and context to the information presented by the news outlet. Print media requires the writer to provide context and background to the stories they are presenting, whereas websites like *Kotaku* function more like an index of recent news, signposting their sources and extra information for interested readers to follow up on.

Another form of news reporting is used by hybrid magazine/website publishers such as *PC Powerplay*. The journalists for these publications often assume that their readers are sourcing international news from the internet already and instead focus on providing information and news regarding their target market, which in this case is Australians. The majority of their news reports reference activities overseas and seek to contextualise them within the local region, such as talking about when a piece of technology will be localised and released in Australia. An excellent example can be found in the March 2011 issue of *PC Powerplay*, where Matt Wilson explored the cost of a new set of CPUs when sold by Australian distributors compared to other distributors worldwide. (2011) Ironically, it appears that the internet has forced traditional publishers to look inside their own region for news to appeal to customers rather than reporting news from overseas.

Conclusion

“One thing’s for sure: the era of videogames magazines’ dominance as the main source of information for consumers is well over. Even a fool could work that one out.”

(Garratt 2006)

Digital media has had a profound effect on both the content and distribution of video game journalism. As recent events cited by the article demonstrate, the convenience of different systems of delivery and global coverage of digital media makes it an attractive alternative to traditional print media, whilst social media and website tools (such as forums) have made it possible to build a international community online around the common hobby of video games. These benefits have seen a dramatic shift in the audience’s preference of medium. Magazines have been consistently losing readership as the internet gains a wider audience, to the point that journalists like Patrick Garratt are shifting their entire careers to be behind digital media:

“All media will soon be on-demand, especially and painfully obviously in the technology space, and multimedia digital content will be king. Are you a multimedia digital content publisher, or are you still spinning crashing figures for circulations of bits of dead tree smeared with ink? Adapt or die, people. Adapt or die.”

(Garratt 2006)

In light of the benefits offered and the degree of acceptance from the target audience, it is reasonable to argue that video game journalism, like many other types of journalism, will be primarily digitally-based in the very near future.

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Facebook Features and MySpace Memoirs: Does user behaviour within social network- ing sites qualify as a form of digital publishing?

NADIA JUNAIDEEN

Abstract

Social networking sites (SNSs) allow users to interact with friends, share personal information, and upload multimedia content, all within the same platform. While this opportunity certainly qualifies as a valuable online service, can it also be classified as a form of online publishing?

This article argues that the creative behaviour undertaken by individuals on SNSs can be classified as digital publishing, similar to a contemporary form of life writing. Individuals use the services that SNSs provide to shape a narrative about their personal identities, and are constantly aware that this narrative is being read by the vast readership contained within their friend lists. This awareness causes individuals to make conscious decisions about the images they portray, creating the behavioural norms that make up the conventions of this new genre.

This article uses existing theoretical definitions of ‘SNSs’ and ‘life writing’ to shape an argument about the validity of this genre. Using MySpace and *Facebook* as key examples of popular social media platforms, the article explores the qualities of visibility and control as typical to the social media experience. It then employs these qualities to help define some of the genres’ emergent conventions. This study will hopefully act as the gateway to a new field of research on SNS behaviour as digital life writing – autobiography for a new era.

Keywords

social media, social networking sites, SNSs, *Facebook*, *MySpace*, digital publishing, contemporary life writing, new media

Introduction

Social networking sites (SNSs) are amongst the most frequently visited sites on the web. According to statistics acquired by U.S. data collection agency Experian Hitwise, *Facebook*, the world’s most popular social media platform, was the number one most visited site of 2010, outranking even Google (Hitwise 2010). Social media is revolutionary in that it combines multiple services within one platform, allowing users to network with friends, share personal information and upload photos and videos, all using the same account. Users are offered a unique virtual space to represent themselves in. There is no

doubt that this opportunity qualifies as a valuable online service, but can it also be classified as a form of online publishing?

Within SNSs, users are given the chance to use status updates, profiles, friend lists and other multi-media elements to shape a narrative about who they are and the world they occupy. This article argues that this type of ongoing self-presentation can be considered a form of digital publishing, similar to a contemporary form of life writing. Social media gives people visibility (which translates into readership), and offers users a high level of control in the sculpting of their online image. In light of these two conditions, this paper suggests that the type of identity performance that social networks support is not only a form of digital authorship, but a legitimate genre with its own set of emergent conventions.

Before SNSs

Social media arose from a specific set of pre-existing conditions. Without the combination of online services in use before the mass adoption of SNSs, social media would not be as flexible or as well-developed as it is today. In the early days of internet use, email, personal websites and online communities (also known as MUDs – Multiple User Domains or Dungeons) constituted the primary streams of interaction between the individual and the broader online community (Marwick & Boyd 2011, pp. 96-7). Each served a function independent of one another: email was used for personal correspondence, personal websites for the promotion of individual interests, and MUDs served as meeting places for interest-based groups wanting to take advantage of the new non-local connections made possible by developing web technologies.

Social media can be thought of as a pastiche of these three earlier forms. Like email, each account is explicitly connected to an offline identity, and information is generally circulated amongst ‘known’ communities of acquaintances. Like personal websites, SNSs can offer users a high degree of variability and control in terms of published content. And like MUDs, the user is encouraged to present a version of who they are through a profile and through interactions with others.

What is an SNS?

An SNS, as defined by digital researchers Boyd & Ellison (2007, p. 210), is “a web-based service that allows individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system”. Examples include *Facebook*, *MySpace*, *Bebo* and *Friendster*.

This definition by Boyd & Ellison is useful in separating SNSs from other types of digital media. It also emphasises the common features that exist across different social media platforms. For example, the concept of each SNS being a “bounded system” (point 1) draws attention to issues of inclusion and exclusion within SNS platforms. While there are many common features that would act as rich points of discussion in the larger debate about the functions of social media, this article, due to its focus on the performative potential of the SNS, will focus on two SNS characteristics in particular: visibility and control.

Visibility

The public (or semi-public) aspect of SNSs transforms user behaviour from a set of functional exchanges into a performance. Although most social networks give the user the opportunity to decide what proportion of their extended network view their profile and interactions, this does not detract from the fact that all actions within SNSs are, on some level, publicly visible. This is what makes social media

different from the more mature form of email. Although both are generally used to connect parties of real-world acquaintances, users on SNSs are very conscious of the fact that they are always addressing a large group of their contacts at once. Behaviour is less focused on delivering messages to specific friend, and more about entertaining and informing an “imaginary mass audience” (Kelley 2007, p. 3). This idea is supported by Adams’s research on *Facebook* behaviour: his study exposes the fact although the average *Facebook* user will generally have over 130 ‘friends’ within their network, they are likely to only interact regularly with four to six of them (2010, p, 105). Similar data was acquired by Thelwall in his 2008 survey of user behaviour on *MySpace* – in his paper on the subject he suggests that regardless of the number of ‘friends’ a user has, they are typically only in regular conversation with a maximum of nine of them (p. 1125-6). Users on SNSs connect with larger numbers of ‘friends’ than they can plausibly interact with on a regular basis: this large group therefore translates as a user’s audience, or in literary terms, their readership.

The significance of user visibility within SNSs is further illustrated by the way social media networks handle issues of openness and privacy. Social networks are configured so that the majority of conversations and interactions that occur within them are made ‘public’ by default (Boyd 2007, p. 117). The choice to not publish information publically is thus considered an evasive act with meaning attached to it, as the user is forced to make the conscious decision to exclude members of their readership (Boyd 2007, p. 117). User visibility can therefore be described as an expected characteristic of SNS interactions, with the user receiving a certain amount of pressure to remain in the spotlight.

Control

The visibility that users obtain on SNSs has a substantial effect on the way they behave. The knowledge that their words and actions are being observed by a large readership prompts individuals to control the impression that they present, and make active choices about their image within this network. It is this tendency to control one’s image that turns the behaviour of SNS users from ordinary modes of communication into a form of authorship.

The idea that individuals manipulate their identity as a reaction to their audience stems from a larger theoretical model that has been in circulation since the mid-twentieth century. This concept is known as identity performance theory, first explained by Erving Goffman in *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959). Goffman suggested that people develop their social identities through a circular process of independent identity construction and modification of this in light of feedback from peers. He called this process “impression management” (Goffman 1959, pp. 19-21). Impression management is highly dependent on the existence of different social circles in our lives, each requiring a different register of behaviour.

This theory is significant because of the way it is undermined when an individual interacts with social media. In the real world, an individual will act out a number of audience-specific personas depending on the context they are in at the time. In SNSs, an individual generally only has one profile which they must use to simultaneously address a number of different, often incompatible real-world contact groups. Kirkpatrick (2010), reflecting primarily on *Facebook*, sees this as a negative feature of social media environments, complaining that they have “collapsed all contexts (school and work, friends and family, the sacred and the profane) into one big bucket” (p. 1).

In literary terms however, this is a positive thing. The contextual overlap that forces individuals to abandon the multiple, reactive personas that Goffman theorised about also compels them to replace these with a singular, holistic identity that addresses their extended networks. This is a creative act. Even if individuals are unaware that they are authoring a text when they engage with social media, they will still subconsciously be doing so through the editing and adjustment of their online identities.

Social networking as contemporary life writing

Social media’s focus on the individual and their unique experience is a defining factor of every SNS. Boyd & Ellison (2007, p. 224) actually describe SNSs as “egocentric-based networks”, where each user can be “the centre of their own self-created virtual universe”. While other users can add to an individual’s story by interacting with the individual in question, at times causing content to overlap between users, each individual’s narrative can still be read as an independent story. In light of this, it is possible to view the type of authorship that takes place within SNSs as a contemporary, ongoing form of life writing.

According to literature scholar Donald J. Winslow (1995, p. ix), life writing is “a fluid term used to describe the recording of selves, memories and experiences, whether one’s own or another’s”. This is an apt description of the writing that occurs within social media. However, while traditional autobiography is written looking back on the events of one’s life, the active, real-time character of the internet allows individuals to write their stories while their lives are still in progress. They can update with new events, new friends and broken friendships, new likes and dislikes, and new pieces of ‘status’ data, as each develops.

Case Studies: *Facebook* and *MySpace*

In order to qualify the suggestion that social media output can be considered a form of publishing, this article will examine two SNSs on their degree of user visibility and control. This in turn should highlight the resemblance of user behaviour on these two SNSs to life writing. According to Hitwise data, only two SNSs have truly dominated the market over the last five years: *MySpace* and *Facebook* (Ostrow 2010). *MySpace* and *Facebook* will therefore form the basis of this examination.

MySpace

MySpace became the world’s most visited SNS in 2007, taking over from the older networking platform, Friendster (Crunchbase 2011a). Its popularity grew until 2009, at which point it was overtaken by *Facebook* in number of unique page visits per year (MarketingVox 2009). *MySpace* however is still an active social network that continues to rank in the top three social media platforms used within the U.S. (Hitwise 2011), and the top five in Australia (Hitwise Australia 2011), attesting to its continued relevance. *MySpace* offers users a high degree of visibility through publically accessible profiles: although a user can opt to make their profile ‘Friends Only’, only 27% choose to do so, according to data gathered by Thelwall (2008, p. 1326). This is a significantly lower percentage than *Facebook*’s 64% (Adams 2010, p. 196). This may have some relation to *MySpace*’s foundation story: the site was actually founded as a platform to support the promotion and discovery of bands and musicians before user trends transformed it into an SNS (Boyd 2007, p. 116). The high degree to which *MySpace* profiles can be customised is also the result of the site’s beginnings: the ability to modify elements such as the background, font, graphics, and embedded music within a user’s profile was originally the result of an error in coding that became so widely used and appreciated it was never corrected (Boyd 2007, p. 118). This high degree of customisation represents the amount of control a user has over the presentation of their image, to the extent that Dan Perkel suggests that the manipulation of one’s *MySpace* profile is in itself a new form of digital literacy (2008, p. 203).

Facebook

Facebook is the current leader in social media popularity, with over 500 million active users, according to 2011 statistics (*Facebook* 2011). *Facebook* combines standard social networking functions with organisational capacities (the ability to form groups and plan events), private messaging facilities that mimic an emailing system, and a simple, user-friendly structure. *Facebook*, unlike *MySpace*, does not offer users the option to make their profile visible to all individuals: interested parties must at the very least have a *Facebook* account to see another *Facebook* user’s profile (Ladner 2007, p. 3). However,

this reduction in public visibility is counterbalanced by *Facebook*'s news feed feature, introduced by the creators in 2006 (Ladner 2007, p. 5). This feature, which actively publishes a live feed of friends' behaviour to each user upon log-in, increases both visibility and likelihood of user interaction (Ladner 2006, p. 5). And although *Facebook* profiles lack the creative variability offered by *MySpace*, users express control over the expression of their identity through the use of such features as the status update, which conveys information about the individual's current status and can vary from trivial to profound, and the expression of likes, dislikes, tastes and preferences within their profile page (source).

Conventions

SNSs have been in use since the late 90s, giving the genre over a decade to develop (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). During this time popularity has spiked and fallen for different sites. The commonalities amongst all SNSs however have allowed the development of certain conventions that have attached themselves to this form of publishing. There is not enough room in this article to discuss the entire repertoire of techniques that users adopt when publishing their stories on an SNS, but it is worth looking at a few of the most significant ones: (1) live updating, (2) the presence of a meaningful network, (3) the use of misdirection, and (4) the inclusion of multimedia.

(1) Live updating

Almost all SNSs, including *MySpace* and *Facebook*, offer live updating of user actions and interactions within their sites (Ellison & Boyd 2007, p. 212). This allows users to represent their stories as ongoing streams of narration, a feature that SNSs share with personal blogs. What makes social media updates even more noteworthy than blog updates however is their extra emphasis on a user's personal information as well as posted thoughts and comments. Information such as tastes, interests, relationship status, religion, school and career are all updatable within social media. These things are so fundamental to personal identity that the type of altering and editing that takes place on SNSs really emphasises the concept of identity as being in constant flux. This is an argument that supports the use of SNS publishing to better understand personal stories, as they provide a more dynamic representation than the more static, traditional printed form.

(2) The meaningful network

According to Boyd & Ellison's definition (2007, p. 210), the ability to form visible connections is a key feature of the SNS. Adams, in 'The Real Life Social Network' (2010, p. 121), suggests that this in fact is the primary aim of the social network: to "make our existing connections more visible". The significance placed on maintaining a visible network suggests that a user's network is more than simply useful – it is a meaningful technique adopted in a user's representation of themselves. As expressed by Boyd (2007, p. 133), in the world of social media "we are judged by the company we keep". The ability for users to browse shared connections on *Facebook* or display their 'Top 8' friends within *MySpace* shows that the maintenance of a significant network of friendships is vital in publishing one's identity via SNS.

(3) Practices of misdirection

This article has already introduced the concept of the holistic identity that users must create when using social media. The material that they publish must be suitable for their entire friend list, with serious consequences of failure. Kelley (2007, p. 9) for example discusses the concept of "audience segregation", referring to the ease with which a user may unintentionally alienate or offend certain groups within their friend list through a lack of performative diplomacy. As a result of this, users representing themselves on SNSs often adopt certain strategies of misdirection to maintain an appropriate public narrative. Lampinen et al. (2009, pp. 7-9) give some examples of this as commonly used on *Facebook*, outlining shifts in behaviour such as self-censoring and the use of private messages and groups in co-existence with public posts when sharing material not suitable for public viewing. Boyd (2007, p. 128)

also explores a more extreme method of misdirection in the world of *MySpace*, in which a user will create several mirror accounts under different usernames, each with content appropriate for those who will have access to them. This allows individuals to moderate the publishing of reader-appropriate material depending on whether it is the individual's friends, colleagues, family, etc. that will be eventually be viewing the site.

(4) Multimedia

The ability to upload photos, videos and links – dynamic multimedia elements – to support an individual's self-expression is a benefit of publishing in the digital age. The use of multimedia elements has been widely adopted and discussed in relation to other forms of digital publishing (for example within blogs and certain iPad and iPhone applications), so this article will not spend too much time expanding on this. The mass uploading of photographic content, whether unique or reposted from other sources, is a popular and widely used feature of such sites as *Facebook* and *MySpace*. This works simultaneously with written output to make a user's narrative both verbally and visually interesting.

Concluding Remarks

In an article published in the *Harvard Business Review*, Jeffrey Rayport (2011, p. 1), discusses the attendance of different publishing firms at a recent conference of digital publishers in the US. He repeatedly questions why *Facebook*, a site that publishes original user-generated content and facilitates the uploading of millions of photographs daily, would be excluded from the conference's guest list. Rayport concludes that *Facebook*, being a branded utility rather than a passive platform, must not qualify as an online publisher. It is functional rather than presentational.

This article has argued the opposite. It is the functional aspects of SNSs like *Facebook* and *MySpace* that allow them to qualify as a form of digital publishing, providing users with a dynamic readership and a sense of creative control and ensures the creation of a fresh and innovative narrative product.

This article has been an introduction to the idea of social networking as a form of life writing within digital publishing. Future directions of research could include a further examination into the conventions, trends, and behaviours that typify this genre, and surveys into the actual produced content to examine whether any themes emerge across a body of user narratives. The beauty of this form of authorship is its organic nature: without necessarily being aware of it, million of SNS users are forming and shaping new stories everyday. If nothing else, the overarching statement this makes about the creative potential of contemporary digital society is, by itself, remarkable.

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I, Consumer, Producer: The rise of collaborative content creation and its impact on producer/user relationships

OLIVIA PORTER

Abstract

Citizen journalism represents a new paradigm of journalism, with the potential to level the field between journalists and readers, and blur the distinction between publisher and recipient. This article examines and compares a collaborative and contributory online news website, Wikinews, to a mainstream online news website, BBC Online, to establish how citizen journalism reconfigures existing forms of publishing news. It is asserted that the relationship between producer and consumer changes through the qualitatively different ways news is gathered, researched and produced. Citizens become ‘producers’ (Bruns 2008, p. 9), assuming a hybrid producer/user role. A convergence of traditional news media and citizen journalism would be highly beneficial in the future to allow for more diverse, varied, and original storytelling; and amplify discussion that might otherwise be ignored or overlooked. It was found that citizen journalism has performed an important service in the wider media and public sphere by building on diverse participant bases to add broad, multiperspectival analysis and commentary on news events to the narrow range of perspectives expressed in mainstream news reporting. The collaboration of traditional news media and citizen journalism is particularly important for mainstream news reporting in the future to maximise the communication and information management capabilities available through new media technologies. In an era of more transparency, more collaboration, more give and take, citizen journalism represents a new model of cultural and societal participation, altering the relationship people have with the news.

Keywords

Citizen Journalism/ Producer/ Gatekeeping/ Participatory Media/ Digital Reporting

Introduction

Gatekeeping, limited consumer feedback, and increasing commercial pressures on news media organisations has led to a growing gap between the needs and wants of news audiences, and the news products provided to them by the journalism industry. With the emergence of new, participatory technologies of information access, knowledge exchange and content production, users don’t have to be just users anymore, they can be ‘producers’ (Bruns 2008, p. 9). This dissertation assesses how citizen journalism reconfigures existing forms of publishing news by comparing Wikinews, a collaborative and contributory online news website, to BBC Online, a mainstream online news website. An analysis of how the relationship between producer and consumer changes through the qualitatively different ways news is gathered, researched and produced will be discussed to determine whether a convergence of

traditional news media and citizen journalism would be advantageous in the future.

The Rise of Citizen Journalism and ‘Producers’

According to Briggs (2009, p. 5), “the demand for journalism from its audience hasn’t diminished. But the models are starting to look very different”. Citizen journalism involves members of the public “playing an active role in the process of collecting, reporting, analysing and disseminating news and information” (Bowman and Willis 2003, p. 9). Once described by columnist LD Lasica as a large collection of “random acts of journalism” (2003), citizen journalism can be categorised into three categories: print media citizen journalism, electronic media citizen journalism and internet based citizen journalism (Murthy 2009). Allan and Thorsen (Peter Lang 2009, p. 9) write:

“Citizen journalism though certainly not without historical precedents, has evolved rapidly across recent years and is expressive of the surrounding culture, organizational structures, and politics of civil societies. Much hangs, clearly on what exactly is meant by ‘citizenship’ and also ‘journalism’ and the plural meanings and projects now pursued in respect of both.”

At a time when current debates over what should count as ‘citizen journalism’ are being hotly contested, it is not surprising that disagreements about its origins tend to be similarly charged. Citizen journalism dates back to the eighteenth century, when newspapers often depended on members of the public to act as news gatherers. These early ‘citizen journalists’ were often the

“vanguard of new developments in the media, whether the radical press in Great Britain in the first quarter of the nineteenth century, or at an international level acting as foreign correspondents by dispatching accounts of important events in the absence of paid professionals” (Chapman & Nuttal 2011, p. 10).

The rapid growth of the internet in the 1990s attempted to conflate the categories of journalist and citizen, and the term ‘citizen journalism’ emerged in 2000 when Oh Yeon Ho, founder of Korea’s OhmyNews, started an experiment in which he hoped would encourage “every citizen to be a reporter” (Kahney 2003). Today the tools are cheaper, easier to use, and more ubiquitous. Rather than use a bulky camera, nowadays a citizen can use his smartphone to record what happened, and then upload the video to websites such as YouTube, Facebook or Twitter who support Web 2.0.

With the rapid rise of collaborative content creation and new opportunity to move from consumer to producer, users now assume a hybrid producer/user role, known as a ‘producer’ (Bruns 2008, p. 9). Bruns (2008 p. 21) defines producer as “the collaborative and continuous building and extending of existing content in pursuit of further improvement”. The production of ideas takes place in a “collaborative, participatory environment which breaks down the boundaries between producers and consumers and instead enables all participants to be users as well as producers of information and knowledge” (Bruns 2008, p. 9). It is “user-led production, commons-based peer production, or more prosaically as the production of customer-made products” (Sauer-Thompson 2008). Participatory news websites differentiate significantly from mainstream online news publications in the way that they monitor gate-keeping by allowing producer, as well as in journalistic content, the extent of Web 2.0 value adding, production values, functionality and accessibility.

Wikinews

Wikinews, operated and supported by the Wikimedia Foundation (a non-profit charitable organisation), is an experiment in collaborative news gathering and reporting. Wikinews was first proposed in mid-2004, with a demonstration site launched in December 2004. It is a participatory website which cultivates “free and open information resources written by its users” (Weiss 2005), while also encouraging original reporting.

Wikinews differs from other participatory journalism websites such as Indymedia and OhmyNews due to its commitment to neutrality. As Weiss (2005) points out in The Unassociated Press, “in a com-

munity that largely sets its own standards, [a] policy of a neutral point of view may be the single most important driving principle”. According to Alexa, a web information company that monitors and compiles web traffic lists, Wikinews is rated at #17, 127 in the world with 13.4% of its traffic from the United States (2011).

BBC Online

In contrast, BBC Online is a public service broadcaster, established by a Royal Charter and funded by the licence fee that is paid by UK households. BBC’s online mission is to “serve the BBC’s public purposes through the provision of innovative and distinctive online content and through distinctive propositions that reflect and extend the range of the BBC’s broadcast services, available to all” (BBC 2011). Since its inception in November 1997, BBC Online has rapidly established itself as a formidable mainstream online news publication. BBC Online is rated 40th in the world with 33.7% of its traffic from the United Kingdom (Alexa 2011).

Rationale of Sample Choice

Wikinews demonstrates a deliberately chosen position as a corrective to mainstream news and is unique in its use of technology. Rather than using blogs or similar content management systems which order content by its time of submission and allow for threaded discussion, Wikinews builds on a ‘wiki’ environment which provides the tools for a far more flexible organisation of content and enables the continued editing of any article posted on the website.

BBC Online is “one of the world’s largest and most popular mainstream news websites” (BBC 2011). More than 300 new stories are written in a typical day and the searchable archive contains around half a million stories (BBC 2011). There has been growth in the number of services provided by BBC Online as a direct result of new technologies which are changing the way that people can receive news content.

Comparison of Wikinews and BBC Online

The similarities and differences of BBC Online and Wikinews news gathering and content delivery were evident in their coverage of the seizure of human breast milk ice cream in London on the 28th February 2011.

By accessing the Wikinews ‘view history’ hyperlink in the top menu and selecting ‘compare selected revisions’ one can get a sense of how this article, *Local government officials confiscate London ice cream made from human breast milk for health reasons* (Wikinews 2011), began as a one line text story at 17:48 on the 28th of February 2011, and how it evolved through its twenty nine revisions by citizens (Wikinews allows for open editing of its content by any user, without the need to create an account) into an interactive piece of journalism, last revised at 1:56 on the 9th of March, at which point no more revisions were permitted by Wikinews.

This article incorporates an ‘inverted pyramid structure’, with the most crucial information placed first. It is written in third-person in active prose. Fast comprehension of important information is made possible because the ideas have been suitably formatted in a style for rapid reading and scanning, with one idea per paragraph. Unfortunately, the authors of this article are not automatically identifiable. Nevertheless, a quick search through the history of the article provides the names of the eight contributing authors.

There is an abundance of needless hyperlinks embedded into the Wikinews story which may hinder rather than help to enhance the storytelling. Instead of hyperlinking keywords such as ‘Icecreamists’ and ‘Baby Gaga’, the authors have chosen to hyperlink ‘martini glass’, ‘zest’, ‘US\$’ and ‘£’. Nonetheless, informative external hyperlinks to its sister site Wikipedia and related stories are included, linking to reliable sources (BBC News Online, Herald Sun and The Washington Post). Due to the limited resources available to them, the authors did not include any static or dynamic images, animations, pop-up screens, rollover links to images, tables, figures, diagrams, graphs, charts or multimedia. The story was

enhanced with the inclusion of a hyperlinked map, yet it is very small (5cms x 3cm) and the user has to click through two pages before the map opens. Disappointingly, the map is the same size and one can barely identify the UK which is in the incorrect position on the drawing.

In terms of functionality and accessibility, Wikinews allows citizens to publically edit a news article until a certain date, and then the page is archived and is no longer publically editable. Wikinews writes, “articles presented on Wikinews reflect the specific time at which they were written and published, and do not attempt to encompass events or knowledge which occur or become known after their publication” (2011). If readers want to add a grammatical or formatting correction to the text, they need to submit a template to a certain page where it will be monitored by the administrators.

Even though the ‘Neutral Point of View’ doctrine is in place to encourage multiperspectival reporting and discussion, Wikinews has the tendency to favour an apparently ‘finished product’. It encourages open input and output; however, it excludes contributors from leaving feedback almost entirely during the response stage. As Grey (2005) states: “what would be the point [of discussion on Wikinews]? There are already thousands of sites and millions of blogs doing just that.” Does this suggest that users should contribute to Wikinews during the input and output stages, but if they want to participate in the response stage, they should go elsewhere? In which case, many users would prefer another participatory site where they can take part in all three stages of the news process.

Unlike the Wikinews article where the headline is editorially weak, the title of the BBC article, *Baby Gaga breast milk ice cream seized for safety tests* (BBC 2011), is succinct and eye-catching. This article is explicit and precise, following a logical structure (‘inverted pyramid’) that makes for informative reading. The ‘hard’ lead provides a comprehensive thesis which informs the reader what the article will cover. The subheading, “Amazing response” (BBC 2011) breaks the text into manageable information ‘bites’, making it easier to skim or browse for facts. BBC Online adds extra information to their article by interviewing a London mother, and establishes credibility to their sources by adding official titles i.e. ‘local government officials’ become the Health Protection Agency. While the article does not state who wrote the article, one can assume that it was written by one of the staff writers, a professional journalist. This article does not actively involve the user in the writing or editing process, nor does it encourage feedback in any way except for a few hyperlinks to sharing sites (e.g. Facebook and Twitter) where the potential for discussion can arise.

BBC’s link, ‘accessibility help’, at the end of the article is a prime example of what big-budget resources available to mainstream online news websites can do to enhance usability. With a few clicks, the user is able to change the font size, colour of the font and background, web settings, and much more to help them see, hear and read the website more easily. There is a link to a BBC blog solely dedicated to accessibility, as well as case studies and a list of their standards. In addition, BBC is committed to allowing people with motor impairments to read broadsheet quality news on news.bbc.co.uk without having to turn broadsheet pages, and deaf and hard of hearing people to ‘listen’ to the Archers via transcripts on bbc.cok.uk/archers.

With a large number of amateur writers overshadowing the comparatively small number of professional journalists, citizen journalism is improving journalism by involving in the process people who actually know about, or are affected by, the issue at hand. When people can choose what to write about, it’s guaranteed that they will do so with passion. Their articles will be more extensively researched and better argued, with greater dedication. In this way, citizen journalism performs an important service in the wider media and public sphere. Building on diverse participant bases, it adds broad, multiperspectival analysis and commentary on news events to the narrow range of perspectives expressed in mainstream news reporting.

However, concerns that the ‘citizen journalist’ will eclipse the role of the professional journalist as more and more news corporations aim to cut costs is fast becoming a reality. John Simpson, a BBC veteran international news correspondent, said in a BBC Radio 4 interview (Leigh 2007), “we just want people’s opinions about what’s happened, not the facts”. Likewise, Max Hastings (cited in Leigh

2007), the ex-editor of the Daily Telegraph, said “all sorts of areas of the world are now thought to be too boring to keep a correspondent there. The commentariat has taken over”. Mainstream media allows the public to have an understanding of the context of the paper in which they read an article. On the contrary, when a citizen writer publishes several articles with no editor to monitor output, can the public ever have an understanding of the standpoint of the writer, with no prior knowledge of him or her? The information provided by the citizen journalist will surely lack the accuracy and ‘objectivity’ of the larger corporation.

Wikinews has opened the door to an active ‘producer’ (Bruns 2008, p. 9) community, but due to its unpaid nature and budget constraints, Wikinews writers often copy-and-paste or rehash the stories already written by mainstream news sites, diminishing the credibility of the writer and sources. Leigh (2007) writes, “some voices are more creditable than others... a named source is better than an anonymous pamphleteer”, indicating that the discrimination we exert over sources is essential to judging the quality of the manuscript. In addition, an amateur writer does not have access to the resources of a professional department. Thus more original reporting is required to compete with international mainstream online news publications such as BBC Online, with its big-budget resources, credibility, and abundance of multi-skilled staff.

The field of journalism is a field of practice “bound by certain processes such as gatekeeping and rigid norms of ethics—ethics of fair play” (Murthy 2009). Today journalism has “far reaching applications and relevance to the wider readership/audience besides industry. As such, today journalism has become a giant institution of billions [of] dollars of investment, human resources and creativity, besides accountability” (Murthy 2009). While citizen journalism often lacks a set of defining, professional journalistic principles, critics of mainstream media argue in favour of developing journalism free from commercial trappings, where the user has the flexibility to write whatever he/she chooses and perform justice to their stories, without it being manipulated by editors to suit their corporate mandate.

The Importance of Collaboration

Users are constantly looking for differentiating factors as they choose their news sources. The readers of today expect the mainstream media to be more responsive than the mainstream media of 1990. Therefore, the collaboration of traditional news media and citizen journalism is particularly important for mainstream news reporting in the future. Prospective experiments should focus on teaming up professional journalists with material derived from the huge pool of sources supplied by citizens. An example of this type of collaboration is iReport, CNN’s citizen journalism initiative. iReport is an online community which allows the public to share and submit unfiltered content. Submissions that are deemed newsworthy can then be broadcasted across CNN’s networks, and published on CNN.com. Likewise, in *Journalism’s new wave: the world in a tweet*, Colvin (2011) writes of how Twitter can be integrated into mainstream online news gathering, quoting researcher Jess Hill,

“I was introduced to the citizen journalist Mo Nabbous, from Benghazi, over Twitter. But Skype was the best way to keep in touch, because we could just casually exchange information. It was about 3:00 or 4:00 in the morning [Benghazi time] when I saw him bob up on Skype one day, just after I watched a video report he’d filed on his live stream about a power station outside Benghazi being on fire. We chatted, and he said he would speak to us on PM, so I ran into the studio. The audio went to air that night. The next day he was shot dead by a sniper, recording Gaddafi forces moving into Benghazi, just before the no-fly zone was announced. The story I filed on his death shows how Skype and Twitter can be used together to develop close contacts” (cited in Colvin 2011).

Hill and her colleagues follow people on Twitter who post about areas of the world that they are currently interested in. They then monitor patterns and cross-reference what they see, so they get early warning of breaking stories. While still a relatively new concept of news gathering, this collaboration is a leading example of how citizen journalism and mainstream media can come together to maximise

the potential of both, whilst building strong relationships between users and producers at the same time.

Conclusion

Citizen journalism represents a new paradigm of journalism, with the potential to level the field between journalists and readers, and blur the distinction between publisher and recipient or reader. By encouraging a new sense of participation and ‘produsage’ (Bruns, 2008, p. 9), contributory sites such as Wikinews and Twitter are being used in news gathering, research and production in ways that many people never thought were possible. Despite the main disadvantages of credibility and limited resources, participatory sites are fast becoming an increasing threat to mainstream online news websites. News media industries need to integrate the best of the mainstream media—their editorial, fact-checking, analytical reporting skills—with the best of citizen journalism—its diversity of voices and perspectives—to foster investigative reporting and national news in the future, while promoting a sense of community and strengthening interpersonal bonds. Neglecting to allow readers to participate will risk losing those readers all together. In an era of more transparency, more collaboration, more give and take, citizen journalism represents a new paradigm of cultural and societal participation, altering the relationship people have with the news.

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Indigenous Storytelling and the Digitised Future

ALEXANDRA HIRST

Abstract

This article explores how the digitisation of storytelling can be used to enhance narratives from cultures with oral history traditions. With the current amount of public attention and creative innovation going into the development of new multi-layered content for electronic publishing, it is important that we use these technologies to their full capabilities. Re-innovation of Indigenous oral stories through digitisation has the potential to redefine this narrative form, to more closely reflect traditional storytelling formats and hence knowledge systems, and to reach a wider audience that would promote a greater understanding of these cultures. As Indigenous culture is closely linked to oral narratives, it is important that digitalisation is used to capture these stories now before they disappear. This article explores three aspects of the digitisation of Indigenous oral narratives; why this shift in format is important for Indigenous groups, why this form of narrative adapts particularly well to digitisation within Thompson's 2005 'added value' framework, and finally, it examines Circle of Stories, a website currently demonstrating some of the possibilities being discussed.

Keywords

Indigenous oral narratives, digital storytelling, electronic archives, digital publishing

Introduction

With 'e-book' currently a buzzword in the publishing world, publishing houses are searching for innovative ways to use this new medium¹, trying to ensure that this time readers follow the trend.² The purpose of this article is to explore a particular type of narrative, Indigenous oral narratives, within the paradigm of digital publishing. Digital publishing has the potential to redefine and recreate Indigenous oral narratives at a time when the nuances of knowledge and meaning held within their traditional narratives are being lost. New technology that uses the multi-layering of different forms of aural and visual

¹ An example of the new media approach large publishing companies are advancing along can be found in this video (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BlEoFt7ty0Q>), where Ettinghausen, a Penguin digital publisher, describes the multi-layered content effects that they're working on that combine gaming visuals, audio and interactive aspects with the more traditional narratives to create a whole new electronic narrative genre.

² Throughout the 1990s and the early 2000s predictions of massive consumer switch to electronic publishing forms initiated widespread investment in new electronic content delivery technologies that promised to be the first to successfully capture the anticipated market. However, disappointing sales figures caused by a variety of reasons that will be discussed later in this article disappointed many companies invested in this race, and led to a slowing in this area of the industry, until recent years.

content has recently been developed, at a time when Indigenous communities are looking for ways to maintain their cultural heritage and reach out to the broader community. Digital storytelling has the capacity to do both.

Digital storytelling is a genre that consists of the visual recording of narratives, often accompanied and enhanced by new visual media and text (Cherubini 2008, Burgess 2006). It has an important social and historical function: 'it transforms everyday experience into shared public culture' (Burgess 2006, p.9). Institutions and private organisations around the world are taking advantage of the accessibility of this new form of cultural media to share personal stories, creating databases of personal histories that span the realities of 21st century existence.³ As Patricia Search discusses in her article *Digital Storytelling For Cross-Cultural Communication In Global Networking*, digital storytelling can be used to engage global audiences in a discussion of cultural differences, especially when applied to Indigenous narratives (Search 2006).

Oral storytelling is an ancient art form that exists in many cultures but plays a particularly integral role in indigenous communities. Outside their primary importance in their own cultural communities, traditional stories can be used for educational purposes within the broader global community, to promote understanding and tolerance of different customs (Powell 2007).

This article will comprise of three distinct sections that will examine the digitisation of Indigenous oral narratives as a specific form of cultural communication. The first section will explore why digital storytelling is important for Indigenous communities and their global future, the second will discuss why this narrative form would adapt well to digitisation using Thompson's 2005 'valued added' framework, and the third will describe a few websites that are currently using new technologies to showcase Indigenous stories, focusing on the example of the US based website *Circle of Stories*. By exploring these three areas I hope to clarify some of the possibilities offered by this new medium, both for Indigenous groups and for publishers looking for new innovative products. This article draws on many studies that directly refer to North American Indigenous groups, namely because more work has been done on oral cultures from this area of the world, however this study is designed to encompass First Nations groups from around the world, with a specific focus on Australian Indigenous groups.

Why digitisation is important to Indigenous culture

In his examination of the e-book and its cultural ramifications Ohler (2001) discusses how it is widely believed that along with the move from oral storytelling to printed books came:

'a cultural shift in which individual, silent reading replaced group storytelling, forcing literate cultures into a linear, visual world and away from a holistic one in which the omnipresent senses of touch, smell and hearing dominated' (Ohler 2001, p. 3).

Similarly the shift towards electronic publishing from print seems to be accompanied by a tendency away from sustained, in-depth reading patterns in favour of the skim reading of multiple interconnected texts (Carr 2008). This alarms Carr in terms of the knowledge, learning and thinking patterns that must also follow this shift. Carr believes that a continuous reading process allows us space for deep intellectual thought and associations, and if this space is lost to new technologically driven reading patterns 'we will sacrifice something important not only in our selves but in our culture' (Carr 2008, p. 35). In other words, the loss of a form of cultural communication also causes the loss of the forms of knowledge

³ A growing number of organisations and institutions around the world acknowledge the importance of the preservation of oral histories in digital form. The State Library of Queensland is the leading institution for the preservation of digital stories in Australia, with projects such as The Queensland Stories travelling recording lab and the Queensland Indigenous Knowledge Centres (http://www.slq.qld.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0018/133308/Longtime_Learning.pdf), community centres for Indigenous locals, part of whose function is to record photos and video interviews with Indigenous people for the purpose of keeping local culture strong and well-documented. The US based website StoryCorps (<http://storycorps.org/about/>) is a particularly inspired example of oral history-taking on a large scale for the sake of creating a shared cultural database.

and learning associated with it. As an integral part of Indigenous knowledge systems oral narratives also reflect and sustain Indigenous culture, and cannot be allowed to disappear.

Oral storytelling in Indigenous communities is an art form that has been under pressure throughout the world since the introduction and subsequent dominance of the Western-style printed literacy that accompanied colonisation (Cherubini 2008). The difficulties in recording Indigenous oral narratives on the page have been widely explored, notably by oral historians Blaeser and Dauenhauer & Dauenhauer. The Dauenhauers describe how ‘at each stage of the recording and documentation of oral literature, something gets lost as the dynamics move from the performance to the printed page’ (Dauenhauer & Dauenhauer 1995, p. 6). Jacklin, while discussing the Dauenhauer’s work in his article *Making Paper Talk: Writing Indigenous Oral Life Narratives* adds that ‘the print version may impose a sense of fixity and permanence that threatens to override the dynamic and fluid nature of oral performance’ (Jacklin 2008, p. 48). This performative aspect of oral narratives has long eluded representation in print, with the above academics being among the many that use formatting and editing styles to recreate the specific environment of the performance.

The fluidity of oral performance is another element that doesn’t translate well into print. Oral narratives are often essentially moral, their purpose being to pass on traditional knowledge and accumulated teachings from past generations and experiences (Cherubini 2008). Because of this underlying purpose to their narratives, oral storytellers often alter their telling according to the specific environment in which they are narrating, in order to relate the principles more closely to the audience and situation. Powell notes that when Freeman Owle, a Cherokee storyteller, performed a traditional Cherokee story for Powell’s students, it differed in certain aspects from when he related the same story the previous day to a University Faculty audience (2007). While the main elements of the narrative remained the same, small changes were made to adapt to the responses, needs and experiences of the different audiences, and to relay the particular message the storyteller want to reveal to each audience. The fixity of print content is unable to reflect this adaptability and fluidity; once a story is published in print it is a very expensive and difficult task to change it.

Digital storytelling has the unique ability to incorporate different elements of multimedia and text, as well as user participation, elements that have the potential to address some of the problems of print mentioned above. For these reasons most Indigenous leaders are embracing digital storytelling as a way of sharing their history, opinion and cultural reality, using the new technology to reach people both inside and out of their communities (Cherubini 2008, Powell 2007).⁴

Why Indigenous narratives digitise well

In his article *The digital revolution and the publishing world* Thompson (2005) writes that some forms of content lend themselves more readily to digitisation than others, due to the potential to add what he labels as ‘value’ to the existing text when using digital technology. According to Thompson the areas of value that digitisation can lend to a text are: ease of access, updateability, scale, searchability, intertextuality and multimedia (Thompson 2005). The potential uptake of digital texts is seen by Thompson as a balance between the potential of these elements to add to the readers’ experience, and the downfalls associated with digital books. These downfalls he lists as pertaining to hardware, formatting, rights and pricing. Narratives are one content area that Thompson believes are less likely to benefit from the value that new technologies can offer, and therefore the lack of balance would likely result in less enthusiasm from readers in this content form. Since the publication of his 2005 article, digital publishing has come a long way, particularly in the previously problematic fields mentioned by Thomp-

⁴ However, some Indigenous groups do reject digitisation of their stories due to the traditional custom of erasing images of deceased members of the community, as it is believed by some that this prevents the spirits’ journey. Some groups who previous took this position, such as the Ojibwe people of North America have decided to embrace the new technology in the face of possibilities for archiving (Powell 2007), but whether other groups will continue to do the same, or whether technology will have to evolve to deal with this cultural barrier is yet to be seen.

son of hardware and format, and it seems likely that most texts will find themselves in e-book format some timesoon. The constraints to viewing caused by unwieldy, unpleasant-to-read handsets have been adapted so that the main complaint most readers have is that e-books don’t provide the reading experience of their text counterparts.

Given this assumption, it is useful to use Thompson’s framework when applying digitisation to oral Indigenous narratives. Using his analysis of added value it is possible to examine how oral narratives, as a content form not discussed by Thompson, adapt to digitisation according to their particular cultural and linguistic characteristics. Oral narratives still share many characteristics with their written counterparts, including the ‘progressive, cumulative character’ attributed by Thompson which necessitates patience and a commitment on the part of their audience to a sustained, chronological reading pattern (Thompson 2005). However, as mentioned by Jacklin (2008), Blaeser (1999) and the Dauenhauers (1995), oral narratives have particular characteristics that cannot be easily reproduced in print. Using Thompson’s analysis these characteristics will be discussed in terms of how they might be addressed by digitisation.

While there are many layers of knowledge and meaning in Indigenous oral narratives, certain characteristics lend themselves to a discussion of digitisation. In particular the element of performance, the adaptability and hence lack of fixity of the oral format which is connected to the cultural and environmental context in which Indigenous stories are told, and finally, the holistic incorporation of senses other than the pure visual.

Cherubini discusses how in electronic storytelling the performative aspect of storytelling is addressed by creating a ‘sense of audience’ that is not present in print text. The internet provides an ultimately larger audience in which stories are not constrained to national borders and limited print runs, or to the spatial and temporal confines Thompson discusses concerning the ease of access of digital works. The potential audience provided by the internet and its countless users replicates the immediate audience of the oral format, allowing elders to share their values and traditions with a wider group of people (Cherubini 2008, Horsley 2007). This preserves the important performative elements of orative style: voice, gesture, tone, timing and potentially a glimpse of environmental setting depending on where the performer is filmed.

The updateability of the internet solves part of the problem of fixity that Indigenous groups find constricts their oral stories in print form. One of the benefits of digitised print, as listed by Thompson, is a near permanent state of updateability, as can be seen in the example of blogs and wikis that encourage the sharing and building of ideas (Quiggin 2006). Indigenous stories in digital form that were presented as wikis would allow their audience to contribute their own experience and knowledge to the site, and provide personal information that could be used to adapt the context of the stories, or the particular version of a story that particular viewer was directed towards. Recorded stories and sites could also be easily added to and adjusted according to the audience’s response, which would be visible, measureable and immediate.

Finally, the added value of multimedia and intertextuality serves to provide cultural context and additional stimuli that add different levels of meaning to the narratives. As Ohler mentions, oral narratives traditionally incorporated a vast array of simultaneous stimuli not captured in the printed book (2001). While digitisation is yet unable to replicate smell and touch, multi-layered technology that combines audio and visual stimuli allows the audience to experience a more rounded cultural context to the stories, a function that is used by website *Circle of Stories* that is discussed below. Websites can also contain hyperlinks that allow readers to move easily between connected sites, linking them to other forms of media. Links to other connected sites, and the visual and auditory media contained within the sites both provide cultural context to the stories being told.

Websites currently using digital forms of Indigenous oral narrative

Some websites are effectively using a combination of new media forms with multilayered content to create some of the possibilities mentioned above. *Circle of Stories* is a North American website devoted to the sharing of Indigenous oral narratives that effectively interweaves video storytelling with photos, art, audio and links to historical sites, to create a cultural hub for First Nations groups from the Americas. The reader is invited to hover over a moving gallery of photos that represent different stories, quotes, political statements, maps, poetry and artwork by Native Americans, creating a mosaic of information that provides cultural context for each storyteller and story. When an image that represents a story is chosen and clicked on the reader has the option to simultaneously read the narrative onscreen and listen to a storyteller talk it. The storyteller is filmed in the natural environment from where their story originates, allowing a physical context to the stories that are often connected to elements of the land. Other sections of the site provide a cultural and historical background of the different cultures represented, both from pre-colonial times and through the colonisation period to the present. There is forum for audience participation where readers are invited to 'join the community': to share their own stories, take part in an online discussion about language and culture conservation, and a section with a list of resources that are links to related sites. Although *Circle of Stories* does not use particularly groundbreaking technology it uses a combination of new technologies to effectively address areas of cultural context, performativity and interactivity that print form would not be able to provide.

Other interesting sites that use digitisation to enhance Indigenous oral narratives include the Cherokee storytelling site *Sacred Stories, Secret Rituals* which combines audio recordings with text and photos in both Indigenous languages and English, and the Australian site *Us Mob* that Patricia Search describes in her article on digital storytelling. This site combines regularly updated personal stories not only by elders but also by general adults and children in a particular Indigenous community in Australia. Visitors request a pass to enter their community electronically, at which point they have access to a variety of multimedia representations of that community's historical and present day reality, and are able to communicate directly with people running the site (Search 2006). According to Search's examination this site combines many of the added value components suggested by Thompson; however, during the research and writing of this article I was unable to enter the site because the high level of internet connection and digital requirements made it inaccessible on a variety of different internet servers. This in itself is interesting because it ensures that most Indigenous communities around the world, which are known for being on the wrong side of the 'digital divide' (Alexander 2001) would be effectively excluded from accessing the site. This is certainly a conundrum that would have to be addressed by publishing companies in the development of these new technologically driven sites and e-books.

Conclusion

Indigenous communities have already recognised the importance of recording and digitising their cultural heritage, in which oral narratives play a large role. Digital storytelling is an ever-improving medium and new technologies will start becoming commonplace additions to narrative content. Through this article I have shown how the particular example of Indigenous narratives lends itself to electronic enhancement particularly easily, and how some sites are already taking advantage of certain elements of technology for this very purpose.

The imposed fixity of print works is addressed by the updateability of electronic texts, as well as the general move towards collaboration between the writer and readers of websites. The potential to combine traditional visual print medium narratives with photos, sound and video recordings and hot links to other related information, engages audiences in a more complete way than print. And perhaps most importantly the intertextuality of digital publishing allows individual stories to be placed within

the cultural context of other tales and pieces of information, just as oral narratives are influenced by the cultural and environmental context in which they are told.

Digitisation of oral narratives has the ability to represent cultures through a layered content format that allows people access to a multi-dimensional view that is more developed than two-dimensional print form. The current level of technology allows us a society to preserve oral narratives through a format infinitely more appropriate than print, and Indigenous narratives are on the edge of being lost. This article has shown that we need to take advantage of this combination of Indigenous and technology cultures now, while we still can.

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Online Campaigning: Web 2.0 and the Australian federal election

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Abstract

Web 2.0 provides a wide range of heterogeneous and distributed resources for people to utilize. Facebook, Twitter and Blog was become increasingly important element in today communication. There are millions of people who are users of these Web 2.0 site, building up a virtual community. This paper will examine the difference between Web 1.0 and Web 2.0 and, and exploring the use and impact of Web 2.0 in 2010 Australian Federal Election political campaigns. The article also study whether the content political elites published in their Web 2.0 campaigns sites is appropriate, use statistic data to investigate how successful campaigns influence voters' approval rating.

Keywords

campaigns, interactivity, internet, social networking sties, Web 2.0

The world of communications is changing radically due to the development of the internet. The increasing number of Internet users and computer technologies was had a strong impact on both digital media and traditional media. The development of digital technologies has transformed the spatial and temporal organisation of social life, creating new forms of interaction, new kinds of social relationship and new ways of relating to others and to oneself. New internet technologies such as Web 2.0, have made it possible to communicate and collaborate 24/7. More and more political parties have started use new internet technologies to raise money, organise volunteers, and gather intelligence on voters and conduct opposition research (Howard, 2005). This paper will focus on reviewing the 2010 Australian election and previous campaigns, and using evidence to explore how political parties and politicians attempt to promote their electoral appeal through Web 2.0 technologies, and explore the identity of these campaigns.

Web 2.0 generally refers to the second generation of services available on the internet that lets people collaborate and share information online. It allows users to interact and collaborate with each other in a social media dialogue as creators of user-generated content in a virtual community (Sauers, 2009). Examples of Web 2.0 include social networking sites, blogs, wikis, and video sharing sites. Web 2.0 was

first officially labelled and defined by Tim O'Reilly in *What Is Web 2.0* in September 2005.

The process of producing political culture has changed significantly over the past decade. Although campaign elements such as negative campaign commercials, the comparing competitors to foreign dictators and focus on promoting the party leader still remain the same, new communication technologies, especially Internet technologies have emerged in recent Australian political campaigns, which has started to change the Australian electoral experience. Chen (2008) point out the political use of the Internet by mainstream political parties in Australia was first appear in 1994, when the Australia Labor Party established its first public website. In 1996 federal election, the Labor Party use its website as promotional and data analysis tools and received 11,000 hits a day during the 1996 campaign (Young, 2003). The success of the Australia Labor Party's website was hailed as a major breakthrough in the electioneering in Australia. Over the successive years the use of technology as campaign tools has grown within most parties (Chen, 2008).

Participation rates among young people in western democracies are very low in the past few years (Alani, 2010). The use of social media in political campaigns has indeed opened up new avenues for participation and re-engage young citizens (Orr, 2008). Social network website like Facebook has a significant impact among 18-to-24-year olds, using of social network technologies during political campaigns has the potential to enhance the relationship between politicians and citizens (Chen, 2006). Web 2.0 encourages people to participate and interact; Jenkins (2009) argues that in traditional media like Web 1.0, the individual is passive in the receiving and interpretation of media texts. In contrast, the digital media, especially in Web 2.0 communication, individuals are invited to actively participate in the creation and circulation of texts. Web 2.0 political campaigns can break down social boundaries and hierarchies and place the represented and representatives side by side in an open forum (O'Reilly, 2005). By using Web 2.0 technologies, the political parties can identify and connect with its supporters; it offers a platform to those people who used were unable to engage in debate on issues of concern to them. Web 2.0 is a media utility that connects people to the politicians, and people can connect with the party leaders in various ways. For example, they can join Gillard's Facebook page, be a follower of Gillard's Twitter account, and comment on Gillard's tweets.

With the increasing of Internet users and the development of high-speed broadband connections, people start spends more times on the Internet. During 2008 US election, 55 per cent of voters in America use Internet as their major source of news and campaign information (Jones, 2008). Internet, as a medium, now have more dimensions than the traditional media such as newspaper and television, it offers a more flexible and high efficiency way to communicate messages from a single source to a collective audience. For example, communications on the Internet are almost instantaneous, when the candidates post an announcement on their Twitter or Facebook, thousands of supporters can use their mobile phone or computer, giving instant reactions to the candidates' words, and build a more extensive network of connections for the distribution of the information, because these follower's friends will receive these information as well. But in traditional media, the audience have to waiting for the release of the newspaper or news-bulletin programs on TV. Furthermore, internet technologies also provide individuals with a huge selection of alternative information sources 24/7, the audiences no longer have to wait until 7p.m to discover the campaign information on local television program. Politicians now can promote their electoral more widely and quickly using Internet technologies. As a result, Crook (2007) points out that the Australia political parties nowadays were using the internet as the only or primary source for information on policies, candidates and general voting information. During 2008 US presidential campaigns, Hillary Clinton even chose to use the Internet as the medium to announce her candidacy (Orr, 2008). For Australia 2010 Election campaign, both Gillard and Abbott using their website as an updated archive of information generated during the campaign, these information including press releases, advertisement videos and blogs.

Unlike radio and television, the Internet allows individual citizens to communicate with each other and with their elected representatives in easy and inexpensive ways, as well as political parties. As Chen argues, everyone loves free lunch (Chen, 2008). Web 2.0 enabled services, such as Facebook, Twitter,

MySpace and YouTube, provide a low-cost, easy-to-use or free tools for political parties hosting and syndicating content. Howard (2005) argues the key concept of professional campaign is use minimum investment to reach maximum population. As discussed in the section above, the sustained growth of potential audience for online content has provided an well-established population, information and news are likely to emerge first through the Internet and circulate rapidly and virally through Twitter or Facebook, before hitting the mainstream media (Williamson, 2010). For example, Gillard's Facebook have nearly 80000 followers and another 50000 on her Twitter, everything Gillard released on Facebook or Twitter will become instant available for those subscriber, some of these subscriber may also share or re-tweet these information to their friend, and finally build a more extensive network of connections for the distribution of Gillard's policy.

The interactive aspects of Web 2.0 also provide the possibility for politicians to form new and deeper relationships with their constituents. (2008). Trammell and Williams (2006) argues that candidates who offer interactivity on the website may be able to enhance users' perceptions of their sensitivity, responsiveness, and trustworthiness. The interactivity level offered on political parties campaign website would influence voter's levels of agreement with the candidates' policy positions. Camila Cooke, who managed the Australian Labor Party's 2007 digital campaign, state briefly that the "key group deciding elections are swinging voters, who do not consumer much serious news and have a short attention span, and interactivity is very effective in reaching these voters". Chen (2006) also indicate that Australian voters who visited campaign website are twice as interested in the election outcome as the average voter.

Unlike those used in traditional media, social media technologies allow for both the production and consumption of political content, it allowing people to engage with the public sphere in a way that is totally different. Web 2.0 websites offer a higher interactivity rate than normal web pages in various ways. For example, during 2010 Australia Federal Election campaign, the campaign websites did not simply push campaign messages, but also heavily featured different methods of interactivity. Gillard's discuss forum allows people with similar political interests can connect and talk about the campaign together, it also offer the chance for those undecided voters to learn about the candidate. Both campaign sites have its blog section allowed people to comments, the reader can respond directly to the campaign article and other people's idea. Political parties now use these functions to make the audience themselves become a part of the campaign, to organize, volunteer and keep the electorate aware of political developments, finally providing alternative way for the electorate to gather information relevant to casting and informed vote.

Research has shown that the audience would feel more connected with the candidate if they are able to respond directly (Endres & Warnick, 2004), Web 2.0 technologies enable the possibility of real-time commutation. The use of social-network Website such as Facebook, YouTube, MySpace and Twitter in 2010 Election make it possible for the candidates communication directly to their supporters and create higher level of interactivity. Gillard use her Twitter account to communicate with her supporters, she answers the question and reply to her followers on Twitter, using words like 'you' and 'you all', she post personal video on YouTube channel. These lower level of production values makes the candidate more real and allows their personality to shine through (Cooke, 2008). Gillard directly addressed her supporters. Such high degree of personal presence and text-based interactivity also help Gillard form a deeper relationship with her supporters. In contrast, Abbott's Twitter is all about his policy statement, he never communicate or reply his follower's question on Twitter. As a result, Gillard have got more than 50000 followers on Twitter and Abbott only have nearly 20000.

The same situation also appeared on Facebook. Gillard's Facebook page always focus on update information on how her policy will move Australia forward, she ask people to consider the contrast between Labor and the Coalition. Gillard deployed a more personalized discussion with her followers, the photo posted on her Facebook all focus on a same theme - the interactive between Gillard and local communities. These photos include met and talk with workers in different industry, and visit school. These photos representation a meaning of 'People First', signified Gillard is care about the Australian, it makes the audience feel that they and the Prime Minister are on the same level, as someone writes in



Figure 1 Polling conducted by Newspoll

their comments ‘Gillard went to a normal school just like me and she is a girl just like me and she is the Prime Minister’, thus, fostered a feeling of greater perceived interactivity.

Thus, although the basic concept of these political campaigns is the same, different candidates are try to project different identities. Gillard definitely have pay more attention on use Web 2.0 to promote Labor’s electoral appeal and communication with supporters. Gillard’s campaign strategy fostered more interactivity than Abbott’s, focused predominantly on individuals, Gillard update her Facebook and Twitter frequently, give people more information and political engagement. In contrast, Abbott’s campaign relied on a more traditional approach. For example, Abbott barely updates his Facebook and Twitter and never communicate directly with his supporters online, he mainly use the campaign page to update his conference information. As a result, the polling conducted by Newspoll and published in *The Australian* shows that Gillard’s supporters are twice as Abbott’s and more than half of people think Julia Gillard would make the better Prime Minister. Trammell and Williams (2006) argues that the strategy of the democratic candidates was to win public support, the more supporter they engage, the more widely campaign information will distribute.

In conclusion, as society moves into a digital age, the Internet becomes more and more important in mass communication. New digital technologies such as Web 2.0 not only enhance people’s ability to communicate but also become an increasingly important democratic tool, with the use of digital technologies. Political communication enters a new communication environment, web 2.0 technologies have reshaped how political campaigns are conducted, more and more political parties using Web 2.0 technologies during their election campaigns. Web 2.0 technologies, such as social networking site, user-driven content and open discuss Internet environment provide the possibility for politicians to form new and deeper relationships with their constituents during political campaigns. New media technologies campaign is all about engaging the people and interactivity, it offers a high efficacy way for politicians to promote their electoral appeal, and give political parties the ability to form new types of civic engagement. New information and communication technologies were eroding the traditional media’s barriers of place and time; bring political campaigns into virtual form. The ability to use Web 2.0 during national campaigns become the major factors for most political parties, however, the inappropriate use of these digital tools may bring negative effect.

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Online News Content: How reading news online affects users' understanding of news events

KELLY STOCK

Abstract

This article analyses how new forms of online publishing have changed the way users understand and interact with news content that is consumed online. This was investigated by examining the way in which The Australian newspaper and The New Yorker magazine adapt and present their content for online consumption. Individual news stories were assessed using comparative textual analysis to analyse the differences in writing style, content and presentation, between the publication's print and online versions. Related literature was analysed to help understand current research into how these differences affect users' understanding of, and interaction with, news events. These two publications were chosen because they represent established, traditional publications that are in the process of adapting their content for the online environment. It was found that The Australian and The New Yorker use almost identical textual elements in both their online and print versions, but differs significantly in the presentation and interactivity features of the two platforms. The information presented here will help to inform media practitioners to further develop online news content, as it becomes an even more popular form of media consumption.

Keywords

Online news content, media, knowledge, reading, print, digital publishing

Introduction

As online technologies become more intertwined with our lives, it seems inevitable that news organisations will need to develop a greater understanding of how their content impacts on and is perceived by users. Developing this knowledge will help newsmakers to create new methods of transmitting their content online in the most efficient and entertaining way possible. Over the course of this article we will look at how The Australian and The New Yorker are adapting their content for online delivery by analysing individual articles that are representative of each publication's digital content. The Australian and The New Yorker were chosen because they are representative of traditional long-standing print publications that are in the process of adapting their print content for online delivery. This paper will also look at how these changes affect the end users through a discussion of relevant literature. Some issues that will be covered include: the effect on users of reading online text that is written in shorter, simpler language; the ability of users to freely choose which articles they read online and how this impacts on their knowledge of news events; the impact of editorial cues on how users select stories; and, a discussion of the layout, presentation and interactivity features of online news.

The main limitation of this discussion is that it focuses on digital news that is inherently linked to a print publication. A future discussion could centre on an online publication that is produced solely online as its content and format may be different and more conducive to combating some of the challenges that face online news content creators. However, the purpose of this article is to define some of the challenges that traditional news media face in adapting their content for online consumption.

The impact on users of accessing news online

Accessing news via the Internet marks a major shift in content delivery that puts users in positions of power with the ability to choose what, when and how they access the news that suits their individual preferences. The functionality of online news sites allows users to engage in a range of activities that aren't possible when accessing news content through print, TV or radio. The myriad of options that are now available give users the ability to access, share, and engage with various media outlets, and other users, for a relatively low cost (Browner and Sears et al 2000, p. 169). Here follows a discussion regarding some of the issues that have arisen from previous research, which suggests there are many different factors that influence users' understanding and interactivity when they consume news both online and in print.

Wolf (2007, cited in Carr 2008) believes that the way in which we read online emphasises "immediacy" and "efficiency", and she questions whether this impacts on our ability to focus for long periods of time on more complicated text. Wolf believes that users who read online have become "mere decoders of information" rather than readers who are actively engaging with their subject matter and who truly think about what they are reading. We see this reflected in the short, simple language that is often employed in both online articles and also on websites.

However, in opposition to Wolf, Bruns (2005) presented one of the opportunities of online news when he analysed the notion of "gate watching" as a new function for media users to engage further with media-makers. This involves active users who effectively "watch" news outlets for interesting content that they can then blog about or re-post on social media sites (Bruns 2005, cited in Quiggin 2006, p.493). In saying this, not all users have been found to be active online. In Scheufele and Nisbet's study (2002, p.59) it was found that many people act as "cognitive misers" when it comes to searching for the information that they need to make a decision, or to become informed about a topic. They suggest that people will only seek out the bare minimum of facts for their purpose. It has also been found that online users will generally only seek out information that they believe to be in line with their current viewpoint. This idea comes from "reinforcement theorists" who believe that the Internet will further divide people along the lines that divide them in everyday life (Scheufele and Nisbet 2002, p.56). Essentially, this means that those with a particular viewpoint, or knowledge set, will only seek out information and engage with other users who reinforce the position they already hold, hence users will not challenge or add to what they already know. However, "mobilization theorists" believe that accessibility, low cost and the two-way communication features of the Internet will lead to more participation from a wider cross-section of society, in particular by young people from all socio-economic levels (Scheufele and Nisbet 2002, p.56).

Browner and Sears et al (2000, p.172) suggest that the ability of individuals to participate by choosing their own news content is still somewhat limited online because almost everything that appears on news sites is still constructed by editors acting as gatekeepers who have to balance the interests of their advertisers with their editorial philosophies. Browner and Sears et al (2000, p.173) also indicate that browsing in an online news site is similar to browsing in a library; although users are able to select whatever they wish to read, their options are still limited by whoever selects the options. Although outside the scope of this article, this point raises questions about the extent to which editors can influence public knowledge, and whether this is increased or decreased with online news delivery.

A newspaper's "thematic" layout and presentation has been shown as one area in which a media

outlet can strongly influence users to understand content, particularly when the content is related to government issues (Iyengar 1991, cited in Scheufele and Nisbet 2002, p. 59). The placement of articles, headlines, graphics and multimedia, all have a strong influence, combined with text, to help readers build meaning in what they read (Cranny-Francis 2005, p. 50). The following text analysis will discuss these characteristics in more detail. Althaus and Tewksbury (2002, p.180) describe this capacity as the “attention-directing function” of editors to attract users attention to articles in a pre-determined order of importance according to their editorial values.

The presence of these “editorial cues”, and readers’ personal interests, were found to be the most important factors used by readers when determining which articles to read (Graber 1988, cited in Althaus and Tewksbury 2002, p.182). Although Graber found that personal interest in a story overrides these “editorial cues”, elements such as the size of headlines and visuals, story length and repetition of content, all help the reader to determine the relative importance of stories, and select articles that build their knowledge of a particular issue. Michelstein and Boczkowski (2010, p.1087) also found that individual user’s goals and interests had a stronger influence on online consumption patterns than medium attributes.

Research in the area of social psychology has also shed light into how individual characteristics affect how user’s process information. Iyengar and Kinder (1987) showed that political knowledge was a positive indicator of media exposure, and argued that less knowledgeable users were more susceptible to media-supplied cues (cited in Michelstein and Boczkowski 2010, p.1090). Given this, the question arises as to whether this effect is more or less pronounced online, where there is less capacity for newsmakers to use agenda-setting techniques, and readers have more control over the stories they read.

In summary, there are two main differences in the presentation of print and online news: the first is that users have more control over which stories they read, and hence traditional formats for ordering news stories are less important because readers are more likely to select stories that interest them. The downside of this is that readers are less likely to be exposed to stories that are outside their areas of interest, which is much more likely when readers flip through a newspaper page by page. Online news is organised into categories that readers individually select, which in some cases makes editorial decisions less important. The second is that the format and user experience online is quite different to print, so the presentation of conventional story cues needs to be adapted for online publication. This is particularly apparent in the “multimodality” of online publications.

The Australian and The New Yorker comparative textual & visual analysis: online vs. print

The first article that will be analysed is The Australian print article, “Threat to stage nuke hellstorm”, (Zubrzycki 2011, pg.1), which will be compared to its online version. The text of both the online and print versions of the article were identical word-for-word, which is interesting because online content is quite often adapted in some way when it is based on a newspaper version of the same article. The print version held strong prominence visually as it was positioned on the top left-hand side of the front page, and its headline was the most prominent text on the page, aside from the masthead. The editors of The Australian were clearly signifying to readers their estimation of the story’s importance. The article was placed in the prominent “margin, ideal, given” quadrant of Kress and van Leeuwen’s diagram for analysing layout (Kress and Leeuwen 1996, cited in Cranny-Francis 2006, p. 51). Also featured with the article was a small cartoon and two grabs directing readers to related stories on page six and page nine of the same print edition. There was also a related story featured below the article. The grabs for the stories on subsequent pages joined with articles in the world section, and the front page of the features section, and to get to these pages readers had to flick through ten pages of the newspaper, exposing them to a range of other stories that the editors deemed to have strong news values. The online version of the article, as mentioned, contained the same text aside from some slight variation in the headline.

The major difference can be found in its structural layout, which features a 40 second Sky News video related to the article’s content. Also, the online version contains links to ten other related articles, five other “leading story” articles, four “latest news” stories, four “business news” stories and four “sports news” stories. This “multimodality”, as defined by Cranny-Francis (2006), provides users with some context to better understand the core article, and places them in the position of “active learners” (p. 50).

The New Yorker article, “The Apostate: Paul Haggis vs. the Church of Scientology”, is a 26 page article in the print edition, and is also separated into 26 pages for the online version (Wright 2011, p. 84). The text in each format is identical, and both use “multimodality”, but in differing degrees. The print edition contains some photos, cartoons and poems that break up the text and link into the story’s themes. The online edition does this also, but uses different cartoons and the same photos, but doesn’t include the adjoining poems that are present in the print edition. Interestingly, both print and online editions follow a similar layout and format, right down to the use of the same distinctive typeface. Indeed, the entire website feels very much like an extension of the print publication. Like articles on The Australian website, this article provides links to related articles and other popular articles. Also, there is a range of social networking capabilities available with the online edition; users are able to tweet the article, post it to Facebook, and/ or email it to their contacts.

The first conclusion to be drawn is that the print versions of the articles force readers to flick through many pages of the print publications to finish the stories, hence exposing readers to stories they may not necessarily have chosen to read if they were given the choice. The print content creators retain more editorial control over how users access the information in their publication. The online versions of the articles offer more “multimodality” in the form of photo galleries, videos, and multiple links to other related and non-related articles (Cranny-Francis 2006, p. 50). The Australian and The New Yorker’s use of multiple links on the same page as an article, even if the links were unrelated, aims to keep the reader clicking through the news of the site. This is an example of the publication adapting to its loss of control over what users read; the editors select stories that may interest the readers of a particular story based on its content. This leads to the conclusion that editors of online news outlets need to be very specific in their “related story” selections to choose articles that closely relate to the unique interests of their readers. If editors use this technique they will attract users by supplying relevant editorial cues and tailoring the content to the interests of their readers, two factors that were found to be most important when users decide whether to read an article or not (Graber 1988, cited in Althaus and Tewksbury 2002, p.182).

However the lack of structure that is present in online news, when compared to print publications, could lead to problems with how users link together all of the information they are accessing. This is particularly apparent in scenarios where the content is related, but the user is not exactly sure how. Gernsbacher’s structure-building framework (1990, 1993, 1996, cited in Yaros 2006, p.288) and Kintsch and van Dijk’s construction-integration model (1978, cited in Yaros 2006, p.288) both posit that for readers to build understanding from what they’re reading they need to be able to build mental representations of what the text means. One impediment to building these mental representations is when the reader is unable to build links between the various types of content they’re exposed to. As editors can’t control the order in which readers access different related articles, users may not receive all of the necessary information to build accurate understandings of the content. It is clear how this could happen with both publications’ online coverage as the multiple links to related articles could make it easy for readers to misunderstand how all of the information fits together.

Conclusion

By analysing two different articles from The Australian and The New Yorker, as well as discussing some of the current research into online news consumption, this paper has presented some of the key issues surrounding the online adaptation of traditional news formats.

It is hoped that this study has contributed to the understanding of how the format of online news content can contribute to or detract from users understanding and interaction with the content. It was found that both publications did not greatly change their text between the print and online versions of the articles that were assessed. This was found to be representative of almost all content that is published in both the online and print platforms of each publication. However, there were distinct differences in the users' access to graphics, video and related articles; all of which were more prevalent in the online versions of the articles. These features enabled users' ability to engage with the content and share through social networking sites. Also, the use of linking allows for readers to engage in directed learning to build a more complete picture of a news topic, but how this impacts on the reading process and how users build meaning is uncertain. It is possible that the overloading of content options could confuse readers as they try to understand how to form meaning from all of the information presented to them. At this time, it seems that online publishing offers new avenues for media outlets to connect with their readers, but digital publications will need to ensure their information is presented in a way that not only increases user interactivity, but also their understanding of the information being presented.

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Teens, Consumerism, and Converse: How lifestyle and identity are portrayed through digital publishing

PRISKA FEBRINIA HANDOJO

Abstract

Donec euismod sem leo, id molestie nisi. Ut hendrerit tincidunt nisl quis iaculis. Duis inteWith 93 percent teenagers and young adults online, youth is the generation which is in touch with the Internet in the most regular basis. The way teens nowadays construct their identity is different from the former generations, as they can learn more about and themselves online. That makes youth the biggest target of consumerism. Many producers see this as business opportunities: teens need identity and lifestyle the can identify themselves with. Therefore websites are carefully built and online communities are created, all in order to sell the product. Specifically, this article aims to analyze the way shoes brand, Converse, forms the teen's identity through the interface and visuals of its website. Furthermore, this article also examines what kind of identity and values the product tries to offer through the case study of Olivia Bee, a teen photographer whom Converse is working with.

Keywords

Youth, Consumerism, Visuals, Photography, Converse, Identity, Flickr

Youth Online: Publishing Identity in Digital Age

Identity in general refers to the way “one subjectively views oneself over time and across situations” (Stern 2008, p. 96), or, “a description of ourselves in language to which we are emotionally committed” (Barker 2002, p. 109). In online space, identity can also mean the production of “intertextual self”, in which one “creates a sense of belongingness to certain communities, ethos, politics, groups” (Thomas 2007, p. 183).

For youth, the Internet is a medium to display and seek their identity, as what the former generation did with graffiti on the walls. According to the psychologist Erik Erikson, teenage year is when one experiences an identity crisis and seeks an identity to fit in. As they are in the period of questioning “who am I?”, being a part of certain groups/clusters to which the youth can identify themselves is essential to confirm who they are. The Internet provides many platforms for youth to express themselves, such as online gaming, social networking, and blogs. For instance, in Facebook, a social networking site, where people can create a personal profile, post ideas, add friends, keep up with friends' news, and join various common-interest groups. One can identify him/herself by showing his/her preference in books, music,

and films, as well as ‘liking’ pages that one can associate oneself with. Other example, the personalized websites/blog (the choosing of colors, layout, and font) shows the aspect of self, in which one prefers how the others see him/her. The publishing of these online display places are seen by the youth as “symbols to others and themselves that they belong to and in the public culture” (Stern 2008, p. 101). In Goffman’s comparison to theatrical performance, online platforms are the stages where youth perform their Self. Teens are online to speak their mind out loud and be heard by the world.

Online Youth, Consumerism, and Converse Campaign

Youth are the biggest spenders of trend commodities. As it is shown in figure 1, 93% of teenagers and young adults go online. In the U.S, teenage consumers have “more than \$190 billion annually in primary purchasing power and influence...include[ing] footwear, clothing, music, mobile phones, home electronics and entertainment” (McCasland 2008, para. 7-10).

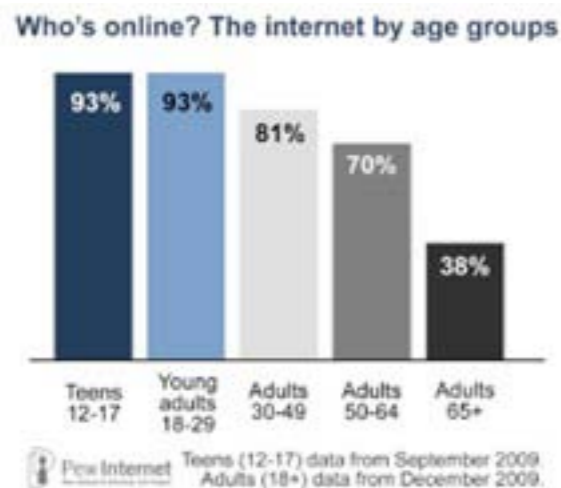


Figure 1
The Internet users by age groups (Who's Online 2010)

Teens are consumers of today, engaged in online activities the most, and are in the stage of seeking and forming their identity. Looking at these facts, it can be assumed that the youth market is highly profitable, and one of the best ways to market a product is through the publication online. In fact, many corporations aim this beneficial teen market that desire to show up “online presence,” by understanding their needs of identity by “design[ing] ad campaigns promoting the idea of consumption as production” (Stern 2008, p. 101). By offering certain identities –power to create, values, community- through digital publishing, corporations do their approach to the teens in order to sell the products and get the teens to consume the commodities.

Here, I would like to look at the digital publishing of a brand which is one of the icons of teenagers and youth, Converse. Converse is an American shoe company, which is famous for its sport shoes by Chuck Taylor, that famously known by teenagers as Chucks. This brand is particularly popular among teenagers and young adult as the ‘original’ and ‘rebellious’ image it brings.



Figure 2
Chuck Taylor’s red basketball shoe (Converse 2011)

In its official website, Converse declares that

“The brand enters its second century by honoring its heritage of seeing things a little differently, loving people who want to change the world for the better, and basically celebrating the spirit of rebellion and originality in basketball, Rock & Roll and anywhere else you find it.”

Through its branding and advertising strategy, Converse shoes have become a symbol of cool, taken on by grunge and punk-rock eras artists and musicians, and widely adopted by teenagers. For example, Converse releases the collection of Kurt Cobain (the front man of Nirvana, an iconic grunge rock band) edition of Converse sneakers.

As a commercial organization which aims at the youth as their main market, the publishing of the products should recognize and follow the way youth deal with their identity in online space.

It leads to questions: Digitally, how the image and identity of Converse is formed, distributed and finally adopted by the teenagers? How does the brand maintain to be seen as ‘cool’, and therefore attract teenage consumers? To be able to answer the questions, this paper will examine the way Converse construct and sell its image and identity through digital publishing. First, I will analyze the design and visuals of its website to show how digital publishing have impacts on creating identity. Later, I will also examine the way Converse makes use of social media -as the place for youth to process their identity- to target youth market by looking closer at one of the chosen ambassadors, Olivia Bee, a teenage photographer and Flickr phenomena.

Converse Website: Publishing Identity Online

Visuals can be very effective to communicate the discourse, which according to Foucault is “a set of statements that articulate a particular way of thinking, feeling, and being in the world” (in Cranny-Francis 2005, p. 37). Visuals are also effective to convey attitudes and values, as well as identify with the viewer. Quisque sed porta nisi. Nullam vestibulum neque dui, sed euismod tellus. Mauris sit amet tellus diam, sed pellentesque massa. Aliquam erat volutpat. Nullam ac ornare diam. Quisque egestas, orci nec consectetur luctus, lacus magna scelerisque dui, ac tempor erat diam quis lectus. Integer sapien sem, feugiat quis posuere vitae, rutrum tempor augue. Phasellus fringilla tellus id nisi accumsan vel posuere urna rhoncus. Proin viverra leo erat, ac rhoncus erat. Proin congue nulla eget est viverra venenatis.

Analyzing visuals on online spaces is important in order to see the performance of identity, as “understanding the visual strategies on the site as integrally related to the meanings generated by the text – about information, about identity, and about contemporary values, beliefs and ideas” (Cranny-Francis 2005, p. 42). In the era of digital age, “the body is reflected through a range of multimodal practices,” one of them is “the aesthetics of the website” (Thomas 2007, p. 192). To deliver a certain image or identity of the products, a website is carefully designed and built. Content is the most important, but the artistic side; pictures, movement, and sound, are also essential, as they propose and construct meanings



Figure 3
Interface of Converse Website (Converse 2011)

Images and Fonts

By the choice of images and fonts, one can see to whom the site is targeted. Converse uses many images on the websites. Photos are mainly used as parts of multimodal text, which will be explained further in the next section. Whereas, images that look like sketches/pencil drawings are used as the background of the website. There are many different type of fonts used, but they have common characteristics. The fonts look like modern handwritings (sloppy, untidy, grunge, rock and roll-ish) that usually belong to teenagers. As a whole, the website tries to imitate the appearance of school note book or journal, on where teenagers often write down their ideas through words/sketch. This may be the effective way to make teenagers feel familiar and be able to identify themselves with the atmosphere of the website.

Layouts and Mix of Modalities

According to Kress and van Leeuwen (1996), the layout of the website can be examined by its elements, which are Centre or point of focus, Ideal and Real or the way information is presented (idealized or more specific information), and Given and New or the way message is constructed for the viewer (whether the viewer is familiar with or must pay more attention to the coded message) (Cranny-Francis 2005, p. 51).

The homepage of Converse already has shown the dynamism of youth. Not following the standard layout, Converse website focuses on the moving feature menus which occupy the main spot. In this case, they are the 'Centre' of the website. These menus move to the right or left, depending on where the cursor is placed. They contain pictures and appealing text such as "Stripped Down for a Good Time. ChuckIt Canvas", and "We're a Fun Date", which is the 'Ideal' and 'New.' When a cursor is put on one of the menu, a caption appears (figure 4.1). Furthermore, when the menu is clicked, other menus disappear, and the clicked menu expands, giving more details and links to the complete information. For example, when the "We're a Fun Date" menu is clicked, it expands and give details (figure 4.2), and provide a link to the online store of shoes for prom (figure 4.3). This is the 'Real' and 'Familiar.

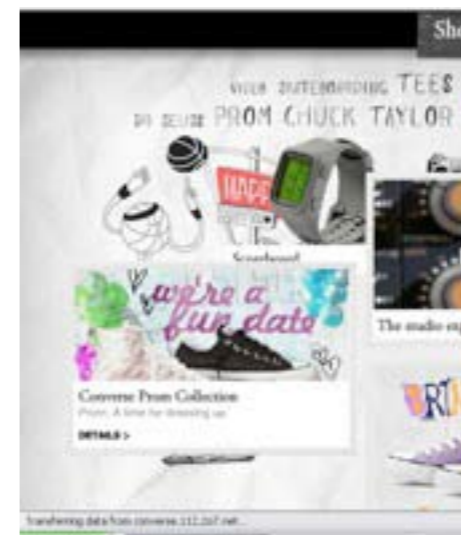


Figure 4.1
Caption appears when the cursor is put on a picture-menu



Figure 4.2
When a menu clicked it expands and gives a link to the

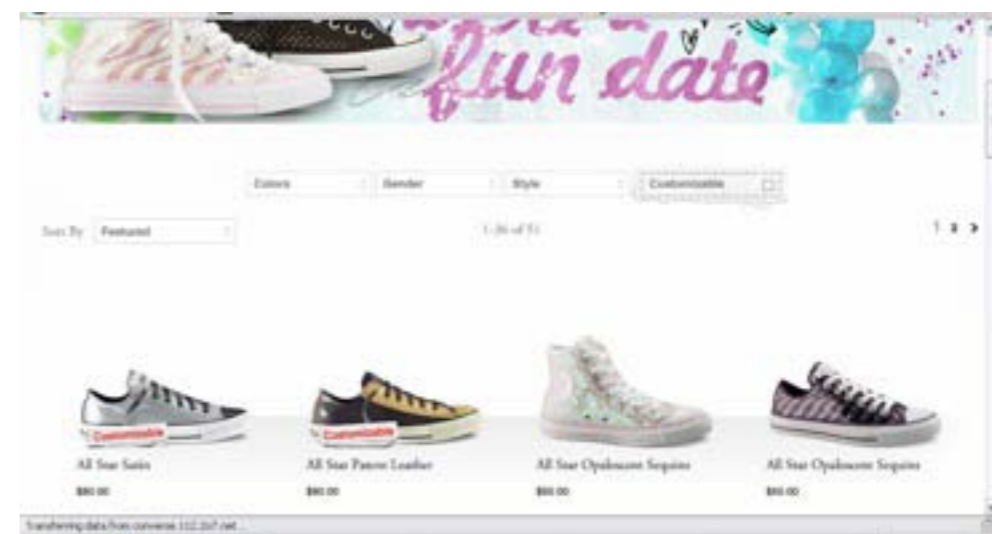


Figure 4.3
When the link clicked it goes to page of online stores (Con-

In addition to the attractive moving-menus, the website also provide two main links, 'shop' which allows users to browse online shop according to their interests, and 'create' which invites users to design their own shoes. More links provided below the two main links, which are: 'video', 'skateboarding', 'tees', 'chuck taylor.' There is also a small wheel of colors which allows user to filter and browse the shoes according to the colors.

By looking at the website layout, one can see that Converse puts forward the ideal value of being youth by associating the users with the image and representation of particular values and experience. Links like 'skateboarding', 'prom', and 'basketball' are closely related to the 'cool' youth culture. Converse website uses a "mix of modalities", which means using "an image...linked to verbal categories and descriptors" (Crannie-Francis 2005, p. 50). Users are encouraged to actively explore the website (and the products) by its interactive images, texts, and movement. The website combines those three aspects cleverly, that it illuminates the teenage years. For instance, the website idealized the meaning of the text "Stripped Down for a Good Time" combined with the image of young people running at the beach with sunlight shed on them, suggesting the freedom and spirit of youth, and an image of a shoe (which represented the collection of shoes on sale). The 'Real' message is the online shop. Converse does not directly sell the products, but sells an identity that is associated with 'free-spirited', 'young', and having a 'good time'. In other words, the brand tries to underline that using converse shoes is celebrating the youth years. Behind those identity and values, the ultimate purpose of the brand is, of course, get people to consume the products. Through its website, it invites the viewers to be the producer of meaning of the multimodal text, as well as be the consumers.

In order to offer a specific identity, publishing visuals in digital age is more compelling and convincing. Digital media, especially web 2.0, allows not only multimodality; it also allows user interactivity which makes the users consider themselves as the producer of meanings. That makes the process of decoding a meaning easier.

Converse, Flickr and Olivia Bee

Another Converse's approach to the teen market is communicating its identity and values through the ambassador. There are many youth representative who have been chosen by Converse to represent the brand. They are the representative from various group/subculture, including skaters, bands, movie makers, athletes, and dancers. Specifically, in this article I would like to analyze Olivia Bee, a teen photographer who has become a phenomenon in Flickr.

Olivia Bee started taking pictures at the age of 13. She posts them regularly to Flickr, and surprisingly her photos get a lot of positive feedback. Her photos are "a raw and honest description of her life, showing herself and friends going through the sometimes hazy, uncomfortable and occasionally, almost delirious, experience of teenage life" ("Olivia Bee is Here to Stay" (n.d.), para 2). She was recruited by Converse at the age of seventeen for an advertising campaign. Converse chose her probably because she is the manifestation of the identity of youth that the brand wants to portray. In an interview, she states that being a teenager inspires her photos, and that her future plans includes "art college, own a husky, make a movie, write a book, run naked across a golf course" (Williams (n.d.), para.1). In the video of the campaign, she says, "my name is Olivia Bee, I put the chaos and confusions of high school on film, what do you do?"



Figure 5
Olivia Bee's Photos (Olivia Bee Photostream 2011)



Figure 6
Olivia Bee's Converse Ad Campaign (Olivia Bee 2010)

Flickr is one of the examples how the social media is used by the youth to discover their Self. In Flickr, one can post their photos, exchange comments, messages and testimonials with other users join common interests groups (“moving image” or “self portrait artists” group) and post their specific photos to the group. Olivia Bee is one of millions teenagers out there who post photos to Flickr to experiment with and publish their identities. She treats it as her personal space to display feelings, thoughts and emotions through photos. In her profile, she writes “this is my diary, it’s okay if you hate it.” This exactly what Stern points out, that online, teenagers treat their personal sites as “private diaries, which have frequently been considered as objects for self-examination and engagement” where they can “map[ing] out personal beliefs and values, question[ing] taken-for-granted truth, and navigate[ing] ever-more complex relationship” (Stern 2008, p. 101). Olivia Bee posts some photos with her wearing Converse sneakers (figure 7.1). Other photos are accompanied by diary-like captions like “i’m afraid of being forgotten. it sounds selfish, and i suppose it kind of is, but that’s the only thing i’m absolutely terrified of. if you’re held at gunpoint, you might die, but it’s only your body that’s killed. but if you’re forgotten, you’ve died forever” (ex: figure 7.2). Her photostream are visited by thousands of people, mostly teenagers, who admire her photograph, stating that they understand exactly what she feels. This proves that her photos, apparently, represents the feelings encountered by many teenagers at her age.



Figure 7.1 and 7.2
Olivia Bee’s photos (Olivia Bee Photostream 2011)

As have been discussed before, blogs, social networking, and homepage are used to perform the Self. Online platforms are the “front stage” or “the part of individuals’ performances which regularly functions in a general and fixed fashion to define the situation for those who observe the performance” (Goffman 1949, p. 19). Olivia, like other teenagers, uses online platforms (in this case Flickr) to express her confusions, emotions, and life stories in her own fashion, a youth’s manner. She performs her Identity, as “identity is about performance of desire and the experimentation with self through exploration of desires, curiosities and/or fantasies” (Thomas 2007, p. 195). The use of online spaces as the place of performing identity and the desire of teens to showcase their identity are seen by the commodity producers as a chance to market the products. “Indeed,” Stern points out, “recognizing how eager teens are to speak out and be heard, corporations enlist them as participants in viral online marketing campaigns.” (Stern 2008, p. 101).

Similarly, Converse selects Olivia Bee as the representative of the brand because her stories and emotions about being a teenager are loudly voiced through her pictures. She embodies the symbol of spirit and characters teens can identified themselves with. The image of her using converse indirectly tells that by using converse, they share the same identity because identity “is also realized through iden-

tification of self with groups and/or communities” (Thomas 2007, p. 194). Converse makes use of social media in spreading the identity it offers, embodied in Olivia Bee and her photos.

To conclude, youth in the digital and Internet era are used to construct, mold, and negotiate their identity in online spaces. This is followed by the new approach of marketing products through digital publishing, as teens are also big-spending consumers. Corporation like Converse focuses on the creating an identity which can be sold to the teens. The popularity of social media among youth is also used by Converse to sell the products. When more teens are willing to share the identity Converse is offering, the more they consume the products.

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The impact of technological advancements upon language and communication in an increasingly digitized society.

PIPPA LYONS

Abstract

Language and its place in society is often impacted upon with the advent of new technology. Every year approximately 175 new words and phrases are added to the dictionary as well as the 20,000 new colloquial terms added to the English language. This rapid growth in the scope of language can be attributed technology, making information both more available and more accessible than ever before. In addition to this the rise of the role of the individual in publishing with the innovation of social media sites has also influenced modes of communication and thus language evolution. Through the analysis of academic texts and the comparison of digital technologies to traditional media forms it can be seen that new styles of language are emerging to conform to the constraints of digitisation.

Keywords

Language evolution, digitisation, technology, social media, publishing, communication

Not only do technological advancements impact upon the development of language but so do societal, political and economic pressures and upheavals. It can be seen after each major change that language has undergone a significant evolution and effect of the increasing popularity of digital technologies in today's society is no different. Through the internet and developments such as social media, new sub-languages and dialects are forming as communication modes but it remains to be seen whether these are merely trends in language or a permanent evolution. Texting has also impacted upon language in ways not previously seen; not only is it propensity for the shortening of words and use of acronyms responsible for introducing new entries in the dictionary but an entire new genre of fiction has been spawned. However this trend towards simplification and economy in language, often commented on by academics, is not only influencing and producing a new style of language and communication but in conjunction with the internet could be responsible for changing the way we think.

Language as a communication tool is not static, it is a constantly evolving concept and remains in a state of flux at all times. Throughout history major changes in language have been seen during times of political, societal and economical upheaval (Graddol 2000 p.4). After the separation of the Americas from British rule lexicographer, Noah Webster, 'proposed reforms of the American spelling system, some of which give it a distinctive appearance in print...which where intended to create a national linguistic identity for the newly independent country' (Graddol 2000 p.6). The development of American English was used to help communicate this change in the political, cultural and societal environments. During these periods the current language cannot be used to adequately convey the changing atmos-

phere, mindsets and dynamics of a society and therefore must evolve for people to successfully communicate these upheavals.

Major technological advancements also play a large role in the evolution of language throughout history. The most demonstrable, prior to the internet, was the invention of the printing press by Guttenberg. Elizabeth Eisenstein (2005 p.261) states 'within fifty or sixty years of the invention of the printing press, the entire classical canon had been reprinted and widely promulgated throughout Europe.' In addition to this Latin as the language of most published works began to decline, being replaced by the vernacular language of each field of study (Webster's Dictionary Online 2006). Prior to the printing press publications were written, printed and reproduced by hand, allowing room for individual interpretations, minor differences and even errors between copies of the same text. Using the same plate to produce a number of copies of an individual text meant there was a unification and standardization of spelling and syntax therefore decreasing the variability of one language. Due to this, for the first time there was a widely used and recognized written language. The ability the printing press to out-produce traditional hand printing methods meant that written works were more readily available to society for discussion and interpretation thus fuelling change.

Similar to the printing press before it, the introduction of the internet has had a profound effect on the evolution of language. Through the internet there is an intersection and amalgamation of many different cultures, societal, economical, political ideologies and pressures. The internet makes 'information producible, accessible and spreads it easily, quickly and without barriers of entry (Buettner 2010). It is obvious that the more widespread information, in this case language, is and the more external factors (such as those through the internet) that impinge upon it the faster information will evolve. While all languages undergo a process of evolution, English in particular has been subject to far more change over the past thousand years than any other language (Malone 2008). This acceleration in evolution could be attributed to the fact English is fast becoming a 'global language' with around 1.5 billion English as a first or second language speakers worldwide (English Club 2004). In addition to this, approximately 536.6 million of internet users communicate in English; it far outweighs any other language in that sphere (Miniwatt Marketing Group, 2010). Linguistics professor Dennis O'Neil (2009) states 'cultures that have more complex, diverse economies and advanced technologies have larger vocabularies.' With English being such a widespread language, with a multitude of influencing external factors, it is easily seen how it would evolve far quicker than languages only influenced and spoken by only one or a few nations.

According to the National Science Foundation language change can happen in a variety of ways, the most recognizable through vocabulary and sentence structure (Malone 2008). Vocabulary is often the first and most noticeable change through the acquisition of 'new words, new phrases or semantic expansion of old words and phrases' (Killian 2008). Sentence structure is far slower to transform but no less present. Changes in sentence structure can be seen in comparing the works of Chaucer to Shakespeare to modern English (Malone 2008). Not only has the vocabulary changed significantly between each era, so too has the sentence structure to the point it bears little resemblance to its predecessor.

The most obvious and perhaps least drastic of changes is the advent of new words. In the most recent edition of the Oxford English Dictionary (OED) 175 new words were added (Martin 2010), in addition to this Global Language Monitor (GLM) estimates a new word is created every 98 minutes (Gall 2009). While these new words may just be colloquial terms not included in the dictionary GLM insists they must, if spoken by one user, be understood by another. As well as this the words must have at least '25,000 citations in worldwide media, social networking sites and elsewhere' (Gall 2009) in order to be included in the count. While acronyms have always held a place in language the rise of technology has meant they are much more prevalent in general communication than before and thus included in many dictionaries or exist as commonly accepted colloquial terms. However, senior editor of the OED Fiona McPherson says, "Some people get quite exercised and say, 'do these things belong in our language?'" (Klienmann 2010). In response to this, it is important to place language within the context of the society it currently exists - that is a technological one. Many acronyms have sprung from technology only to be

absorbed into mainstream society and language; given that technology plays such a large role in current society acronyms very much belong.

Technology and the internet, in particular social media, have had an enormous impact on the evolution of language. According to social media authority Brian Solis (2010) social media can be defined as 'is the democratization of information, transforming people from content readers into publishers. It is the shift from a broadcast mechanism, one-to-many, to a many-to-many model, rooted in conversations between authors, people, and peers.' Where the printing press led to a standardization of language, the interactive almost conversational mode of social media seems to be leading to a diversification of language. As O'Neil (2009) hypothesized the more diverse a culture, the more advanced a language will be. Social media provides a meeting ground for various subcultures globally and in doing so unique sublanguages and dialects have begun to emerge. 'L33tspe34k' (pronounced leetspeak), 'LOLcats' and 'txt-spk' are all bastardisations of English which serve to identify a different group or subculture within the overarching confines of social media. However linguistics professor David Crystal argues that 'txt-spk' is not a new language, "people say that text messaging is a new language and that people are filling texts with abbreviations - but when you actually analyse it you find they're not... In fact only 10% of the words in an average text are not written in full' (Klienmann 2010). However even this slight change in the structure of a word can make the communication indecipherable to those not initiated in an internet or technological culture.

'L33tsp34k' originally stemmed from programming code, where letters are substituted with numbers and is grammatically and phonetically incorrect as is 'LOLcats'. Both of these sub-languages mean little outside of the context of the internet and users who have not been inducted into this would have great difficulty deciphering their meaning. This point was demonstrated when the founder of anarchic message board 4chan Christopher Poole was called to testify in the trial of the man accused of hacking of Sarah Palin's email account. During the trial he was asked to clarify several well-known internet colloquialisms. While understood by users of the site and the internet in general, these meant nothing to the greater public (Klienmann, 2010). Due to the relatively small percentage of users in comparison to other languages it remains to be seen whether these 'sub-languages' are simply fashion or whether they are a true evolution of language. Words and linguistic trends have always cycled in and out of fashion. However due to the rate at which language is currently changing is difficult to compare the longevity of a trend in current society even to those in relatively recent history.

Social media such as blogs and wikis as well as dedicated social networking sites including Facebook and Twitter is having a two-pronged effect on language. These sites are leading language to become more informal as well as promoting an almost simplified version of communication. Social media is 'countless vibrant online communities, forums and bloggers consisting of deeply engaged readers and communities' (Buettner 2010). The interactive, almost communal nature of social media encourages a more conversational style of written communication, which in turn is increasingly informal than previously seen. Aliza Sherman (2010) writes 'one of the real impacts of social media communications on our general communications is that many of us tend to be much more revealing in business and personal communications than ever before.' John Quiggin (2006) also comments on this trend, 'a blog posts serves more to initiate conversation, held in public view, than as a discreet piece of communication from author to reader.' The seemingly personalized nature of online forums and social media means that language once reserved for personal relationships is now used in much wider social contexts (Beard 2004 p.39).

As communication becomes more informal and personalized, a shortening of language or 'linguistic economy' is emerging (Klienmann 2009). Due to the more personalized nature of the communication via social networking it is appropriate to use acronyms, drop vowels, and shorten words or sentences to get the message across. Not only does the increasing informality of language encourage this but so does the very set up of many social media platforms. Social media is designed for short 'posts' of information; Twitter even limits the number of characters per 'tweet' to 140. Users must adopt a linguistic economy to convey something meaningful in a few words, stripping the idea down to its bare bones

to make an impact (Sherman 2010). In cases such as Twitter where the technology is a response to a trend in language, that is a linguistic economy, changes in language can first find roots in the limitations of previous technologies. In the first generation of mobile phones with texting capabilities users were limited to a number of characters per message. Therefore in order to keep costs down it was imperative for users to shorten words and sentences to convey information without going over the character limit. Even as mobile phone technology has evolved in most cases to unlimited character counts for messages the linguistic economy remains and is encouraged by future generations of social media such as Twitter.

On a deeper level, technological advancement is affecting the way in which we think and therefore the way in which we communicate. Journalist Nicholas Carr (2008) said 'what the Net seems to be doing is chipping away at my capacity for concentration and contemplation. My mind now expects to take in information the way the Net distributes it: in a swiftly moving stream of articles.' It would seem that technology, specifically the internet, encourages this style of communication; log onto the landing page of just about any website and users are confronted with a barrage of choices in the form of links, blurbs and scrolling banners. Blogger Bruce Friedman also commented on how the internet has influenced his reading saying, 'I now have almost totally lost the ability to read and absorb a longish article on the web or in print' (Carr 2008). This point is further reiterated through a study conducted by scholars from University College London, which found:

'it is clear that users are not reading online in the traditional sense; indeed there are signs that new forms of "reading" are emerging as users "power browse" horizontally through titles, contents pages and abstracts going for quick wins. It almost seems that they go online to avoid reading in the traditional sense' (Carr 2008).

This style of information absorption and communication is encouraged and built upon with the increasing growth of social media such as Twitter and Facebook where users are encouraged to post small snippets of information. Some would argue that this style of media is contributing to the dumbing-down or simplification of language (Killian 2008). However this generation of speakers has developed their use of language significantly through technology including texting and social media rather than the traditional medium of books, radio and face to face (Killian 2008), it comes down to the question of what is appropriate for current society. What constituted language and societal norms fifty or sixty years ago may not be appropriate or relevant in a society today that is dominated by technology. With so much information available literally at our fingertips, it is no longer necessary to retain vast reams of information. Instead we can just remember the Google keywords that will take us to the relevant site.

Examples of this can be seen even in traditional media as it 'adapts to the audiences new expectations' (Carr 2008). In the case of the traditional novel, the structure of the plot has undergone a radical change; we have lost the 'long and complex works of prose' (Carr 2008) that became commonplace after the introduction of the printing press and with this we have weakened our 'capacity for...deep reading' (Carr 2008).

Further to this change in the novel is the advent of the 'cellphone novel'. Mostly love stories written in the short sentences characteristic of text messaging but containing little of the plotting or character development found in traditional novels (Onishi 2008). The cellphone novel came about through a generation of Japanese who came of age during the boom of personal communication technologies. This shows what an integral part technology plays in shaping language. Japanese literature expert Chiaki Ishihara said, 'It's not that they had the desire to write and that the cellphone happened to be there. Instead, in the course of exchanging e-mail, this tool called the cellphone instilled in them a desire to write' (Onishi 2008). The rise in popularity of these novels can also be attributed to the increasing brevity and informality in communication;

'They don't read works by professional writers because their sentences are too difficult to understand, their expressions are intentionally wordy, and the stories are not familiar to them...older Japanese don't want to recognize these as novels. The paragraphs and the sen-

tences are too simple, the stories are too predictable' (Onishi 2008).

Language is currently predominantly a written medium, however Professor David Crystal believes the next generation will become increasingly voice oriented and questions in fifty years time how much of our communication will be written (Visual Thesaurus 2008). Users are coming to expect an added layer of embedded meaning and interactivity within technology-rooted texts (online or e-books), TTS (text-to-speak), synchronised audio tracks and embedded multimedia and other interactive content are an increasingly common features of these texts (Buettner 2010). However at what point do these added extras, while they might in some elements enhance the text, begin to detract from the text? Through this embellishment of language as a written medium we are at risk of losing the art of reading for the sake of reading and potentially even language as a written medium as technology becomes more and more visual and auditory.

History has shown that language is not static; technology and society will always influence trends in language and communication as well as the evolution of language itself. Due to the rate at which technology moves at present the evolution of language is not only becoming faster but perhaps we are also more aware of it due to the nature of technology such as the internet which gives users access to more information in a shorter period of time than ever before. It remains to be seen what the outcome of language will be and what place it will hold in society, although it is highly unlikely that written language will ever completely disappear even as it is displaced by the visual and auditory. Language will continue to evolve through sub-languages and dialects as these become absorbed into everyday communication as language evolves with society as it advances to convey ideas and infuse the world with meaning.

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