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Refolding the fold: the complete representation of actuality in digital culture

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Abstract

Before the internet came into popularity and digital culture became part of everyday life there already existed an anxiety about the repercussions of copy culture on the original. Benjamin Walter's famous essay on the mechanics of photography comments on the reproductions ability to remove an image from its context and place it on an accessible medium. Walter's dissertation has been applied to the internet's ability to recreate objects, communities and cultures that exist in the real world. The anxiety breeds in the fear that the actual world will cease to retain its importance and the 'aura' of the original will be lost. This anxiety is based on a reductionist understanding that does not seek to cohesively understand objects, but to comprehend the parts in the path to conceptualising the whole.

Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz was described as a holistic philosopher. His philosophy was based on the idea that all things in the world are connected, as folds on one piece of paper. This philosophy, when applied to the physical world, has implications for the internet. The real world is perfectly connected; any one part of the world is fundamentally representative of the entire world. Therefore any copy of a part of the world, also copies the whole world represented in that part.

This essay will take the current scientific world view and revert it back to Leibniz's philosophy. Thus the internet will be presented as a copy of a world that is cohesive and connected. Consequently any copy of a part is also a copy of the whole and thereby calming the anxiety over the detrimental aspects of copy culture. As a result, an argument can be made that the anxiety over copy culture is founded upon one philosophy that can be displaced by another.

Keywords
DIGITAL CULTURE • COPY CULTURE • INTERNET • LEIBNIZ • HOLISTIC PHILOSOPHY

In high school physics I was taught two ways to understand the workings of the universe. The first was that all bodies of mass in space produced a gravitational force around themselves. The second was that gravity is conceptualised as a force as well as a plane. Gravity as a force was easy enough to understand as I munched on an apple that had fallen from its tree; however the idea of a gravitational plane required more explanation.
So my physics teacher brought into class several balls of different sizes and a very large sheet. Mr. Johnson asked the students to pull the sheet tightly to create a flat surface that was elevated approximately a metre above the floor. This represented the plane of gravity that existed in space. Then the balls were placed on different areas on the sheet to represent the various bodies of mass. Each ball that he placed created a dent in the flat plane. By the end of the experiment there were multiple dents in the sheet, some of which were small, some larger, and some larger yet having being caused by two balls combined weight. This sheet of material can be used to represent the fabric of the internet bent, dented and impressed upon by the actual world.

This visualisation of the gravitational plane of the universe can be transposed upon the philosophy of Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, a German philosopher from the 17th century, who described all of matter as universal. Leibniz's postulated that there are folds in the plane of universal matter that form the objects that exist. Therefore everything can be defined by all other things as they exist upon the one plane.

This essay applies Leibniz’s philosophy of folds to the actual world. A plane that interacts with the objects that sit upon it will be presented as an analogy to understand digital culture, namely the internet, imitating the folds of actuality. This essay argues that Leibniz’s philosophy implies that all representations are copies of the folds that claim the universality of objects. Therefore the copy of any fold is a copy that encompasses all reality. Consequent implications of this theory will be explored with regard to the copy culture that arises from the structure of the internet.

The Fold

Leibniz's philosophy is an attempt to understand the world in a way that is antithetical to the reductionists point of view commonly held by modern scientists. A reductionist argument would claim that the world can be understood by atomisation – breaking the world down to its smallest unit and understanding it. This understanding of the parts would then be used to comprehend the whole. So the scientist would progress from the subatomic particles, to the atom, the elements, to the molecules and so forth. This reductionist philosophy assumes a distinction between parts entails a separatist concept that dictates absolute fluidity and an absence of cohesion. Famous discourse of the subject exists between Leibniz and his contemporary René Descartes who wrote ‘[that] all matter existing in the entire
universe is thus one and the same, and it is always recognized as matter simply in virtue of its being extended’ (Descartes 1644, pp. 175). That is that all matter is connected and exist as extensions to one another, however Descartes continues ‘[i]f the division into parts occurs simply in our thought, there is no resulting change’ (1644). Descartes and Leibniz differed in philosophies, as where Leibniz saw a pre-established harmony between mind and body, Descartes saw them as clearly distinct (Dear 2003). Descartes philosophical writings were used as the springboard that led to Newtownianism in the 1600s, which eventually developed into current scientific, reductionist methodology. Remaining on the wayside is Leibniz’s equally and philosophically apt argument that objects are divided into infinity by small folds that retain cohesion. That the decomposition of these folds would reveal the connectedness of the object (Deleuze 1993). In this theory the smallest unit is the fold and the whole of matter can be likened to a large piece of paper with many folds.

All things are therefore connected. It is through the large page of reality in which every fold is made, that there is a cohesion and universality to everything that exists. The folds in the paper can be recognised by the connection that it has with the other folds. The fold can also exist as a representation, as well as a verb (Deleuze & Strauss 1991). This means that the folds represent the physical and the metaphysical objects in the world, but can also speak of the process of folding and concealing part of the piece of paper. The hidden parts of the paper needs to be explored in order to understand the world and therein lies the pursuit of science.

The most important aspect of viewing the world as folds on a universal piece of paper is to acknowledge that all things are connected. When one looks at a pond they are looking not just at the fold of that pond, but also at the way in which it can be likened to the folds created by all the other ponds in the world. A fish in that pond is connected to every other pond, and every other fish in the world, and so forth. This conceptualisation of the connectedness of the world can be applied to digital culture by arguing that through hyperlinks connections are made between all things and nothing exists on its own. However, this then means that

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1 Unfortunately, this essay will not explore the affect that the history and development of western science has on digital culture and social views on the internet. However, I do think that this would be a revealing and stimulating study – particularly when considering the overwhelming impact that the Enlightenment has had.

This further study could also further explore the differences between the physical and the metaphysical existences in Libniz’s philosophy and where the internet lies with regard to these categories, and why. However, this essay is also unable to explore these potential research areas.
the internet only links the world that is on the internet, and does not produce a complete view of the internet’s imitation of the actual world.

Copy Culture

There was a massive rise in the number of internet users when browser software was improved to make it more user friendly. This rise catalysed the flood of information stored online – including e-books, online newspapers and information. Thus the study of copy culture was born. It appears that the internet serves as a storage space for all things that exist in actuality. Essentially the virtual world has become a copy of the actual world.

Benjamin Walter wrote about the mechanisms involved in photography and the theorised the impact that a photograph had on the world that it was reproducing (Benjamin 1972). His dissertation of the mechanics of photography can now be applied to digital culture and the online copy of the actual world. Walter wrote that photography has altered the elitist nature of art works by enabling excellent reproductions to be disseminated amongst the middle and lower classes (Benjamin 1972). Walter’s argued that involved in the mechanics of the photograph was the ability to capture and displace actuality by removing it from its exclusive context and making it available to more people. In the same way, the use of the internet has allowed many of the things that exist in actuality to be made available to the masses as copies are placed on the internet.

These online copies are growing in their importance as the use of the internet grows. Many students and educational programs no longer require students to use a diverse range of sources. Applications such as Google, Google books and journal databases means that all the information a student may need to complete an assignment can be found on the computer. In other words the internet is relied upon to produce a replica of the actual world. Yehunda Kalay considers this phenomenon in his essay about preserving cultures through digital media. In his essay he points out that when the traditions of memorising verse moved to writing things down on scrolls, all the knowledge that was not written on a scroll was lost (Kalay 2008). It is possible that the future of knowledge will rely on this copy culture that has replicated actuality and presented it on the internet.

There are, however, counter arguments to the advantages of the copy and these
are presented by Walter when he writes: “The removal of the object from its shell, the fragmentation of the aura, is the signature of perception whose sensitivity has so grown that by means of reproduction it defeats even the unique” (Benjamin 1972 p. 209). Walter, through describing photography in his essay, here recognises that something of the ‘aura’ of an object is lost when it is copied into a photograph. In the same way, something in actuality is lost when it is reproduced on the internet. This is something that may detrimental to actuality if the reception of the online copy is able to change the real world. More likely it’s a technological trade-off that is a natural outcome of a paradigm shift in information collation (Christen 2005).

The Plane and the Fold as parallels

The idea that the folds of actuality are replicated in the plane of the digital world can dissolve the fear of creating copies that only partially represent the world. If the concept of the fold is applied to the world and all things in the world are connected, the idea of the internet can be seen as a plane that lies on top of the folded page (to describe it pragmatically), then digital culture can be considered to be a representation of the entirety of actuality. In forming an indent created by the fold that connects to all things, the indent can similarly be considered a representation of all things in the digital world and in the actual world.

In considering the digital world to be a plane, rather than a fold, we are no longer faced with the problem of losing a sense of ourselves when we consider the impact of the internet. In fact it may even lead to a heightened sense of the self in the world: ‘...the impact of new media may bring a change in one’s sense of one’s own place no less than of the place of the things around one’ (Malpas 2008, p. 23). The key to the copy not being a danger or a threat to the sanctity of the original, ie. the actual world, is that “…the virtual reproduction, so long as it is evident as virtual, does not masquerade as the real thing” (Malpas 2008, p. 18). Social networking sites, such as Facebook, Twitter and MySpace, do offer replicas to the actual world, but they do not pretend to be the relationship between people. Rather, they offer an opportunity for something that exists in actuality to be replicated online for convenience and to defeat the material and spatial barriers that may arise in the real world. The evidence for this can be found in the way in which the interaction it offers replicates what already exists in the world – such as becoming a fan of a band, or commenting on the activity of friends.
By combining Leibniz's theory of the Fold as a representation of the cohesive relationships that exist between all aspects of material culture in the world, with the physical phenomena of a gravitation plane, the copies that exist in digital culture can be viewed as a holistic representation of the actual world. The copies that exist in the digital culture are removed and pulled out of context, but this serves the purpose to encourage an understanding of the world from the point of view of the self. The copies are also not just representations of part of the actual world, or deficient in terms of what has been copied and what has not been copied. Since the copies in the digital world are copies of a universally cohesive actual world, as described by Leibniz, then the copies themselves are cohesive and universal. To return to an earlier example, when looking at an image, or information, about a pond on the internet, one does not just see the all the information and images about that pond that is online. They also see all the information about any pond that is online. Contained in the information about any pond online is the information about every pond that exists in actuality. Because the 'pond-bend' in the plane of the digital world, is actually caused by the pond-fold in the actual world. The pond-fold contains all the information of every pond that has ever existed. In this philosophy the online digital culture presents to its reader a holistic and complete view of the actual world. More than this, digital culture also offers to its reader the opportunity to discover and define culture through their understanding of their own self since '[c]ultures exist side by side, [and] partly overlap’ (Deuze 2006, p. 72).

The implication for this point of view means that the world represented on the internet is complete. Where it has previously been asserted that the information is not whole or that the internet is not democratised in its presentation is false as demonstrated by the cohesive connectedness that exists on the page of the real world and on the plane of the virtual world that imitates.

As a result of the cohesive nature of the internet it is now recognisable that the information contained therein is of equal value to the user. If too much time is spent on 'technological precision' we will 'remain unconnected or unaware of the past's broader role and function in society, we will always be chasing phantom unicorns of unchanging essence, rather than trying to understand and encourage the creativity of collective memory in all of it's evolving forms' (Silberman 2008, p. 90). Thus a researcher is free to accept the subjectivity of digital culture, in terms of the shifted focus of information from its own context to that
of the reader, and to embrace the way in which it is able to represent the actual world apart from the material restraints.

As a concluding remark let us return to the classroom analogy presented in the introduction. The plane of the internet is bent and dented but the folds on the page are the actual world. Each dent in the plane of the internet cannot help but influence the way in which the other bends and dents in the fabric are made. The plane of fabric that sits upon and is influenced by the folds that are on the page of actuality, is the large sheet that is being dented by the balls that sit upon its surface. The page of actuality is doubly connected by the impressions on it and interrelations, and by the folds that it imitates. Considering actuality as thus presented, the internet can be appreciated and enjoyed as a holistic representation of the whole of the actual world.

References


Mind over media? A philosophical view on user-generated media and social identity

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Abstract

With the development of web 2.0 and social networking sites, the production of user-generated media (UGM) has skyrocketed. In creating user profiles, blogs, videos and other computer mediated content, the selection of material to be published is integral to the presentation of the user’s identity. This paper examines the notion of self-disclosure in relation to the creation of the user’s identity on the web. Many scholars agree that users intentionally create ‘impressions’ of themselves by choosing to publish certain kinds of content. This paper provides an overview of related documentation (with focus on the Uses & Gratifications model), thereby presenting a sound theoretical base for the alternative argument presented. This alternative view is a philosophical one and asserts that there is intention in the creation of users’ identities on the web – intentions that can never be known. It proposes the invalidity of the ‘psychological needs’ argument that is central to Uses & Gratifications, suggesting instead that users strategically select and produce content to support their created identity. It is this perspective that is used to examine the notions of impressions, motivations, intentions, identity, and the created self.

Keywords
USER GENERATED MEDIA • SELF-DISCLOSURE • SOCIAL IDENTITY • FACEBOOK • USES AND GRATIFICATIONS • SELF-PRESENTATION • IDENTITY-CREATION • SOCIAL NETWORKING

Introduction

In an era where web 2.0 offers mass communication platforms to the average person, user-generated media (UGM) has become a global phenomenon. With the development and popularisation of user-generated sites such as Facebook, YouTube and countless others, the privilege of control – once safeguarded by the technical elite – has been placed in regular users’ hands. Scholars highlight the ability to control as a significant contributor to the appeal of UGM, particularly in the realm of identity-creation and self-disclosure (Flaherty et al. 1998; Papacharissi and Rubin 2000).

Self-Disclosure and the Public/Private Divide

Self-disclosure is an important consideration in the analysis of identity-creation on the web. Taddeo (2009 p.122) argues that increasing access to recording tools – e.g. homepages,
blogs, Facebook status updates, video streaming – provides a ‘hypertrophy of memory, which can cause the incapacity of people to select and give importance to what they record’.

The content published on these sites often gives cause for questioning. Yet, information about personal relationships, for example, features frequently on Facebook news feeds. It is possible that some users do not know how to restrict access to their profiles, thereby exposing content to unintended audiences. Others purposely leave access open despite privacy standards required to ‘encourage safe participation’ (Strater and Richter 2007 p.157) in these sites. The point of self-disclosure, after all, is to invite the audience into the private sphere.

As Strater and Richter (2007) point out, ‘the disclosure of personal information... support[s] online popularity and perceived social attractiveness’ (p.57). So, users make choices in disclosing private information in order to establish themselves in a certain position in a social setting, in this case social networking user-generated sites.

Alternatively, Taddeo (2009) claims that people ‘seem to lose the difference between public and private spheres of memory...even between what must be remembered [or published] and what not’ (p.130). This implies the use of UGM technologies causes people to act in a certain way, and that this can be predicted by scientific study.

Claims like these base themselves on the assumption that human beings’ actions are governed by a particular force within them, often labelled the ‘mind’. This argument is flawed because it is illogical to attribute human action to a force that cannot be observed; it also takes choice away from a person and, along with it, their accountability for the choices they make (Spillane 2006).

**The Uses & Gratifications Perspective**
The Uses & Gratifications theory is a common thread across studies in user-generated media. According to U&G, people choose a medium based on the likelihood of it meeting their ‘needs’ (Blumler and Katz 1974). The majority of the documentation reviewed for this paper was based on the U&G model.

U&G is a psychological communication perspective that proposes that ‘active audiences select particular media to satisfy felt needs, which are influenced by a number of social and psychological factors that affect media selection and use’ (Rubin 1994). Its main objectives focus on the correlation between media and ‘needs satisfaction’; understanding the motives behind media behaviour; and identifying the functions or consequences
that result from the needs, behaviour and motives of the user (Katz et. al. 1974). In this psychological context, Katz (et. al. 1973) divided thirty-five ‘motivator’ needs that cause people to use media into five categories: cognitive, effective, personal integrative, social integrative, and tension release needs.

Many scholars – e.g. Rubin (1994), Morris and Ogan (1996), Milheim (1996), Kramer (et al 2000), Papacharissi (2002) – agree that people ‘consume contents for fulfilling their information, entertainment, and mood management needs’ and ‘produce their own content for self-expression’ (Shao 2009 p.7). Similarly, Papacharissi’s study identified self-expression as a positive indicator for engagement in UGM. This was interpreted as suggesting a ‘need’ to use a homepage for personal expression (Papacharissi 2002 p. 364).

As previously mentioned, UGM allow users to control the content published on their profile or homepage, with minimal constraints imposed by the systems. Shao argues that having control appeals to people not only in a technical context, but also psychologically: ‘the ability of control [is]...an important factor that enhances people’s gratifications’ (2009 p.12). But there can be no psychological needs.

By definition, psychology refers to the study of the mind (Macquarie Dictionary, 4th ed.) – an abstract concept. The mind is neither physical nor locatable anywhere inside the body; it is not observable. Therefore, there is no force operating inside the body between its conscious and unconscious states (Spillane 2006). Lacking the subconscious, no actions can occur without active choice. A person can need (require) something, but they cannot possess a need. Needs, deriving from the illusory ‘mind’, are also unobservable and therefore cannot govern a person’s actions. People can ‘choose to explore certain sides of their personalities...or even invent virtual life personae different from their real life personalities’ (Bolter 1996), but they cannot need to.

A Philosophical View: the Created Self

The philosophical view counteracts the psychological U&G perspective and provides an alternative method for analysing self-presentation. In the tradition of Hume (1739) and Russell (1946), Spillane (2006) argues that the mind is an invented concept and anything related to its study has no basis. Therefore, the ‘self’ as a product of the mind succumbs to the same prognosis.

The idea of the ‘self’ has informed theses in numerous disciplines for centuries. Descartes (1637) claims there is a force within the human body that causes people to do things. In
his *Discourse on Method*, he asserts ‘cogito ergo sum’ – ‘I think therefore I am’. He exists because he thinks; and he knows he is thinking because the only thing he is certain he cannot doubt is that he doubts. He concluded that he was a thinking ‘thing’, which he termed the ‘soul’. Descartes treated the body as a machine whose physiology could be explained through physics principles – as matter. But the soul was ‘unitary, unextended and free’: ‘it knows the perceptions which arise in the body...wills actions but once having done so, the body runs them off mechanically’ (Spillane 2006 p.47).

Descartes’ ‘soul’ doubts, understands, feels, denies, wills, asserts and imagines. In order to place it within the body, he assigned it the function of thinking and pinpointed the pineal gland as its place of residence (Spillane 2006 p.48). This notion, Cartesian Dualism, developed until the ‘soul’ became the ‘mind’. Szasz (2002) argues that the invention of the ‘mind’ should not be blamed on Descartes, because there is no French word for ‘mind’. When the dichotomy was translated into English, for lack of an equivalent noun, the verb ‘mind’ was reified to represent the concept. Szasz’s *The Meaning of Mind* elaborates on the conversion of the verb ‘to mind’ into a noun. Spillane (2006) accords with Szasz’s views: as a noun, ‘the (scientific) mind resembles the (religious) soul, although it is less likely [than Descartes’ ‘soul’] to be granted the ability to survive bodily death’ (p.48).

A modern product of the mind, the ‘self’, inherited the ability to feel, think, and so on. It also acquired the ability to ‘need’. In doing so, it was determined that if the soul could need, then it could have needs. However, the ‘self’ is an abstract concept. Like the mind, it is neither tangible nor observable. ‘Needs’, like thoughts and feelings, are abstract nouns that have been reified and can only be observed as far as behaviour. People do not have ‘needs’ (or thoughts or feelings) ‘like they have colds; they communicate their thinking and their feeling [and needing] to others’ (Spillane 2006 p.49). Williams (2007) concurs: ‘individual self-consciousness is illusory...self-consciousness assumes a “mental entity”...“mental” entails “mind”...therefore “mind”, [derived] from an illusory self-consciousness, is not a noun...a mind does not exist as an entity in its own right’ (p.50).

If the ‘mind’ does not exist, neither does the ‘self’. There are no psychological needs, no self-consciousness. Logically, nothing can occur subconsciously because one is either conscious and fully aware or unconscious (and therefore not thinking). Being unobservable, the ‘mind’ cannot be proven to exist. The verb ‘mind’ derives from the Latin mens, meaning ‘intention’ or ‘will’:

*It is not a thing (material or immaterial) but is an activity which is reflected*
in its status as a verb. Much confusion has resulted from the unfortunate
tendency [of reification]. If the mind is not an entity ‘it’ cannot be in the brain
or in any other part of the body. And there can be nothing ‘in’ the mind, such as
thoughts, feelings, wishes, memories. We can conclude, therefore, that we have
no minds even though we mind; how and what we mind is who we are.

(Spillane 2006 p.48)

Any theories inferred from an abstract concept are invalid. The U&G model attempts
to emulate scientific argument by predicting outcomes. Science denotes empiricism
and logic, so psychology – depending as it does on unobservable, ‘compulsive’ forces –
is not scientific, but pragmatic. The necessity of distinguishing between a scientific and
pragmatic perspective, then, requires a philosophical view.

Social Identity

According to Spillane (2006), in Homeric times, only verbs, adjectives and adverbs described
human action. A man was simply the sum of his actions. As previously emphasised, people
choose to act. Therefore, self-expression is something one chooses to do, either explicitly
‘through direct self-disclosure’ or implicitly, ‘through choices of topic, words, illustrations,
and style’ (Van Lear et al 2005). People use these tools in order to ‘construct a certain
image of self and claim an identity’ (Shao 2009 p.11).

When creating a profile, Papacharissi (2002) claims users are ‘establishing a sense of
self on virtual terrain’ (p.346). They are certainly establishing something – a crafted,
multi-mediated identity made up of ‘audiovisual components and text to communicate to
potential mass audiences’ (Papacharissi 2002b p.643). Identity, like ‘self’, is a construct.
It is a ‘character and the role that an individual devises for himself as an occupant of a
particular social position’ (McCall and Simmons 1978 p.65). UGM sites are very useful
in creating an identity, or even multiple identities. A person may wish to be seen in a
certain way or establish a particular impression. Identity-creation involves ‘both an image
displayed to others and an idealized self visualized by the actor’ (Walker 2000 p.102), but
also the action taken in establishing ‘identity’.

Perhaps Somers and Gibson (1994) argue the point most effectively: ‘people construct
identities (however multiple and changing) by locating themselves or being located within
a repertoire of emplotted stories’ (p.38). They create a narrative about how they want to be
perceived then establish their ‘identity’ within that context.
Impressions and Interpretations

A number of scholars argue that people want to present their inner 'self' to others (Shao 2009 p.11). They assume that users have a need to show themselves in a particular way (Goffman 1959; McKenna and Bargh 1999; Swann 1983). Self-presentation, like identity-creation, is not a recent subject. Goffman (1959) ‘conceptualized the presentation of self in everyday life as an ongoing process of information management, whereby the individual is constantly trying to influence the impression others develop of him or her as a way of ultimately influencing others’ attitudes and behaviours’ (Papacharissi 2002 p.347-8).

Individuals give and give off expressions. The former is presumably unintentional. The latter is deliberate, with the aim of creating an impression intended to shape others’ perceptions. This is an ‘information game’ set up by the individual ‘whereby the impressions formed of oneself become a result of one’s expertise in controlling the information given and given off’ (Papacharissi 2002 p.347-8). It is a ‘performance’ (Goffman 1959).

Politicians illustrate this perfectly, presenting themselves as trustworthy, empathetic, decisive – in any way that appeals to voters. Recently, UGM sites have featured in political campaigns. Almost all presidential candidates for the 2008 US election used MySpace and YouTube to garner support; some users made videos supporting their preferred candidates (Shao 2009 p.8).

For the regular user, icons and imagery are crucial. Users employ emoticons and colours in creating their image: ‘if an individual seeks to come across as creative, a light hearted tone and inclusion of animations, playful colors, or other interactive elements lend nonverbal support to that claim. A person who wishes to appear outgoing could provide links to pages of friends and photos of gatherings as evidence’ (Papacharissi 2002b p.646).

The problem with impressions is that they cannot be lasting and can be contradicted by other impressions (often created by the user within a different context). Impressions are also subject to interpretation. Hume reflects in his Treatise of Humane Nature: ‘... when I enter most intimately into what I call myself, I always stumble on some particular perception or other…I never catch myself at any time without a perception, and never can observe anything but the perception’ (Hume 1739, cited in Russell 1946 p.602). So, a person can never be anything to another but an impression (one they choose to manufacture or one given involuntarily).

If, then, a person is nothing but a series of impressions, it follows that they may choose to create the impression given off. Facebook user Kristine Gasbarre, in an article about
her relationship break-up (2009), describes the dilemma of changing her status from ‘In a Relationship’ to ‘Single’:

- Krissy is deleting old text messages from her phone? Too bitter.
- Krissy is hoping you’re not all laughing at her for another effed up relationship? Too true.
- Krissy is pondering the meanings of life and love? Too sappy.
- Krissy is...Krissy is a new leaf. Perfect – fragile, but surging with new life. In truth I was faking the “new life” bit – I was bleary-eyed and deflated.

Kristine is clearly preoccupied with the opinions of her Facebook friends. This internal monologue illustrates the deliberate crafting of her impression so as to secure a particular response. Instead of pitying her, she describes how her status triggered a supportive attitude in her friends, many of whom posted sympathetic messages on her profile.

Russell (1946) contends that impressions are observed and converted into ideas, and that it is the ‘idea’ of someone that is remembered. Impressions come first and are derived from experience, e.g. a man born blind has no idea of colours because he has never had an impression of them (p.601): the ideas ‘that retain a considerable degree of the vivacity of the original impressions belong to memory, the others to imagination’ (Russell 1946 p.601). It is this act of interpretation that ultimately forms what are commonly labelled ‘impressions’, and impressions can be constructed for a particular purpose or reaction.

**Motivations**

Scholars have contented themselves with assuming the motivations of identity-creation and self-presentation for decades. According to U&G, ‘motives are general dispositions that influence people’s actions taken for the fulfilment of a need or want’ (Papacharissi 2002 p.349). From a philosophical standpoint, there are no motivations, only choices: actions taken based on an evaluation of their benefits or outcomes.

Mook (1996) argues that the motive for identity-creation is an unconscious one, while Bughin (2007), Kollok (1999) and Rheingold (1993) argue that it is psychological and aimed at seeking recognition or personal efficacy. Rosengren (1974) elaborates: ‘according to [U&G], communication needs interact with social and psychological factors to produce motives for communicating’.
Joyce and Kraut (2006) present an argument for the reinforcement model, which ‘predicts that people repeat actions that lead to positive reinforcements’ (p.725). Similarly, Bowman and Willis (2003) contend that people produce content to inform or entertain other users, while Shao (2009) suggests they wish to trigger responses or interaction. This paper asserts that these models can only explain, not predict, behaviour.

**Intentions**

Self-expression is a process that allows users to control the impressions they give (Dominick 1999; Jones and Pittman 1982) and thereby influence others’ interpretations. Given the content of UGM sites such as Facebook, it is safe to suggest that users are seeking a reaction or acceptance from the community in which they choose to create their identity.

While it can be assumed that there is intention behind the action, the actual intention cannot be assumed from the content generated by the user. It can be proposed that the user anticipates the outcomes that will result from their action or they would not have acted in the first place. However, what they intend to gain from these outcomes, and therefore the intention behind the action, is known only to them.

**Conclusion**

The philosophical argument is not new. Applied to social identity-creation and self-disclosure, however, it highlights some interesting points. It does not make assumptions of the user or seek to decipher their behaviour or intentions. It proposes instead that users intentionally act and that there is choice and strategy behind their actions.

Users of UGM sites create profiles in order to shape the impressions given off. These are interpreted by others and it is the resultant idea that forms the basis for their conclusions. Users choose to engage in identity-creation and self-disclosure because of the outcomes foreseen. The philosophical argument puts the onus of action back on the user through attributing them choice rather than attributing action to whim. Where the U&G model implies that any user-generated content is fair game for psychological assessment, the philosophical perspective provides a way to evaluate user online behaviour as deliberate in search of outcomes.
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Outsiders looking in: How everyday bloggers are gaining access to the elite fashion world

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Abstract

Internet users united by an interest in fashion are being empowered by the user-friendly capabilities of digital publishing. Fashion blogs and collaborative communities are examined in this article in relation to Tavi Gevinson’s blog ‘The Style Rookie’ and fashion community Polyvore. The theoretical points of reference are the creation of virtual communities, the active reworking of dominant meanings by consumers, and Deuze’s concept of the bricoleur-citizen. The responses of traditional media publications and major fashion companies to the growth of the digital publishing capabilities of consumers are also addressed. This article finds that the creative possibilities enabled by the availability of fashion-related information online allows active participation by any internet user who wants to contribute to the ongoing dialogue about fashion. The fundamental change that is occurring within the paradigm of fashion journalism is a significant emerging area of interest in the discourse of digital publishing.

Keywords
DIGITAL MEDIA • PUBLISHING • FASHION • ONLINE JOURNALISM • BRICOLAGE

The contemporary media landscape has transformed from a standardised and direct delivery model of mass communication towards a decentralised mode of news-gathering and distribution (Flew, 2009; Gillmor, 2003). Media consumption is now increasingly convergent and personalised. This development is linked to the introduction of the Web 2.0 platform, which enabled Internet users with little or no specialized technical experience to create online content (Harrison & Berthel, 2009: 157). The potential production power of consumers has increased as they operate in broader networks and are able to actively create media content. In particular, the availability of easy to use blogging platforms from around 1999 onwards has allowed interactive collaboration through active engagement with other users (Bell, 2007: 98). The increased accessibility of blogs over the past decade has resulted in a rise in both their quantity and popularity. The dissemination of fashion-related discourses online is enabled by the participatory capabilities of blogging as well as online collaborative communities.
The legitimisation of fashion blogging

The accessibility of fashion-related information online is one of the primary reasons for the rise of the perceived legitimacy of fashion blogging. This is illustrated by the tendency to receive front-row invites to fashion shows to provide updates for their readers (Dodes, 2006; Moore, 2009). In addition, almost instantaneous access to video and photos of the latest collections allows an immediate response from consumers, who can reproduce and comment on these visual stimuli on blogs and other online forums. The participation of consumers in online fashion-related discourses has increased because anyone with a computer is armed with the tools to potentially contribute to an ongoing exchange of ideas (Walker, 2009).

The salient characteristic of blogs in this context is their creation of an ongoing dialogue between the writer and a multitude of potential readers. By contributing discussion to blog posts, users are part of an organic process of knowledge sharing that continues after the author publishes a text online. According to a journalist who successfully made the transition from newspaper columnist to blogger, audiences are no longer passive because of the role they play in creating a feedback loop: ‘my readers know more than I do, sometimes individually on specific topics, but always collectively’ (Gillmor, 2003: 79). The power of a community of internet users can therefore be harnessed to enrich the dialogue surrounding a topic. This is important in relation to fashion consumption because consumers can draw myriad potential meanings from a wide range of sources online. This counteracts the passive acceptance of style directives that are disseminated through print media such as magazines.

The rise of the media-savvy consumer

Major fashion brands and print media publications have had to creatively respond to the challenges posed by the increasing mass of critical voices that engage in an online critique of fashion-related products. Brands such as Chanel and Gucci are utilising digital media to market their brands, with both releasing applications for the iPhone that provide interactive content aligned with the lifestyle associated with their brand identities (Mackay, 2010). The founder of a luxury brands consulting agency noted that this is a major shift, ‘they have hundreds of years of proven success on the ability to create meaning and deliver it through highly formal, socially approved, and traditional media’ (Mackay, 2010). Companies must be attuned to the visual and digital literacy of consumers who have built up a resistance
to the constant bombardment of messages through brand advertising (Carroll, 2009: 155). The potential to break through this apparent immunity has been hindered by the formation of virtual communities, as Carroll has identified: ‘The practice of blogging has drawn attention to the vagaries of brand advertising, with individuals posting their views on web pages and inviting commentary to the extent that virtual communities have formed, their purpose to offer and share critical appraisal’ (2009:149). The significant collective power of online communities as both critical commentators and consumers is increasingly being recognised by the fashion industry.

The power of the amateur ‘style rookie’

The crucial role of fashion-related blogging in the critical consumption of fashion online has led to the steady rise in legitimacy of this sub-genre of blogs. Scott Schuman’s street-style blog ‘The Sartorialist’ is currently the most popular fashion blog in terms of visitor numbers, with the site receiving over 1 million hits a month (Walker, 2009; Copping, 2009). However, the amateur blogger who has perhaps most visibly influenced the growth of online participatory fashion journalism is teenager Tavi Gevinson whose blog is called ‘The Style Rookie’. Her articulate, quirky, musings about her adolescent life and its intersection with fashion have steadily attracted widespread media attention. Tavi has been invited to collaborate on projects with major fashion designers, such as a mini-documentary with sibling designer team Rodarte to promote their capsule collection for Target (Phelps, 2009). She has also participated in photo shoots and written articles for respected fashion publications such as POP magazine (Wiseman, 2009). The success of Tavi’s blog illustrates how the perceptions of bloggers have changed. A young individual, who probably wouldn’t have been taken seriously as a fashion commentator in other circumstances, has been accepted as a legitimate participant in the emergent online fashion discourse.

The role of bloggers in alerting consumers to aspects of the previously obscured and exclusive creative process of fashion is one that has been praised, as Christopher Bailey, Burberry’s creative director, explains: “It’s important that the bloggers become well respected. They have a very articulate way of expressing an opinion. The difference between bloggers and traditional press is that [bloggers] are often talking directly to a final consumer’ (Copping, 2009). The direct and instantaneous nature of blogging may also be criticised for the lack of a mediating force to ensure that the final written product meets the requirements of its format. Tavi’s stream of consciousness style calls attention
to the potential limitations of blogging:

‘There was an obvious kinderwhore Courtney vibe from Proenza Schouler’s Fall collection but it wasn’t until I was looking at Marc Jacobs for the millionth time (and, can I say, it is inspiring and fresh and exciting every time) (Ugh, I hate when you love something so much your stomach hurts! Unless it’s the incessant amounts of Fruit Roll Ups. Or awful singing!) (Run-on sentences, ugh) (TOO MANY PARENTHESIS)’ (Gevinson, 2010).

Tavi’s tendency to pull together disparate pop cultural references into her analysis of fashion reflects the rise of what Deuze refers to as the ‘bricoleur-citizen’ (2006: 70). In the context of this article, this refers to the ability of Internet users to appropriate disparate elements from a variety of sources and create coherent forms of self-expression. Although a possible criticism of Tavi’s blog is that there is a distinct lack of an editor, this actually preserves the precious amateur nature of her writing style. Tavi’s unique form of self-expression is part of the niche appeal of her blog. If an editor were to intervene, her disjointed teenage prose would be reduced to something more reflective of mainstream fashion journalism, subsequently losing its perceived value as an outsider’s voice. In light of the pressure to maintain an independent voice despite increased media attention for her blog, Tavi seems to be secure in her unique place in the world of fashion blogging: ‘I think being young and working pretty independently from the industry helps me when I’m trying to come at something from another viewpoint and add something new to the discussion’ (Milligan, 2010).

**Amateur & professional journalism: A necessary alliance**

The success of Tavi’s blog is indicative of the almost inevitable intersection of amateur blogging with professional fashion journalism. Deuze has noted that the rise of participatory, interactive journalism has occurred parallel with professional, mainstream journalism rather than in direct opposition to it (2006: 72). The development of a symbiotic relationship between the two is mutually beneficial for all fashion-related media producers in order to maintain their readership and share common resources. For example, *Vogue*, a leading magazine franchise in fashion journalism, has developed an online presence (Style.com) that offers more immediate commentary in conjunction with the magazine’s monthly
release. Website editor Dolly Jones explained that although both the magazine and the website feature an exclusive view of the fashion world, the website allows *Vogue* to ‘create a constantly moving commentary on that world as it evolves’ (Walker, 2009). Another example of this transition is the recent employment of blogger Tommy Ton of popular fashion blog Jak&Jil by Style.com. Asked for his thoughts on the blogging revolution in a recent interview, Ton stated: ‘Style now I think is more influential than actual runway fashion, because style is a little bit more filtered down, and it’s more accessible to the real people. And that’s why I guess bloggers have become so influential’ (Fashion Television, 2010).

**Reworking fashion meanings**

The influence that Ton refers to above is the power of digital publishing to encourage a more active and participatory role by consumers in their reception to fashion. Thompson & Haytko have suggested that consumers actively rework messages they receive about fashion, both dominant and marginal, in the process of constructing their own personal style: ‘Through the juxtaposition of countervailing meanings, consumers can create a localized understanding whose whole differs from the sum of its constituent cultural associations’ (1997: 38). The detachment of fashion-related meanings from specific cultural and geographical contexts can be liberating for Internet users who love fashion but live outside of fashion capitals and/or don’t have the material means to fulfil their desires as consumers. As Spiridakis notes, ‘whereas a decade ago, suburban girls with a craving for fashion daydreamed via the pages of *Vogue*, today’s budding fashionista has access to a world of sick looks on her laptop’ (2008).

One of the crucial aspects of the process of reflecting upon and sharing ideas about personal style online is that consumers can consider the range of choices available to them and draw inspiration from trends without being beholden to them. Indeed, the idea of displaying a specific brand identity is one that is linked to conspicuous consumption and rejected by Tavi, according to Seidel’s analysis of her comments at the ‘Generation Next’ forum in New York: ‘For Tavi, luxury products should be like a secret society that connects you to like-minded individuals and not a mainstream, homogenised stamp of status. Brand markings should be secret emblems that only certain people recognize, she said’ (2010). Tavi’s determination to display a non-conformist persona online reflects Arvidsson’s
argument that social production whose products are created in a digital environment are not usually borne out of monetary concern, but are instead characterized by a particular value logic; ‘an ethical economy where socially recognized self-expression is the main motivation and community contribution is the main measure of value’ (2008: 326). Tavi and like-minded internet users actively rework fashion meanings because it allows them to express their unique self-identity in a welcoming, inclusive online environment.

**Virtual scrapbooking**

Amateur bloggers are the creators of online spaces where their unique expression of identity can be enacted and shared, which is significant in relation to the use of blogs by young women like Tavi. Harrison & Barthel (2009) have likened the weblog to a type of online diary. Young girls arguably use their blogs and other social networking sites as the virtual equivalent to written diaries, scrapbooks and bedroom walls. Bell (2007) has noted that many bloggers are in fact adolescent girls, and their usage reflects the location of blogs on the boundaries of what constitutes the private and the public. By engaging in communication online they are both sharing their personal lives with peers who are known to them, as well as being aware that the contents of their blogs can reach a potentially broader public audience. Tavi’s blog is part of the section of the wider blogosphere inhabited by young female bloggers who want to share their personal experiences in an online journal format. Brand consultant Hugh Devlin has pointed out that people enjoy participating in the idealistic world of fashion online, because ‘what they dream is up to them and they are likely to be drawn to bloggers who they feel share aspects of that dream’ (Copping, 2009).

The users who are drawn to the ‘dream’ embodied by Tavi’s blog are likely to also be amongst the 1.4 million registered users of the website Polyvore. Its basic function is to facilitate the assemblage of personalised, thematic ‘sets’ sourced from a diverse range of websites, quite like an online scrapbook and reflective of Deuze’s concept of the bricoleur-citizen. 200,000 of Polyvore’s users actively create sets and share them on social networking sites (Jacobs, 2010). Co-founder Pasha Sadri has likened the intertextual techniques encouraged by the site to the Lego-like assemblage of matching pieces that make up outfits in everyday life, ‘When you put on clothes, you are making that sort of assembly from pieces that you have...and it’s highly integrated with your identity’ (Jacobs, 2010). The value of a user’s contribution to Polyvore exponentially increases based on the number of views, comments and the reproduction of their chosen elements in the compositions
of other users. The attraction of the site is that it provides a forum for users to satisfy the desire to become virtual stylists, with no constraints of an actual budget and answering only to their personal sense of style. Users are engaged in an active process of creating meanings that are aligned with individual self-expression.

The tools for digital publishing expand the creative possibilities for the expression of consumer identities. This is evident in the success of Polyvore as a forum for a playful exploration of the meanings surrounding fashion. Multiple users can participate in forums through which they can play with notions of identity and consumption in an inclusive online environment. Tavi’s use of digital publishing tools to express her unique voice as a teenage consumer of fashion has granted her access to the once elite world of fashion journalism. The participation of consumers in fashion-related discourses online is potentially paradigm-shifting, as major fashion companies must acknowledge the new participatory era of fashion consumption due to the increasing use of digital media technologies. The contribution of internet users to the dominant fashion discourse reinforces the role of consumer participation in fashion as an ongoing process of appropriation and individualisation; a shift enabled by the possibilities of increasingly user-friendly digital publishing.
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New media revolution: personal ads expand to the Internet

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Abstract
This work begins by examining the similarities between print and online type personal advertisement. An analysis of characteristics shared by these two types of publication are made including the format of the relationship building processes, levels of self disclosure presented, typical strategies used, and goals anticipated by the author. These similarities are further strengthened through a comparison of the written type relationship formation sequence (i.e. personal advertisements) and typical face-to-face relationship development. The work moves on to examine how and why the placement of personal advertisements has shifted in recent years from print to online mediums and attempts to explain this conversion as a natural evolution in the field of publishing as a result of technological advancements.

Keywords
PERSONAL ADVERTISMENT • DIGITAL PUBLISHING • RELATIONSHIP FORMATION • INTERNET

Each new technology introduced into society has some effect on the way people live their lives. Throughout recent history this seems to have been the case with innovations such as the printing press, radio, television, telephone, and, most recently the Internet; all reconstituting society, how we view ourselves in it, and the actions we take to maintain that position. Manovich contends that ‘Today we are in the middle of a new media revolution – the shift of all culture to computer-mediated forms of production, distribution and communication.’ (qtd. in Deuze 2006, p. 63). A clear example of this shift can be seen in the evolution of the personal dating advertisement from print to digital, online contexts. What was once only possible by means of face-to-face meeting and communication became commonplace in print publications and now has expanded onto the Internet.

In order to investigate the reasoning behind this format shift of the personal advertisement, it is necessary to first demonstrate that, regardless of online or print publication type, the two are one in the same. This assumption can be based on characteristics shared by both formats of the personal advertisement including goals of publication and outcomes anticipated, author’s presentation of self, and implementation of common content strategy. Additionally, similarities can be seen in the sequence of relationship development for written correspondence, one which differs greatly from that of face-to-face relationships.
The goal of print and online type personal ads is relationship formation. In the construction of a personal advertisement authors attempt to minimize the risks involved in the process of meeting a partner which are present in traditional face-to-face encounters while at the same time maximizing their response probabilities. Placers of personal advertisements are free to screen the responses they receive and continue correspondence with those they see fitting, perhaps exchanging photos, telephone calls, or arranged meetings. This is a process which can be repeated with several candidates until the outcome is deemed acceptable (Montini & Ovrebo 1990, p. 335). Individuals who have difficulty with face-to-face relationship formation due to shyness, social anxiety, or lack of social skills find this process is especially beneficial (Whitty 2007, p. 3).

In composing advertisements authors present an image of themselves and describe their vision of the partner(s) they seek. (Montini & Ovrebo 1990, p. 27). This presentation of self is designed completely by the author, and is based on context, setting, and anticipated audiences (Schau & Gilly 2003, p. 387). Personal expression is facilitated by higher levels of author ambiguity and diminished pressure of social desirability. Authors can choose to conceal personal attributes which they personally see as being undesirable (e.g. age, gender and appearance) (Schau & Gilly 2003, p. 388). The published written format allows ad placers to present themselves by word rather than by physical referents, thus replacing social interactions which formerly were only produced in real time between participants in the same physical location. This written setting emphasizes the imagination process which holds a higher level of importance than physical characteristics. (Schau & Gilly 2003, p. 385). In this way, ‘…communicators may exploit the capabilities of text-based, non-visual interaction to form levels of affinity...’ (Walther et al. qtd. in Whitty 2007, p. 2).

Similar content strategies are used in both print and online personal advertisements. Montini and Ovrebo identified four main strategies implemented by ad placers, ‘up front,’(i.e. focused on who the authors are, what they want, and what they are and are not willing to accept in a partner), ‘con-avoidance,’ (i.e. aimed at preventing correspondence with individuals pursuing potentially negative motives (e.g. sexual exploiters and financial swindlers), ‘presentation of self as unique,’ (i.e. inclusion of statements regarding personal idiosyncrasies and appeals to shared cultural beliefs) and ‘appeal to fate’ (i.e. focused on potentially fateful encounters often presented in positive, romantic wording, and reference to astrological signs, and luck) (1990, p. 329-333).

The similarities of print and online published personal advertisements become even more apparent when their typical relationship formation sequence is compared with that of the
face-to-face relationship. In standard face-to-face interaction, the sequence for relationship building begins with, 1) a need for spatial proximity and 2) physical attraction between two individuals. The sequence moves forward to, 3) a search for common ground or similarities once communication has commenced, and later continues on to 4) higher levels of self-disclosure as a means of creating solidarity within the relationship. Correspondence based relationships, such as those formed through personal advertisements, follow an inverted sequence of these four criteria, tending to begin with 1) self-disclosure in an attempt 2) to find common ground and similarities, move on to 3) physical attractiveness as a point of importance, and later, depending on the depth of the relationship, a decision to meet in person may cause a need for 4) spatial proximity. Reasons for this development include the fact that textual publishing removes the need to be physically near others to communicate, something which is traditionally necessary to form bonds. Self presentation through word also reduces the importance of physical attractiveness as a primary means of attraction, allows for great anonymity, and demands high levels of self-disclosure as compared to face-to-face relationships. These variances on relationship development presented by the publication of personal ads, ‘represent a developmental and behavioural sequence far removed from customary methods of finding attraction and intimacy with another person’ (Merkle & Richardson 2000, p. 188-189).

If print and online personal advertisements are considered to be the same entity based on commonly shared characteristics, the question then arises as to why a shift in their publication to online contexts has taken place. Bolter and Grusin explain that, ‘every new medium diverges from, yet also reproduces, older media whereas old media refashions themselves to answer the challenges of new media.’ (Deuze 2006, p. 68). Applying this concept to the personal advertisement, one can argue that online publication has evolved from and reproduced traditional print media, and print type personal advertisements have refashioned themselves so as to become compatible with the Internet medium. In this way, the online personal advertisement can be seen as an evolution of, or extension on, its print publication counterpart.

There are many benefits of publishing digitally rather than in print. Thompson outlines six characteristics of digital publishing which have added value to their content over print publication: 1) Ease of access - information placed online is not hindered by spatial and temporal constraints of print texts and thus is accessible at any moment by anyone who has an Internet connection and permission of access, even by multiple users simultaneously, 2) Updatability - content can be updated quickly and frequently, 3) Scale - large quantities of
content may be included as physical space concerns are greatly diminished, 4) Searchability - large databases of information can be searched based on keywords, names, phrases, etc., 5) Intertextuality - hypertext links may be included in a text to connect readers to further information, and 6) Multimedia - a variety of different media can be incorporated into a written text (2005, p. 318-320).

Thompson’s six characteristics can similarly be related to the digitalization of the personal advertisement. Where in print publications, due to various constraints, ads contain little more than a short text, contact information, and perhaps an image, online venues generally allow participants to, ‘provide a photograph and answer an array of questions including geographical location, age, weight or body type, education level, income and other relevant demographics. In addition, most sites allow participants to write several paragraphs describing themselves.’ (Rosen et al. 2008, p. 2125-2126). These online advertisements are easy to access by other members of the given venue, update by users, able to include larger quantities of information (e.g. multiple paragraphs of personal description), can be searched for on the venue’s database, may contain links to other information (e.g. the author’s blog, social networking profile, etc.) and incorporate multimedia (e.g. personal images, video, etc.).

In addition to the value adding characteristics of digital publication a large impetus of this shift to computer mediated models of communication extends from an advancement in users’ technological skills and exposure to others’ attempts (Schau & Gilly 2003, p. 391), and the introduction and growing usage of the Internet to the general public particularly the advent of Web 2.0. Coined in 2004, Web 2.0 is a term which references the higher levels of user participation, interactivity, innovation, and content and data sharing of the modern Internet (Gorman 2009, p. 241-242).

Web 2.0 has increased the number of publication options available to authors aiming to place written personal advertisements beyond traditional print publications. The many venues available to individuals looking for a relationship online speak volumes of their demand and usage by those on the Internet. In finding love online venue options include, dating websites and services, social networking sites, blogs, email, instant messengers, video phone conference systems like Skype, bulletin boards, and photo sharing sites. The various meeting places available to Internet users looking to meet others are expansive to say the least. ‘Today an individual “…requires little more than a computer, a modem and an ability to make conversation…” to find the companion of one’s dreams.’ (Phlegar qtd. in Merkle & Richardson 2000, p. 188). Relationships can be formed via Internet with literally
anyone, anywhere, anytime within cyberspace.

One popular location for the publication of online personal advertisements is the dating website. Many sites, in addition to providing dating services, allow Internet users to expand their social networks to include communities which meet their personal preferences, and fulfil their sexual desires (Merkle & Richardson 2000, p. 188). The plethora of dating websites does not end with the mainstream as many websites are now catering to specific groups and interests, ‘to fulfil the needs of those with fetishes, pathological sexual paraphilies and unusual sexual preferences’ (Merkle & Richardson 2000, p. 190). The diminished need for spatial proximity provided by the Internet allows people with less common preferences and interests to connect with others similar to themselves around the globe.

Chat rooms, ‘synchronous conversations with more than one user that primarily involve text’ (Subrahmanyam & Greenfield 2008, p. 121) are another popular pick of the Internet often used to establish relationships in the written form. One study conducted on 12,000 utterances in an adolescent chat room found that partner requests resulted in approximately two requests per minute with only five percent being of a purely sexual nature (Subrahmanyam & Greenfield 2008, p. 129). Research does however show a growing use of chat rooms as a means of locating sexual partners, with younger users (18-24 years) more actively doing so than older age groupings (Hollander 2002, p. 318). In such a situation, levels of romantic relationship formation verses sexual connections are difficult to differentiate.

Even social networking sites, ‘online utilities that allow users to create profiles and form a network of friends’ (Subrahmanyam & Greenfield 2008, p. 121) have arisen as a medium for written relationship formation. While social networking sites are most commonly used as a means of communication to reinforce bonds with those met offline (Subrahmanyam & Greenfield 2008, p. 120) they also frequently serve as a reference tool for deciphering if a candidate is eligible for a relationship or not. One for example may meet someone offline briefly and later gain access to their profile on a networking site where they evaluate the information listed and use it to decide if the person is of romantic interest or not (Subrahmanyam & Greenfield 2008, p. 130), a process similar to scanning personal advertisements for eligible relationship candidates.

Since social networking sites often list a wide scope of users’ information including, education, interests, employment history, lists of friends, social groups associated with,
relationship status, photographs and even opinion blogs, a quick revision of one's online profile is often more informative about their character than speaking to them in person. This certainly was the case in one study done on 1,440 first year students at Michigan State University which found that in the screening of social network profiles, students reported feeling more attracted and similar to the information they had reviewed online than to the person they had met in real life (Subrahmanyam & Greenfield 2008, p. 130). People take advantage of this technology and strategy to guide their dating habits and selection.

Along with newer venues for personal relationship advertisement, a growing number of Internet users has broadened the pool of possible relationship candidates, and is expected to continue growing (Merkle & Richardson 2000, p. 187). As of January 2005 there were an estimated 836 dating websites, an increase of 37% from the previous year (Rosen et al. 2008, p. 2125). As a derivative of extended Internet use, overtime, online relationship formation has developed and grown in popularity. Contesting to this is the statistic that of ten million single Internet users who are actively searching for a relationship an estimated 74% have implemented the Internet in finding a partner (Rosen et al. 2008, p. 2125).

Though it is hard to pinpoint an explanation for the shift of relationship formation into online contexts, several theories are available. Merkle and Richardson offer one intriguing possibility, stating that, ‘As Western society continues to accelerate its pace, free time becomes more of a scarcity, and individuals strive to balance multiple roles and responsibilities, people are finding themselves thrust into a position where they must find non-conventional avenues for social interaction such as the Internet’ (2000, p. 191). Another view, as presented by Rhindgold, maintains that online communities are replacing public spaces like pubs and cafes as locations for social interaction (Wilson & Peterson 2002, p. 456). Deuze contends that, ‘...all aspects of everyday life in highly industrialized modern societies are to some extent influenced by, and implicated in, computerization.’ (Deuze 2006, p. 63). Subrahmanyam and Greenfield see the Internet in yet another light, as a virtual world that, ‘serves as a playing ground for developmental issues from the physical world, such as identity...’ (2008, p. 124). Regardless of the exact reasoning behind the phenomenon, the occurrence and growth of online publishing for romantic relationship formation within today’s society cannot be disputed.

The evolution of personal advertisements from print to online media demonstrates clearly Manovich’s concept of a new media revolution in which culture shifts to computer-mediated forms of production, distribution and communication. A trend in the use of the Internet for publication of personal relationship advertisements corresponds directly to
technological advancements in the field of publishing and the corresponding benefits they provide. The introduction of Web 2.0 has further advanced this new media revolution, calling Internet users to participate, share, and interact. In response to these drastic changes and technological advancements in publishing, growing populations have accepted online media as a means of expression in all areas of life, including the search for love.

References


Online publishing: (Anime) Fan fiction and identity

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Abstract
The internet is an ideal tool for exploring identity because it provides a unique space for self-expression. Many individuals express their identities creatively in ways that resonate with their interests. Fan fiction is created when fans use existing narratives and characters as the basis for their own texts, often extending plot, creating new characters, and developing relationships. This article focuses on Japanese animation (anime) fandom and fan fiction, and examines how writing and publishing fan fiction online affects the identity of a young woman, Tanaka Nanako. Research is sourced from books, articles, and case studies. This article argues that the case study demonstrates that publishing fan fiction to an interactive and receptive online fan community such as Fanfiction.net can result in the construction of an empowering discursive identity. This article expands online publishing research and highlights the benefits of fandom and fan fiction as instruments for the negotiation of identity.

Keywords
FANDOM • FAN FICTION • IDENTITY • ANIME • ONLINE PUBLISHING • ONLINE COMMUNITY

Identity, Adolescents, and the Internet
An examination of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries reveals these periods can be distinguished from others due to their unusual focus on identity. These are identities crafted around race, religion, gender, sexuality, and age; identities based on popular culture and its fluctuating representations (Black 2006). ‘Identity’ is a complex social construction produced and maintained by a subject’s position within their culture and society. Individuals therefore possess the capacity for multiple identities.

Adolescence is an important period in which individuals construct and develop their identities, negotiating the confusing feelings produced from straddling both childhood and adulthood (Thiel 2005). The confusion during this time allows for experimentation with different approaches towards communicating and conveying identity. Young women are particularly susceptible to identity crises during adolescence as a result of dominant patriarchal cultural and media discourses (Thiel 2005). Many young women seek alternative discourses from which they can construct alternative identities. Information and communication technology such as the internet provides these women accessible
spaces for the negotiation of their alternative identities.

It is important to investigate the ways in which identity construction has become increasingly complex. Online identity negotiation is often located directly through the discourse of online communication; that is, through language use and social networking (Thiel 2005). So do online interactions lead to the formation of a distinctive online identity that may or may not be different from an individual’s offline identity? This question assumes a ‘core’ identity that is at odds with this article’s definition of identity as multiple and fluid. Research has shown that rather than adopting a different identity online, it is sometimes the only place female adolescents feel comfortable expressing their ‘true’ identity (Thiel 2005, p. 185). One reason may be that female adolescents who are confused or negotiating identity do not feel pressured to conform to a single or particular identity on the internet. This article is specifically concerned with these adolescents who are also fans.

**Fandom, Fan Fiction, and Identity**

A ‘fan’ is an individual with an intense liking and enthusiasm for a certain thing, called a ‘fan-object’ (Napier 2007). This fan-object can be anything: books, television series, or stars. Fans are distinguishable from other consumers by their level of emotional investment with the fan-object (Sandvoss 2005). This article is concerned with a specific type of fan—media fans. Media fans construct cultural and social identity by ‘borrowing and inflecting mass culture images’ (Jenkins 1992, p. 23). While some media fans stay committed to a star, others use individual series as springboards into broader fan subcultures, called ‘fandoms’. A fandom’s existence represents a critique of conventional forms of consumer culture and provides a space where fans can discuss issues concerning sexuality, gender, racism, and forced conformity. Many fans feel greater freedom to express themselves and ask questions within fandoms, than outside them. Community is important: for many fans who have not received financial or cultural rewards in general society, praise from the fan community means a lot (Gregson 2005).

‘Fan reading’ is a social process during which individual fans’ interpretations are shaped and reinforced through ongoing discussion with other fans (Jenkins 1992). These discussions produce meanings that are more fully integrated with the fans’ lives. These ‘poached’ meanings shape how fans perceive future encounters with the fan-object (Jenkins 1992). There is empowerment in how fans assimilate fan-objects into their lives, and many fans share knowledge with others by creating fan-texts. Fan-texts include fan fiction, fan art, and fan videos, and are shaped by the social norms and aesthetic conventions of the
larger fan community. They define fan communities by indicating what fans do and do not like (Gregson 2005). Fan-texts are unlike those produced by mass media: they are for other fans with prior knowledge of the fan-object.

Media fandoms reflect the fans’ fascination with television series and their frustration over producers’ inability to tell the stories they want to see. Fan fiction emphasises this duality because fan authors rework or rewrite texts to their satisfaction. ‘Canon’ is events in the original text, which present the universe, setting, and characters; this differs from ‘fanon’, events created by the fan author (Busse & Hellekson 2006, p. 9). An understanding of canon is important for fan authors, as they are judged by other fans on how well they follow or deviate from it. Common ways in which media fans rewrite texts include expanding textual boundaries, reworking ideology, manipulating genres, and defamiliarising stock conventions (Jenkins 1992, pp. 162-176). Fan authors use their texts to engage other fans and these fans respond by delivering criticism or praise. Fan fiction therefore becomes a social activity, and functions as a form of personal expression and source of collective identity (what it ‘means’ to be a fan). This article will now briefly discuss how technological changes have affected fandoms and fan fiction.

**Online Fan Fiction and Identity**

The advent of the internet has been the most important technological advance for fandoms. Before this, most fandoms were restricted to face-to-face encounters in the form of fan clubs, fan conventions, and physical fanzines. Fandoms were ‘transmitted from person to person’ and geographical borders were often an issue (Busse & Hellekson 2006, p. 13). Increasing access to the internet from the mid 1990s changed many aspects of fandoms. Financial resources became less of a concern and geographic boundaries and time zones no longer limited interaction. Most importantly, it became easier to find information and other like-minded fans (Gregson 2005).

Fans moved to new spaces as these spaces became accessible, and this was in part the result of fans’ adaptative abilities (Busse & Hellekson 2006). The history of fan fiction clearly demonstrates that technology is complicit in the generation of fan texts. Fans with knowledge of how to edit, print, and sell fanzines learned how to use desktop publishing programs and other tools for online publishing. Fan texts became electronic. Online archives of fan fiction were created and carefully maintained. These archives offer megabytes of content for free and are easily accessible (Busse & Hellekson 2006).

Fandoms expanded into the blogosphere in the early 2000s and this had consequences
for fan-created space. While newsgroups and bulletin boards focused on a particular fan topic, fans that blog in places such as LiveJournal.com create journals with a mixture of ‘fannish’ (fandom-related) and ‘non-fannish’ (real-life) musings (Busse & Hellekson 2006, p. 12). Fan fiction may consequently become linked with the way a fan author’s identity is performed on LiveJournal. Some fans enjoy the individualised discourse of blogs like LiveJournal that permit ‘multifannish [multi-fandom] interaction’ and more personal conversation; others dislike it for the same reasons (Busse & Hellekson 2006, p. 15). In contrast, Fanfiction.net is designed to focus solely on fan fiction and fan criticism. The site allows fan authors to post fan fiction and provides designated spaces for peer reviews and collaborative writing. Fanfiction.net is a prime example of a website where traditional print-based language and post-typographic forms of text play important roles in performing identities (Black 2007). This article will now examine a more specific subsection of media fans that produce online fan fiction on sites like Fanfiction.net.

**Anime Fans and Identity**

Fans of Japanese animation, or ‘anime’, are committed media fans. One difference between anime fans and other media fans is that anime is a non-Western product, which signifies its non-mainstream status. Another key difference is that anime is a medium, not a particular television series, film, or genre. Within the anime fandom there are subgroups of fans attached to particular series, films, and directors, but the overarching loyalty of anime fans is to anime in general (Napier 2001). A survey of anime fans revealed that most had a preference for a variety of genres that ranged from romance and comedy to horror and the occult. When asked to name three favourite films or series, answers ‘cut across genres’ (Napier 2001, p. 245). This suggests the overall anime experience attracts fans as much as any particular series or film.

The most common reasons as to why anime fans find anime appealing are because of its ‘thematic complexity compared to other animation’ and the ‘imaginativeness of the narrative’ (Napier 2001, pp. 249-254). Many fans note that other animation, such as that of Disney, simplify storylines and are too predictable or familiar. These fans believe that anime portrays ‘more mature’ and appealing characters and stories in comparison with other animation (Napier 2001, p. 251). Anime is also known for its lack of compromise in making its narratives palatable for Western markets. This is true in regards to the many Japanese references within the texts, but also in regards to pacing, imagery, humour, narrative style, and the uncompromising portrayal of violent and sexual themes. Non-fans widely believe that anime’s popularity is primarily due to its distinctive Japanese qualities
and fans relishing this liberal attitude towards violent/erotic content (Napier 2001). While anime fans concede that anime is partly appealing for these reasons, they maintain these are not their main reasons for watching.

Intense identification between the fan and fan-object blurs the boundaries between the two, and fan-objects can become part of ‘the fan’s (sense of) self’ (Sandvoss 2005, p. 101). This correspondence is based on the process of self-reflection and is the active construction of identity and between fans and their fan-object (Sandvoss 2005). Napier (2007) found that the majority of anime fans she studied perceived characters as potential objects of identification. These characters served as extension of the fan’s self, and at other times were ‘idealized [sic] role models’ for the development of fans’ identities (Napier 2007, p. 179). It should be noted that a large number of fans identified with adolescent characters. Anime therefore appears to be particularly effective at portraying the confusion and conflicts of adolescent life. Anime fans demonstrate the flexibility of identity by the ease with which they identify with characters and willingly engage with foreign cultures. However, anime fans largely appear to be confident in who they are (Napier 2007). These fans are capable of embracing a variety of identifications and perceive fandoms and anime as ways to enhance their selves. With its rapid narrative shifts and transforming imagery, anime may be the perfect medium to reflect the fluidity of identity. Before turning to this line of thought, this article will discuss how technological changes have affected anime fandom and fan fiction.

**Online Anime Fan Fiction and Identity**

While most fandoms are large and their fans centrally located, the anime fandom is small and their fans are widely dispersed. The advent of the internet addressed this issue and made it possible for anime fans to become part of a bigger and supportive fan community (Gregson 2005). For this reason anime fandom was one of the earliest adopters of online communication. Online anime fan fiction is an example of the highly participatory and global nature of online fan culture (Black 2009). Anime fan authors often construct hybridised identities which are enacted through their texts: they use existing media characters to express interests, issues, and/or tensions sourced from their own lives. Many of the stories on Fanfiction.net deal with issues that are never raised in certain anime series, such as teen pregnancy, school violence, and suicide (Black 2005). Through these hybrid characters and texts, anime fan authors use literary skills to articulate and enact concerns from daily life. These fans make the narratives their own, infusing them with social or cultural themes and multiple literacies (Black 2006).
The majority of fan fiction published on Fanfiction.net is written in English, but analysis demonstrates that many anime fan authors on the site seem to display a ‘global disposition’ in their valuing of and interest in learning about different cultural and linguistic backgrounds (Black 2006, p. 172). The ‘unofficial curriculum’ of anime fan fiction does not centre on English-only or print-based forms and conventions of writing, but instead centres on a shared appreciation of multiple languages, cultural perspectives, and alternative forms of text (Black 2006, p. 172). The article will now focus on a subject from Black’s case studies (2005, 2006, 2007, 2009) in order to demonstrate the ways in which publishing anime fan fiction online affects one young woman’s negotiation and construction of identity. These case studies are specifically concerned with publishing fan fiction of the anime *Card Captor Sakura* to Fanfiction.net.

**Case Study: Tanaka Nanako**

Tanaka Nanako is a young Chinese anime fan. Her second language is English and she uses this to write her *Card Captor Sakura* fan fiction. Her extensive use of ‘Author’s Notes’ — a typical way for writers to address their audience before, during, and after stories — supports the idea of Fanfiction.net as a social and interactive writing space (Black 2006, p. 176). Nanako uses Author’s Notes for a variety of purposes: to introduce and orient readers to her texts, to thank reviewers for feedback, and to establish aspects of her identity. One of her Notes reads: 'Important note: English is my second language and I only spoken it for 2.5 years. So please excuse my grammar and spelling mistakes’ (Black 2007, p. 121). This reflects Nanako’s identity as a new learner of language.

Nanako often incorporates Japanese terms such as ‘konnichiwa minna-san [“good afternoon everyone”]’ in her texts and Author Notes (Black 2007, p. 121). This is a means of indexing her identity and ‘insider status’ as an Asian within the anime fandom (Black 2006, p. 176). Similarly, Nanako incorporates Mandarin Chinese in some of her texts to enhance the cultural authenticity of the Chinese characters Li Syaoran and Meiling. This provides a way for Nanako to represent her identity as a multilingual individual within the Card Captor Sakura fandom without being perceived as ‘tainting’ her fan fiction by crossing over from canon into fanon. One reader review, which Nanako receives from a native English speaker, expresses enjoyment at this multilingual interaction: ‘This is really interesting, the plot is thickening every minute! I’m learning so much chinese [sic] and japanese [sic] every time I read!’ (Black 2006, p. 179). These kinds of reader reviews support Nanako’s identity as a fan author and cultural insider, and allow for expression of other anime fans’ own identities and cultural perspectives.
Changes in Nanako’s fan fiction over time can be related to transforming patterns of participation and self-representation. During the years Nanako first began to write her stories, she was adjusting to life and school in a new country (Black 2006). Nanako’s texts at this time represented themes and issues from her adolescent life: her fiction was set at concerts, sleepovers, parties and classrooms. The texts dealt with concerns familiar to young women worldwide, such as popularity, friendship, first love, and the pressure to succeed academically (Black 2009). As more time passed and Nanako continued to receive and integrate feedback, there were shifts in her writing. It was not until Nanako received hundreds of encouraging reviews that she began to incorporate foreign terms into her fan fiction (Black 2006). As other fans began to respond positively, she began to present more of this aspect of herself to readers. Her fan fiction began to turn towards themes and topics she viewed as closely related to her identity as a young Asian female (Black 2009). Some texts centred on the role of women in Chinese and Japanese society; others were based on the history of relations between China and Japan (Black 2006).

Nanako’s case study (Black 2005, 2006, 2007, 2009) demonstrates that publishing fan fiction online over a number of years allows her to negotiate different aspects of her identity in different ways. Who, what, and how she chooses to represent herself changes throughout her fan fiction. These things are contingent on the feedback and positive interactions she has with other anime fans and fan fiction readers and writers. Through self-identification with the Card Captor Sakura series, its characters, and other fans of the anime, Nanako is able to explore her identity in ways that she may not have been able to if she had not written and published her anime fan fiction online.

Conclusions
This article discusses how writing and publishing (anime) fan fiction online, particularly to receptive and interactive fan communities, can affect the ways in which one young woman constructs and negotiates identity. Through her online anime fan fiction, Nanako was able to construct and negotiate a discursively powerful identity for herself as an anime fan, fan author, and Asian female. This article also demonstrates how fan authors and readers are able to co-design a social and learning-based space through interaction and negotiation, such as Fanfiction.net. Fan fiction sites have the potential to expand understandings of how digital and print-based literacies play active roles in designing and negotiating learning spaces and enacting identities as engaged and literate members of a fandom. This article therefore demonstrates the benefits of studying (anime) fandom and fan fiction as instruments for the negotiation of identity. Further research into this field is highly
recommended.

References


The practicality of magazine websites

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Abstract

‘Magazine websites are asserting their identities and creating friends and communities independent of their famous parents to become young stars of the screen’ (Taylor, p.24). It is fair to argue that unlike other areas within the publishing industry such as books, magazines have capitalised on the digital revolution and magazine publishers and designers see computers as an opportunity as opposed to a threat. The purpose of my article will be to analyse how the magazine website complements the magazine but also to delve deeply into the virtual community of the magazine website and, through the analysis of visual semiotics, study the relationship between the magazine website and the reader.

This paper is relevant to digital research and publishing, as it will discuss the evolution of magazines from print to digital. The article will analyse the relationship between the technological and visual formats in magazine websites and compare them to the cultural practises, such as the formation of a magazine community, that the website has created. This culmination of the cultural and the technological aspects will hopefully draw conclusions on the implied and actualised relationship with the reader that the magazine website has created. The implications for the article’s conclusions are that magazine websites will be more popular and accessible than the print magazine itself, due to the community formed around and throughout the website.

Keywords
VISUALS • SEMIOTICS • CULTURAL • TECHNOLOGICAL • SYMBIOTIC • RELATIONSHIP • OBJECTIVES

Magazine websites are asserting their identities and creating friends and communities independent of their famous parents to become young stars of the screen’ (Taylor, 2007 p.24). It is fair to argue that unlike other areas within the publishing industry such as books, magazines have capitalized on the digital revolution and magazine publishers and designers see computers as an opportunity as opposed to a threat. The Cosmopolitan magazine’s website (Cosmopolitan) and the New Musical Express magazine’s website (NME) will be closely analysed to exhibit how the magazine website complements the print magazine. A natural evolution from the print magazine’s community, is that of the virtual community of Cosmopolitan and NME where Francis (2005) states that ‘a particular identity for the institution and for users’ (p.28) is generated, illustrating the importance of a relationship between the magazine website and the viewer.
Unlike print, the magazine website is a culmination of technological and visual formats that create cultural practices, such as the formation of an online chat forum, like the ‘Cosmolicious’ message board where members can talk about a variety of issues from men to fashion in Cosmopolitan. Although the magazine website has many advantages over the print version such as immediacy of content, and the fact that they are updated sometimes numerous times a day, they:

...Provide news, exclusive features, longer versions of articles which have appeared in the printed magazine, a picture gallery, searchable diary dates, reader contribution options, a member’s portfolio facility and online shopping featuring exclusive online offers... (Ingham & Weedon 2008, p.209)

It must be noted that the magazine website has not had to ‘work’ as hard as the print version in getting reader's attention as the print magazine has already done that for them. Ingham & Weedon (2008), affirm that the magazine website ‘has not had to invest in advertising to secure readers, although it has been the subject of cross-promotion within the printed magazine’ (p.209). In essence, the magazine website could be described as ‘a natural extension of the magazine’ (Taylor 2007, p.26) and with their extreme interactive natures, ‘a great editorial and marketing tool’ (Taylor 2007, p.26) that promotes the brand. Hence it is no surprise that ‘publishing as a whole has embraced the online magazine format with considerable success.’ (Inghan & Weedon 2008, p.206) As magazine publishers approach the web content as it’s own entity and rather than competitive to print, complementary, thus a ‘symbiotic relationship has been created and it’s to the benefit of all – reader, publisher and advertiser.’ (Taylor 2007, p.24) It must be noted that both print and online versions of the magazine have different objectives. The print magazine’s goal is to create something permanent and beautiful for the reader, that they can hold, collect and rip out pages if need be. Evidence of this can be seen through NME’s poster section in the print magazine where beautiful high-quality photographs of musicians are placed throughout the magazine. The magazine website however, is updated constantly, a source for extra information, interactivity and a place where readers can come together and form a community based around the magazine. Furthermore this growth away from the print version is functional in design as opposed to stylistic, although publishing houses are still intent on representing the brand whilst acknowledging, ‘the different objectives of the two different products – print and screen’ (Taylor 2007, p.27).

Cosmopolitan’s website is highly visual and targets the young women demographic
whilst NME’s website is targeted towards a broader category of music lover’s and the site’s use of many multimedia tools is evident of this. Both sites are extremely different in layout, structure and their use of visual and audio tools are evidence of the magazine’s use ‘of the visual genre of the web site to explore contemporary visuality’ (Francis 2005, p.28). Thus it is Cranny-Francis’s theory that ‘deals with the ways that visuals operate to produce meaning – or potential meanings – in multimedia’ (2005, p.27) that will be applied to Cosmopolitan and NME, to study the logistics of the relationship with their viewers through the analysis of visual semiotics.

Cosmopolitan uses striking visuals to gain viewer’s attention and emphasise that the website is an extension of the Cosmo brand. The strong, bold font that is used on the magazine cover is used on the website in large, white letters, made to stand out by being positioned on a hot pink background. So whilst the bold font is representative of the Cosmo brand, immediately signifying the connection to the magazine, and luring magazine reader’s in, the predominantly hot pink background serves a symbiotic function as well. By having this background colour dominate the website, Cosmopolitan is embodying the bold and bright females that there brand is about. The colour pink is there to symbolise women and the bright, hot tone of the colour not only invites viewers in, but also represents young, upbeat and inspiring females. So whilst the magazine’s type font was used throughout the website to acknowledge the brand and get reader’s attention, the hot pink background is aimed at a wider audience, with the intention of attracting more ‘fun, fearless females’ (Hearst Communication 2010, home page, para.4) that had not necessarily been familiar with or read Cosmopolitan magazine. Cranny-Francis (2005) argues that visuals carry ‘meanings that could only have been laboriously explained verbally’ (p.27). Thus the combination of Cosmo font and the hot pink background goes beyond the decorative to contain ‘layers of meanings about gendering’ (Cranny-Francis 2005, p.27) and who the publishers want the Cosmo reader to be.

Like Cosmopolitan, NME uses the same font for its title that is used on the cover of the print magazine, emphasising consistency of branding. Unlike Cosmopolitan however, NME is targeting a much broader category of viewers, and the configuration of visuals and multi-media tools are a reflection of this. The first noticeable element used on NME is the music playing in the background, giving an auditory sign of what this website is about. On the top right hand corner is the symbol of sound waves that are moving up and down, not
only signifying the NME radio, but the constant influx of music onto the site. Below the NME radio symbol is the ‘video box’, which features ‘music videos, interviews and more’ (IPC Media 2010, home page, para. 2). There are four featured videos on the homepage with large play button symbols placed on top of these videos. The prominence of these play buttons further heighten the interactive nature of music on NME for its viewer’s, as it symbolises the act of pressing play, reminiscent of a CD player, or a television remote.

...A visual text is also not removed from the everyday; its significance is understood when it is positioned within the everyday; and it thereby becomes a part of knowledge production, individually and socially... (Cranny-Francis 2005, p.38)

The act of pressing play is also literally represented, as when the button is clicked, the featured video begins. Cranny-Francis (2005) states ‘locating the meanings in a visual text involves more than reading images’ (p.35) and whilst NME uses an abundance of visual signs and symbols throughout the site, it is the ‘awareness of visual conventions — and of the meanings associated with those conventions,’ (Cranny-Francis 2005, p.35) that encapsulates the specific essence of NME and it’s highly connectable relationship with it’s users.

By having these radio waves and play icons dominating the site, NME have turned music into a visual form. These icons are a translation of play; a pragmatic indication on the interactive nature NME want to have with its users.

Both Cosmopolitan and NME are extremely organised in layout, with quick links for categories such as photo galleries, features and chat forums clearly displayed and easily accessible. Yet again emphasising the female-related nature of the site, all of the arrows pointing towards links on Cosmopolitan are bright pink. Once you have rolled over a link, such as ‘Celebs & Style’ (Hearst Communication 2010, home page, para.2) the font turns purple. Without actually reading any of the text, the vivacious colour scheme of Cosmopolitan is enough in itself to represent the intended audience of the site to young females only. These conclusions can be drawn as ‘knowledge is constructed when abstract ideas or concepts are placed within an understanding of the practice of everyday life,’ (Cranny-Francis 2005, p.37) and Cosmopolitan have used their visuals (particularly the colouring of the site) to connontate to viewer’s who they want their audience to be. NME on the other hand uses a very simple colour scheme of red, black and white, in font,
background and images. The use of these colours throughout is not only consistent but
gender neutral and not as obtrusive as Cosmopolitan, however it is more fitting to NME’s
‘personality.’ The colours and layout of NME make it easy to navigate for virtually anyone,
as it presents itself as a more serious and informative site, than the over the top, fun and
bright Cosmopolitan.

One of the advantages of the magazine website is that it is constantly updated as there
is a ‘commercially driven need to continuously move forward’ (Ingham & Weedon 2008,
p.217). Whilst NME and Cosmopolitan use very different virtual signs and symbols to gain
reader’s attention, they are both very successful in using these design elements to navigate
the reader towards the community of the brand, affirming McLuhan’s (1964) statement
that ‘the medium is the message’ (p.487). The magazine website being the medium in
talking, has created virtual communities, through it’s use of differing visuals and audio
tools, unlike any affinity created by the print magazine itself.

The highly female symbolic visuals of Cosmopolitan have resulted in the creation of a
very specific online community of females researching, reading and talking about issues
from hair and beauty to relationship and sex advice on Cosmopolitan. On the website
members receive the weekly Cosmo newsletter, they can submit questions and chat in the
forums as well as participate in the ‘Quizzes & Games’ (Hearst Communication 2010, home
page, para. 2) section the site offers. An example of one of the games on offer is that an
individual can put an image of her or her friends onto an online template of Cosmopolitan
magazine. ‘If you’ve ever dreamed of being on the cover of Cosmo, then here’s your chance!
Upload your photo, write your own coverlines, and viola!’ (Hearst Communication 2010,
quizzes & games link, para.3) This example of a game shows the intensely interactive
nature of the magazine website, allowing the women on Cosmopolitan to form an online
community, specific to their wants, needs and interests. Magazines realise that ‘articles
and images which have been curtailed by the dimensions and advertising compression
demanded within the print version, are allowed free rein within the online version.’
studies have shown that when reading magazines, it is important for ‘women to be part
of the community of readers, as letter pages and personal stories engage them in social
experience.’ (p.206) Whilst the readers value the feedback elements of the magazine, the
magazine website provides much more space and choice in this department, creating a
much wider and interested readership. ‘The reader has the choice, the opportunity and the freedom to make the selection online of what they read and when – they dictate’ (Ingham & Weedon, p.217).

It is the capacities of such digital media, that can work with multi-modal material, that defines the difference in relationship between the reader and print magazine and the reader and the magazine website. Thompson (2005) affirms this, stating, ‘more generally, electronic communication has increasingly become the central medium through which publishers interact with their...actual and potential customer base’ (p.315). In 2008 Cosmopolitan was re-launched with ‘a host of new features, including online video service Cosmo TV, with the aim of tripling visitor numbers within a year’ (Guardian News and Media Limited 2010, para.1). Like they anticipated, within a year, The Guardian (2010) stated that users went from 176,000 to 500,000. It is no coincidence then, that when more videos, quizzes and audio, visual and digital technologies got applied to Cosmopolitan, that users became more in quantity and involvement, proving that the magazine website uses its stylistic and functional elements to create an interaction with its readers, unsurpassed to the print version. Taylor (2007) highlight’s the importance of this interaction by declaring that ‘all that spiked copy and reader rants that never make it to print, are up there on the web, easy to file and easy to access, making reality screen stars of us all’ (p.27).

The relationship NME users have with the site is yet again entirely different than the relationship they would have with the magazine, due to the almost overwhelming amount of multi-modal tools available for the reader to use. Unlike Cosmopolitan, the small, plain black font used throughout the site is simple, easy to read and exudes a serious and informative tone as it is there for the reader to navigate through and absorb the information they want to know. By placing this font on a spacious white background the visuals of NME are allowing the reader to sift through various amounts of information, making the site appear less crowded. However this is contrasted heavily by the videos, moving play icons and advertisements, not only visually signifying music and video but automatically signifying to them that music is simply not read about, it is listened to and watched to, and NME offers all of this simultaneously. Quiggin (2006) states, ‘every new medium of communication creates new possibilities, which influence the kinds of messages that can be transmitted’ (p.487).
To conclude, it is a new form of communication with readers that magazine websites have created, as a result of the ‘internet rapidly establishing itself as a major communication network’ (Thompson 2005, p.309). Taylor (2007) states that magazine publishers are aware that ‘readers are visual’ (p.24) so by directing the magazine reader to the website, more opportunities for readers to feel visually stimulated are evident. NME and Cosmopolitan both have hyperlinks on their site’s to subscribe to the print magazine, as well as links to ‘Inside the new issue. On News stands now!’ (IPC Media 2010, home page, para.6). This form of cross-promotion demonstrates that value is still placed by publishers on both versions of the magazines, as despite the differences in form, ‘the online magazine can clearly be seen to have developed a life of its own’ (Ingham & Weedon 2008, p.209).

So whilst the purpose of this article was not to compare the print magazine to the online magazine, it is evident that through the ‘use of visual strategies’ (Cranny-Francis 2005, p.38) used in the magazine websites, an interactive community is created with its readers, one that would be impossible to replicate by the print version. It is the relationship between the technological and visual formats that have created the cultural practice of the interactive magazine community, highlighted through the acknowledgement of the differing objectives in each medium. Magazine websites offer immediacy, more content, involvement and choice to a much wider audience, making them ‘hugely popular, community led information providers that have their own identities and are not merely self-conscious add-ons of their glamorous parents’ (Taylor 2007, p.24). Furthermore, NME and Cosmopolitan, use differing web techniques to invite their readers in. In most cases the web design used is functional rather than beautiful, proving that magazine website’s have different objectives to their print titles. This acknowledgement of difference is what complements the targeted readership even more and creates a broader community than the print magazine’s readership.

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A Cultural Historical Approach to Virtual Networking

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Abstract

The essay attempts to examine the digital media revolution through a cultural-historical lense, examining experimental projects of artistic communities from the United States, Canada and Germany between the 1950’s and 1970’s. These projects demonstrate a shift in the cultural imagination of society of the time, with an emphasis on networking, community formation and inclusive art practices. Such projects foreshadow current user principles of online, digital media.

Keywords

CULTURE AND TECHNOLOGY • ART • MAIL ART • PERIODICALS • MAGAZINES • NETWORK
CULTURE • VIRTUAL COMMUNITY • GLOBALISATION

Discussion of the uses of digital media typically focuses on its function as a tool and the subsequent development of practices and norms associated with the Internet as a virtual, disembodied, decentralized realm of communication and information. This familiar narrative is continually applied to the same topics of discussion; social media, political media and online journalism. While these perspectives are important specific consideration of cultural practices and the dissemination of cultural information concerning art and design both online and offline seems to have been neglected by such analysis.

The exchange and interplay between culture and technology is a complex relationship that is continually evolving. Firstly, it is important to consider what is meant by culture in this essay. This essay is concerned with the subjective interests of communities in Western culture concerning art, design, fashion, photography, music and architecture that produce symbolic meanings of society with a required audience for such meanings to take affect.

Technology has the power to produce a cultural mindset or cultural signifiers that construct meanings and experiences of technology in everyday and artistic settings (Saper, 2001; Neumark 2005; Gangadharan, 2009). Cultural developments in society are
reliant upon cultural imagination and individual subjectivities, while in turn cultural imagination and individual subjectivities are produced by these technologies (Neumark 2005:10). Counter culture and the cultural undercurrents of society are concerned with mainstream practices, links, interactions and experiences, while attempting to breathe life into an otherwise homogenized, mechanised and de-personalised society (Saper, 2001). As a result of a motivation for innovation, variation and change new ways to engage with information, discussion and user communities are developed.

On the cusp of globalisation, post World War II, a desire to absorb and interact with the culture of global communities became a social mindset. This was a significant change and a departure from the voyeuristic tendencies of previous generations and the end of an era of cultural exclusion, replaced by an inclusive art world and inclusive popular media. In a paper co-authored with Robert W. Taylor in 1968, titled ‘The Computer as a Communication Device,’ Licklider discusses the potential of networked computers to create ‘interactive communities of geographically separated people’ that furthermore ‘will be communities not of common location, but of common interest’ (as cited in Perkins, 2005).

Artistic communities have shown an independent motivation for promoting and extending their community bases, embracing technology available to them at the time. In many instances their networking projects have foreshadowed the ways in which online communities interact in contemporary society. Since the development of the Internet, globalization can now be considered a social and cultural condition, however a desire for connectivity and communication is evident in media and technology projects of smaller communities since the 1950’s. The following essay will consider art and creative culture and its relationship with media as a form of communication and community formation from the 1950’s until today.

Mail Art: Evidence Of The Beginnings Of Cultural Networking

The mail art movement was an innovative outgrowth of the downtown New York art scene of the 1950’s, pioneered by local artist Ray Johnson (Perkins, 2005; Cubitt, 2005; Gangadharan, 2009). Intrigued by collage and communication, Johnson embraced the
development of transport technology and the subsequent increased efficiency of the postal system. He compiled the contact details of artists, art historians, art connoisseurs, and other members of the downtown New York art scene and even celebrity figures, using the list as participants in a letter chain. The letter would be a collage made from everyday images cut from magazines, packaging, brochures, newspapers and advertisements, which he would invite the recipient to add to.

By the early 1970s Johnson’s utilisation of the postal system in the creation of his own network of correspondents had expanded far beyond him into an independent and self-sustaining network. Between 1970 and 1980 the number of exhibitions increased from two to 425, with one art show attracting as many as 20,000 contributions from Iceland, New Zealand, Poland, South Africa, Venezuela and more (as cited in Gangadharan, 2005). Johnson did not believe in the commoditisation of art and wanted to avoid formal presentations of art, like museums and art galleries (Gangadharan, 2009). The Internet is embraced in contemporary society in the same way, providing an equal space and free access to communication, connection and a chance to showcase whatever you desire to share.

Mail art operated as a social construction bringing together a community of people with shared interests and a desire for connection, independent of political and economic motivations. To both casual and serious observers this art draws obvious similarities to the way society engages with online network culture.

The Restructuring Of Magazines And Periodicals
Periodicals and magazines have played an important role in voicing the interests, ideals and concerns of social niches. In the past such publications have been a way for audiences with specified interests to foster these interests as a collective. In creative industries of art and design where questions of taste are individual and subjective, magazines have played an important role in developing and uniting like-minded persons and providing a voice for artistic communities.
Magazines are often neglected for their cultural significance as a prolific medium for communication. They are vectors of pleasure, they encourage the acquisition of knowledge, they may play an important role in the formation of identity, they are open to resistant readings, they easily encompass and incorporate flexible and varying conditions of consumption and production, and they form a readily accessible community focus (Holmes, 2008). Innovative magazines that have diverged from the traditional role of the coupling of imagery and text and consumer marketing, to promote cultural trends and social communities in which the publication becomes a work of art itself with special consideration for paper stock, layout, imagery and typography – the work’s print marking the final stage in the conceptual and artistic process.

Two examples of such publications, *Omnibus News* and *FILE* magazine, have used the mainstream media format of a magazine to produce an artwork in itself and experiment with the social processes of disseminating information. In 1969 three aspiring underground magazine publishers (Thomas Niggl, Christian d’Orville, and Heimrad Prem) in Munich proposed an invitation to the community to submit a contribution (illustration, writing, poetry, photography) to their publication, titled *Omnibus News*. Each contributor was responsible for the cost of generating their submission and in return they were given ten copies of the final product to sell or give away. Published in 1969, the publication was 200-pages long, a substantial publication (Perkins, 2005). *Omnibus News* restructured the formal idea of a periodical or magazine, inverting the traditional relationship of the editor and contributor. The purpose of the project was to ensure distribution by creating multiple distribution sources. The magazine promoted concepts of networking, inclusion, communication and media, that are still relevant and operational in digital media.

Another example of the use of magazines to promote and extend audiences is the 1971 publication titled *FILE* magazine. The magazine began as a product of an art collective called General Idea, developed as a soundboard for artistic communities in Canada (Gangadharan, 2009), continuing the project of mail art. *FILE* promoted the relational aesthetic by regularly compiling and publishing an artist’s directory and request list for artworks to which readers had public access, to connect and interact with others.
In the directory established figures stood alongside the hundreds of other unknown and less well known (Gangadharan, 2009). *FILE* facilitated the artist’s contact with like-minded individuals, and actively reinforced the values and meanings of networking in an information and communication enriched society. The magazine ironically embraced a mass-media trope. Each issue still contained conventional mainstream magazine sections: letter to the editor, editorials, book reviews, brief updates on art events, profiles, features and advertisements. It also fashioned a space for personalized activity and allowed individuals the freedom to participate and interact on their own terms, collaborating rather than competing (Gangadharan, 2009). As Ascott has noted from the 1950's onwards society began to reject the idea of the artist as genius and an individual, which had existed in artist communities up until then (Ascott, 1994 as cited in Gangadharan, 2009). Modernism and the subsequent processes of globalisation and cross-cultural development placed an emphasis on the formation of communities and the exchange of information.

Despite operating twenty years before the advent of the Internet, both *FILE* magazine and *Omnibus News* indicate a desire to promote and extend information receivership with an emphasis on networking and community. Artistic communities are motivated by a desire to break free from homogenized social practices. Such motivation inspires a desire to change and invert the roles of media usage. Beuy’s proposes an expanded role for art, which is reflected by the models of participation, egalitarianism and community that *FILE* magazine and *Omnibus News* desired and promoted;

‘Only art is capable of dismantling the repressive effects of a senile social system… to dismantle in order to build a social organism as a work of art. The most modern art discipline – Social Sculpture/ Social Architecture – will only reach fruition when every living person becomes a creator, a sculptor or architect of the social organism.’

(Beuys 1979, as cited in Perkins, 2005)

The social climate of the 1960’s and 1970’s demonstrated a formation of the technological and conceptual foundations of what would become the Internet. The structure and operational methods of these publications demonstrated a reformulation of artistic practice and media usage, emphasising a desire to create new structures capable of maintaining the development of communication and networking culture (Perkins, 2005).
Creative Cultural Networking And The Internet

Online publishing provides endless opportunities for networking, information sharing and community formation projects. The development of digital media has impacted the creative information economy on multiple levels. Blogs are publications independent of online journalism that promote creative interests and ideas, forming virtual communities of like-minded persons, with options for personal submissions, links to similar sites and forums for comment. They provide instant gratifying hits of information in short bursts, with a variety of hyperlinked images and small text posts, opportunities for submissions and forums for comment. The appeal of the blog format allows a mix of multimedia posts, which is a particularly attractive feature for those who are publishing information with a visual focus.

The development of this form of online publishing is specifically designed to create equal opportunities among users, infinite distribution possibilities while encouraging a community focus – satisfying all the motivations of the past creative networking projects of mail art, FILE magazine and Omnibus News. They provide new and interesting ways of accessing and absorbing information that have expanded the world of cultural media. Even a blog format has become mainstream and current projects are being developed to increase effectiveness of community formation and networking art.

The NOTCOT website began as a blog and has now been reworked to further emphasise community and information sharing principles. NOTCOT.com was created by Jean Aw. Followed by its success Jean Aw and Daniel Frisinger developed NOTCOT.org – a website featuring user submitted images that are hyperlinked to the website associated with the photo, with over five million page views per month (NOTCOT.com/about). The site provides a network of community contributed design-related sites. The information is submitted by users who register with the site, they supply an image and a link to further information about the related image. The post is submitted to be selected and edited by NOTCOT editorial team and issued periodically appearing on the screen in a grid format with the most recently submitted link in the top left hand corner. Not all links are submitted.

The work of design-related blogs is entirely remediated information from a variety of
sources. This idea of sampling information from other sources to be presented as one on-going publication, edited by the blogger is referred to as bricolage. NOTCOT.org is an example of bricolage outlined by Deuze as “the remixing, reconstructing, and reusing of separate artefacts, actions, ideas, signs, symbols and styles in order to create new insights or meanings (Deuze, 2006). It is a way to share information that exists in offline cultural communities.

NOTCOT.org is an example of a reworking of an existing media format by design and art orientated creators to push the boundaries of information presentation and absorption - it is the format and presentation selected that is of value in its originality. Jean Aw, the sites creator, graduated with a Master degree in user experience design. She explains the platform as “addictive,” conditioning viewers to click on the hyperlinked images, which open a new window to another site leaving the NOTCOT.org window as the locus of browsing activity (Aw, 2010). For online publications like blogs and information sharing websites originality lies in the method of bricolage.

The blogging platform Tumblr allows for individual customisation of the page, including fonts, colour, graphics, embedded song files and options to change the sites html code for those with the know-how. They also allow for comments and for users to provide links to allow blogs of interest to them. Tumblr emphasises and encourages the formation of communities with opportunities to ‘follow’ or subscribe to blogs of interest to viewer. For example Tumblr is a blogging platform that allows users to follower other blog publishers with a link on the top right hand corner of each Tumblr blog. Users are able to list the blogs that they follow on their page so that site visitors may be connected with other blogs of a similar genre.

As an informational system that is in constant flux, the online information economy does provide access to networking and community formations that have been desired by artistic and creative communities since the processes of globalization infiltrated society post-WWII. Links enable users to connect texts and visuals to the contextual space in which they are embedded, and to visualise a network of references that would normally be separated by physical space (Paul, 2008). Within this network, information is subject to
infinite reusage, recycling, reworking and retextualising, which are some of the distinctive processes of digital media.

The examples of the mail art movement, Omnibus News and FILE magazine indicate a shift in social and cultural practices from the 1950’s. The examples of this essay outline not only some of the connections to be made with our technological history, but also the cultural influences that point to a complex relationship between technology and social change. Digital media theorists indicate a new social climate of infinite and intricate networks, connected and facilitated by media, however our technological, cultural and social history indicates that the operational and philosophical principles of digital media have existed in culture before these newer, refined technologies succeeded in providing a stable outlet to manifest such ideals. Such a perspective sheds new light on the symbiotic relationship of society and technology. A cultural-historical approach to studying technology illuminates how artistic movements can manifest social practices that technology instantiates.
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How social media is changing public relation practices

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Abstract

With the rise of social networking and microblogging tools, public relation practitioners are given new opportunities to pursue the form of relationships between their organization and the publics that had long been favored by public relation scholars: a balanced relationship based on two-way symmetrical communication identified by Kent and Taylor (1998) as a dialogic relationship. Their theory-based, strategic framework for dialogic relationships is the central theory in this article. The framework encompasses five features seen to be vital to create a dialog between the organization and the public: mutuality, propinquity, empathy, risk and commitment.

The article examines Ford Motor Company’s social media strategy in the light of the aforementioned framework by Kent and Taylor with the help of a prominent case study. Ford’s efforts show that organizations that make a genuine effort to involve all of the five aforementioned features when engaging in online conversations with their publics, have a real chance to form, and benefit from dialogic relationships.

Keywords
PUBLIC RELATIONS • SOCIAL MEDIA • DIALOGIC RELATIONSHIP • FORD • RANGERSTATION

As Scott Monty, Ford Motor Company’s Head of Social Media, was logging into his Twitter account early in the morning on 10 December 2008, he was alarmed to discover a number of comments criticizing Ford for allegedly trying to shut down a fan website, TheRangerStation.com. Ford’s legal department seemed to have sent a letter to Jim Oakes, the owner of the website, to surrender the site’s URL and pay a fine of US $5,000 (For Immediate Release Interview 2008). Not knowing what to do, Jim Oakes had posted his dilemma to the The Ranger Stations’ user forums. Within minutes, angry comments started to come in and the message that Ford was shutting down a dedicated fan website was spread though other fan sites and Twitter (Ploof 2008).

Scott Monty immediately replied to the angry Twitter messages, saying he was looking into the matter. He investigated the case and within hours he reported that Ford’s lawyers believed the site was selling counterfeit goods. He persuaded Ford’s lawyers to withdraw the shutdown request if the site would halt the sales. By the end of the day, he could announce via Twitter that the dispute had been resolved (Ploof 2008).
This case study impressively shows what the new PR world looks like for global corporations such as Ford. Within hours a crisis can develop and spread through the blogosphere and social networks such as Twitter and harm a company’s reputation. However, as social media allows for two-way communication, the same tools and mechanisms can also be utilized to resolve the crisis quickly.

For more than ten years, public relations scholars have been recognizing and pointing out the dialogic power of the Internet for their profession. The Internet could finally offer the tools to pursue the idealized form of dialogic organizational-public relationships (Kent & Taylor 1998; Kent & Taylor 2002; Seltzer & Mitrook 2007; Bruning, Dials & Shirka 2008; McAllister-Spooner 2009). Until recently however, the reality showed a different picture of static, non-interactive corporate websites that have been used rather for impression management than for full two-way communication (Connolly-Ahern & Broadway 2007).

The development, growth and wide acceptance of social media however changed this picture. Since social networking and microblogging sites, such as Facebook, Youtube and Twitter, began allowing organizations to create profiles and become active members, organizations have utilized these tools to launch products and strengthen their existing brands (Waters et al. 2009).

However, for Kent and Taylor (1998) the real power of the World Wide Web is its potential to build effective organizational-public relationships. Their theory-based, strategic framework for dialogic relationships is the starting point for this article that aims to explain how interactive social media tools, not static websites, have the potential to foster a balanced relationship between organizations and their stakeholders.

Kent and Taylor’s (1998), concept of dialogic communication was largely based on Grunig and Hunt’s (1984) four models of public relations - press agentry, public information, two-way asymmetrical and two-way symmetrical communication. Out of these four, two-way symmetrical communication was the most desirable model (Grunig 1992). The relationship between two-way symmetrical and dialogic communication can be seen as one of process and product: dialogic communication is the product, a particular type of relational interaction, that is established through two-way symmetrical communication structures, processes and rules (Kent & Taylor 1998, p. 3).

Dialogic communication consequently refers to any negotiated exchange of ideas and opinions and is guided by the principle to reach mutually satisfying positions and the principle of intersubjectivity (Kent & Taylor 1998, p. 5).
To utilize the power of the Internet for dialogic communication, Taylor and Kent (1998) then presented five principles of content and website design that every corporate website should embody. The principles include 1) dialogic or feedback loops to allow the publics to query organizations and organizations to respond to questions, concerns and problems, 2) the usefulness of information, 3) the generation of return visits through repeatedly updated information, 4) the intuitiveness or ease of the interface and 5) the rule of conservation of visitors.

These five principles incorporated the status quo of good web design but Kent and Taylor (2002) felt the need to clarify the concept of dialog in public relations and provided five features that were recommended to be implemented by any organizations seeking to commit in dialogic communication.

**Feature One: Mutuality**

Mutuality refers to an acknowledgment that organizations and publics are inextricably tied together. It implies collaboration in seeking to understand the position of others and how they reached those position and the spirit of mutual equality.

**Feature Two: Propinquity**

Dialogic propinquity means that publics are consulted in matters that influence them and are able to articulate their demands to organizations. The feature of propinquity includes the immediacy of presence, which means that parties involved are communicating about issues in the present rather than after they have been solved, a temporal flow that focuses on constructing a future for participants that is both equitable and acceptable, and real engagement.

**Feature Three: Empathy**

Empathy refers to the atmosphere of support and trust that must exist if dialogue is to succeed. Empathy involves the notion of supportiveness which means that participation is not only encouraged but facilitated though making conversations easily accessible. Moreover empathy implies communal orientation and confirmation which refers to acknowledging the voice of the other in spite of one’s ability to ignore it.

**Feature Four: Risk**

Implied in all organizational and interpersonal relationships is some risk. It includes the risks of vulnerability, unanticipated consequences and the recognition of strange otherness
which means the unrestricted acceptance of the individuality of one’s dialog partner.

**Feature Five: Commitment**

Commitment is the extent to which an organization gives itself over to dialogue, interpretation and understanding in its communications with stakeholders. Commitment presupposes genuineness, commitment to conversation and commitment to interpretation.

As the features illustrate, dialogue is not an easy product of communication and relationships. While it is clear that dialogue is a highly desired outcome of public relations communication, it also needs to be pragmatic and accessible to the people who practice it. Dialogue means a greater commitment of resources on the part of the organization to train its PR practitioners to communicate dialogically (Kent & Taylor 2002, p. 10).

Many scholars have called for specifically trained public relations personnel to initiate, author, and maintain dialogue on the internet (Galloway 2005; Gonzalez-Herrero & Ruiz de Valbuena 2006; Seltzer & Mitrook 2007). The organizational communicator needs to be independent enough to maintain a distinctive, individual voice, yet must also be trusted not to go off message or post items that could prove to be embarrassing to the organization (Seltzer & Mitrook 2007, p.3).

Galloway (2005, p. 1) even calls for organizational communicators to develop a new form of cultural literacy, implying that the online communications context demands use of a new language and knowledge of the protocols of the environment. These are not technical protocols so much as the conventions of:

- swift, abbreviated, direct responses that capture communicative moments rather than extended discussion; moments often spontaneous rather than structured, used more to co-ordinate and sustain social relationships, and to meet emotional needs such as a feeling of belonging rather than simply to achieve task-related outcomes (Galloway 2005, p. 2).

Another element that is often regarded as a requirement for dialogue, trust, collaboration, insight and accountability within the public relation practice is the notion of transparency (Christensen & Langer 2006). Following recent corporate public relation crises, the public has called for increased openness and transparency from organizations (Waters et al. 2009, p. 2). Kelleher (2006) encouraged practitioners to use the Internet and social networking sites to advocate for their organizations and causes; however, the practitioners should be transparent in their online communication activities.
Scott Monty, Head of Social Media at Ford Motor Company, is one of these specifically trained public relations practitioners who is versed in two-way symmetrical communication skills, and is knowledgeable of the organization and its publics and who values transparency.

Ford began to integrate social media into their Communications business model in 2007 by engaging an agency to help develop a social media strategy (Fox & Scott 2008). As an additional asset, Scott Monty, who formerly worked for an advisory firm specializing in social media, was hired in July 2008 (Kiley 2009).

Part of Ford’s new social media strategy was to set content free (Fox & Scott 2008). In the past, like many companies, Ford had treated images, video and even press releases as valuable assets that needed to be carefully controlled for the exclusive use of select influential automotive and major mainstream media journalists, all of whom had to register to get access to a password-protected media site.

Under the new strategy, Ford began publishing Social Media Press Releases (SMPR), with all photo and video content on Flickr and Youtube respectively, leveraging their native sharing properties and making all content digitally available to everyone under the Creative Commons license (ford.digitalsnippets.com 2010).

Ford’s social media strategy involves actively engaging in the social web in order to join the conversation consumers are having. However, Ford acknowledges its responsibility to be open and transparent about their engagement by abiding to the Word of Mouth Marketing Association’s Code of Ethics (Ford 2009).

Ford’s efforts in engaging in the social web can be illustrated and further examined through analyzing the aforementioned Ranger Station case study under the theory-based, strategic framework for dialogic relationships described earlier in this chapter. Scott Monty is actively using Twitter to establish a dialog with Ford’s stakeholders and implement the above-mentioned features developed by Taylor & Kent (2002).

The following messages were sent by Scott Monty from his Twitter account and document his participation in the Ranger Station case study.

**Feature One: Mutuality**

As mutuality is described as maintaining relationships of equality and collaboration, it was important for Scott Monty to let the enraged Twitter community know that he was working to solve the issue and that he too, did not agree on the actions of Ford’s legal department.
10:54 a.m. @pblackshaw I was made aware of it this morning and I’m tracking down our trademark counsel to weigh in on it. Not good (Monty 2008)

10:55 a.m. @badgergraveling I’m on it. Getting our legal team’s perspective and trying to stop a PR nightmare(Monty 2008).

11:23 a.m. @ContractorTalk I’m in discussions with our Chief Trademark Counsel about it right now. I’m none too pleased. #ford (Monty 2008).

**Feature Two: Propinquity**

As propinquity involves immediacy of presence, temporal flow and engagement, Scott Monty delivers an excellent example in his Twitter conversation. Not only was he constantly delivering updates about the current status of the issue, he also made clear that he was dedicated to find a solution that would satisfy all parties involved. Moreover, his dialog with the legal department and personalized answers to people addressing him in their tweets highlighted his engagement.

**Feature Three: Empathy**

As empathy refers to the atmosphere of support and trust that must exist if dialogue is to succeed, Scott Monty delivered all of this through his constant presence on Twitter. He tried to mediate between Ford’s position and the enraged Twitter community.

4:55 p.m. @KrisColvin We’re not shutting the site down; we’re asking that they stop selling counterfeit material. #ford (Monty 2008).

Furthermore, once Scott Monty found out what the issue was actually about, he could ask for a favor in return: to retweet Ford’s official response.

4:56 p.m. Here is Ford’s official response to the fansite cease & desist debacle http://is.gd/b3qd #ford

Please retweet (Monty 2008).

**Feature Four: Risk**

Trying to solve the issue and communicate it publicly definitely involved some risk for Scott Monty. As described by Taylor & Kent (2002), dialogic communication is unrehearsed and spontaneous and creates vulnerability and unanticipated consequences.

The conversation on Twitter could have gotten out of hand very easily as there were a number of critical tweets throughout the day that could have restarted the public outrage. Just as Ford started posting its official response online, another Twitter user wrote:

4:32 p.m. How do you repay your online evangelists? Well if you’re Ford Motor Company, you step on
Scott Monty however handled the situation professionally:

4:34 p.m. @BrettTrout Please correct that. We’ve since remedied it http://tinyurl.com/6b7njd (Monty 2008)

**Feature Five: Commitment**

Overall, the Ranger Station issue showed a high degree of commitment from Scott Monty. Not only was he trying to communicate Ford’s position on the issue, he actually tried to resolve the issue himself since he understood the importance and the negative consequences the issue would provoke.

He showed genuineness in admitting what an embarrassing PR scandal this issue would be, real commitment to conversation and interpretation by working on this issue and commenting on its status publicly.

**Conclusion**

As the Ranger Station case study highlights, social media has the potential to build real dialogic relationships between organizations and their stakeholders if used in a committed, genuine effort.

Social media should not just be seen as another media channel to promote a corporation’s products and services. Its real power lies in making stakeholders’ opinions visible and facilitating conversation.

As long as organizations make a genuine effort to involve all of the five aforementioned features when engaging in online conversations with their stakeholders, they have a real chance to form, and benefit from dialogic relationships.

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The 3D evolution after AVATAR: Welcome to 3D at homes

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Abstract
Recent technological advances of 3D TV services are close to deployment of the arrival of the 3D experience in the home. The large scale research on its challenges and opportunities are evaluated in this article. The purpose of this paper is to examine the 3D movie phenomenon after the huge success of AVATAR and the media industry’s next step towards the standardization of 3D at home. This article examines current technological processes of the major home entertainment manufacturers for delivering 3D content at home. The primary sources that are used to investigate the 3D phenomenon and information about 3D technology are academic journals, film industry reports, film literature, technology literature and science magazines.

Keywords
AVATAR • 3D CONTENTS • DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY • THE FUTURE OF 3D • 3D HOME TECHNOLOGY

2009 was a turning point for the 3D content history with the success of AVATAR, which is the most ambitious 3D film ever released. This $237 million budget 3D film has not only attracted adult viewers to 3D screens, but has also given us a glimpse of 3D content’s bright future. The worldwide success of AVATAR has demonstrated that audience are willing to pay a premium for 3D experience and, in 2010, more than 24 3D movies are slated to take over the success of AVATAR. Moreover, with the convergence of the audiences’ desire for a new media experience and technological advances of home entertainment equipment, the arrival of the 3D experience in the home world is just around the corner. The evolution of stereoscopic 3D effects in feature animation extends its power to a more popular form of media. The media industries are exploring a way to deliver major events such as sports games or music concerts with 3D applications to fans. In addition, recent technological advances are close to the actual deployment of 3D TV services in homes. The purpose of this paper is to examine the 3D movie phenomenon after the huge success of AVATAR and 3D film industries’ next step for the standardization of 3D films in the theaters. With technical updates, films makers are also eager to access the new technologies to advance 3D experience at homes. As a result, I examine the current technological process of the major home entertainment equipment for delivering 3D content homes. The primary sources of this article are from academic journals, film industries’ reports, film literature, technology literature and other science magazines.
An increasing number of alternative 3D contents in theaters

12 feature films made in the 3D format were released in 2009 and more than 24 3D films are slated for release in 2010. The huge success of AVATAR last year resulted in a rapid increase of 3D screens in theaters; however, the fight for 3D screens in 2010 is still continuing due to increasing demands. An increasing number of alternative 3D contents have been being delivered in theaters after the positive result of Mozart’s Don Giovanni beamed in 3D in Paris. Moreover, the French Tennis Open final was delivered in more than 20 3D theaters in France and Spain, and music concerts and sports matches have also been shown in 3D theaters in the U.S. (Wolfwood, 2010). In this tendency, Sony announced that 10,000 digital projectors will be equipped in the theaters and 3,000 of these sites are expected to be 3D by 2012. Barco also announced that 10,000 screens would be equipped with 3D technology. These new projection systems will add to the number of screens needed for the increasing popularity of alternative 3D contents. Given the current state of technology and the maturity of the market place, the broadcasting industry expects that the public is able to access more international events such as World Cup or Olympic Games in their 3D multiplexes soon (Wolfwood, 2010).

3D home entertainment technologies and processes

With the growing success of 3D feature films in theaters, major home entertainment industries have been showing a keen interest in 3D home theater applications. Several major manufacturers have been developing 3D home theater entertainment solutions for several years. Panasonic displayed their 3D high definition home theatre with glasses to get the stereoscopic effect at Combined Exhibition of Advanced Technologies (Ceatec) in 2008. NEC and KDDI also showed a 3D image and 3D LCD display for mobile devices without 3D glasses (Ogg, 2009). At the Consumer Electronics Show (CES), Sony, Panasonic and Samsung all displayed new technologies to reduce the problems of the current anaglyph imaging technology such as image ghosting and viewing discomfort. Sony introduced a prototype that uses standard Real D polarized glasses. These special glasses are the dominant method for displaying 3D films in the theater, but were previously not possible with an LCD display (How 3D LCD Shutter Technology Works, 2010). Viewers have to be able to display alternating left-eye, right-eye images with opposing polarization to view the 3D effects. This is the most popular 3D cinema technology, but some sensitive users could feel nauseated or experience a headache as some may have experienced in a standard movie theater. Although there is controversy about practical use of this technology due to viewing discomfort, the 3D images in the Sony LCD are clear and sharp without image
ghosting (Verrier, 2009).

Panasonic and Samsung 3D plasma displays work with LCD shutter glasses technology. This technology uses special LCD shutter glasses, with each lens alternately darkened when the other lens is transparent. It works well with the new plasma and LCD displays with a minimum of a 120 Hz refresh rate (How 3D LCD Shutter Technology Works, 2010). The video action scenes appear to flow smoothly with no visible ghosting. Samsung has 3D DLP televisions in the marketplace today and Panasonic showed off their own products on the market for consumers as well. However, there are economic challenges because it is not possible to convert standard Blu-ray or DVD recordings to 3D since the process needs the original film recorded by 3D stereoscopic cameras. Relatively new technology for users of 3D features at home is a webcam with two lenses. The lenses mimic human sight by capturing the images and turning them into 3D footage. The webcam is accompanied with software to make it easier for home users to enjoy 3D movies on many different types of screens. American firm TD vision showed off various software codec and a prototype 3D camcorder that helps the software to turn footage into 3D movie. However, the webcam also needs the kind of old-school anaglyphic glasses with red and yellow lenses that offered a novelty 3D effect (Ogg, 2009). There are very hopeful home theater 3D technology demonstrations at the CES in Las Vegas every year. It seems that major home entertainment manufacturers have been serious about 3D home theater technologies and have tried to prevent 3D customers from format war issues as we all saw with Blu-ray versus HD DVD. Consequently, the challenges may be resolved in only matter of time as it is decided which company will settle the dust and attract 3D fans first.

Animation features might be the most significant genre of films that receive the benefits of computer generated images (CGI) technology and 3D effects. Since CGI technology is a major part of animation features, the additional cost of producing animation in 3D is relatively cheap. Jim Mainard, the chief technologist of Dream Works, estimates that the additional cost of producing 3D was 8.5% from 2007 to 2009, but the average earning per screen was 3 times that of 2D screens (Wolfwood, 2010). Furthermore, as animation in 3D depends heavily on CGI to create a three dimensional look, the images in 3D have more perceived depth than the images in 2D animation (Nailon, 2010). With the release of the majority of animation features on 3D screens young audience have been already loyal consumers of 3D content. Moreover, Disney said that they are producing more 3D animations than any other major production company and began this year with Disney’s A Christmas Carol, followed by Alice in Wonderland and Toy Story 3. (CES, 2010). In this tendency, the home
entertainment industry started to consider delivering children and family content in 3D as the new frontier. At the 2010 CES, major manufacturers such as Samsung, Sony and Panasonic showed off a range of television sets with 3D capabilities teamed with major animation productions. Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs is available at home theatres with Sony’s Bravia 3D-enabled LCD television sets. Dream Works Animations announced a 3D Blu-ray version of Monsters vs. Aliens with Samsung’s 3D-capable TV sets and Blu-ray players (Wolfwood, 2010). This shows that there is still a stronger preference for 3D effects in animation features more than any other genre. Therefore, they are definitely going to be the first 3D home entertainment experience for most 3D fans.

3DTV broadcasting

Another interest of the media industry to come with the glowing success of 3D content might be the possibility of delivering 3D broadcasting. Technological developments including high definition and digitalization are enabling the use of 3DTV for broadcasting application. In addition, broadcasters are exploring the possibility of delivering 3D sports, movies, and documentaries to homes. 3D broadcasting is much more complex than 3D films for movie theatres or home theatres since 3DTV is delivered to the home by various possible broadcasting channels such as cable and satellite, or other types of media such as Blu-ray and internet. In addition, each of them has a specific transmission bandwidth and coding constraints (Bernard et al., 2009). The choice of different video formats during transmission and their compatibility with different 3D technologies varying in characteristics and sizes are another critical challenge of 3DTV broadcasting. As a result of that, to standardize 3DTV broadcasting services in homes might be the long term plan. However, Foxtel is screening the upcoming Australia vs New Zealand match in 3D and Channel 9 will also air Wednesday night’s State of Origin match in 3D. A Harvey Norman spokesman said that they had sold 10,000 3D televisions (Sun, 2010). In spite of all the challenges, delivering 3D contents via broadcasting applications for home viewers seems to have already begun.

Kalva et al (2006) said that the key factors that influence the success in video coding for 3D TV are effortless viewing, content, compatibility with the existing infrastructure and the role of multi-view video coding. In this tendency, the biggest challenge of 3D broadcasting might be the battle with special glasses for home viewers to avoid nauseaation. It could be acceptable for 3D fans to wear the glasses for two or three hours for a home 3D experience, but glass free auto-stereoscopic displays might be needed more for the 3DTV broadcasting audience since it is not suitable for viewing for longer periods. However,
current technologies of 3DTV with many different 3D video formats and active shutter and passive polarise glasses might be the best chance of 3D experience in the next few years. 3DTV for broadcasting application and consumer televisions may be the next big evolution in television and to experience a good enough quality 3D broadcast without special glasses is one of the key drivers for the successful deployment of 3DTV. In spite of all those challenges, it is evident that 3DTV technology is beginning to take off its simple anaglyph and 3DTV-based anaglyph will become a mainstream broadcasting service in the near future.

As specific proposals for 3DTV at homes are being introduced in the market, a number of research studies are being conducted to make sure that consumers are getting the quality 3D images they expect. Every home TV technology such as LCD, plasma and DLP in homes is preparing to adopt a 3D capable 120 Hz refresh rate. 3D video-on-demand services will leverage the bandwidth and synchronization for 3D, and BSkyB and English satellite operators are ready to open a 3D channel. In this context, home TV technology is developing rapidly and it costs a lot to replace the new equipment every time new equipment is released. But the good news is that after converting to HD, to retrofit existing 2D gear equipment into 3D tools is possible and it might satisfy the demand for pirated 3D content. To produce full resolution 3D using available HD overcapacity, Sony SRW decks are used to record Journey to the Center of the Earth left and right streams in 4:2:2 on a single tape. Quantel Pablo's SD and HD output is used for down-converting a secondary HD channel. Both channels synchronize HD and are ready for 3D (Bernard F et al, 2009). On the contrary, existing conversion techniques cannot still achieve the 3D detail and sharpness of the 3D images without stereoscopic cameras. However, as we have seen that quality issues come second after availability through the 2D piracy experience, the ability to convert 2D to 3D content could be one of the options to contribute to market penetration of 3D in homes.

Conclusion
The debate on 3D films as the future of cinema has been already moved into outdated issues since every major studio is now competitively making 3D features. The increasing success of 3D films in theaters has renewed the possibility of delivering other 3D content in cinemas and made home entertainment in 3D a popular issue in media industries. The number of 3D screens is increasing every month and theatres are rapidly being equipped with special digital projectors. While diverse 3D content is delivered to the audience through a special digital projector in theaters, home entertainment manufacturers are
seeking the most effective ways to deliver 3D to homes. Major manufacturers such as Sony, Samsung and Panasonic are constantly showing off new 3D production and delivering tools to prove its value as a full-fledged live action medium. Moreover, major Hollywood production companies are also producing more 3D animations for various ranges of television sets with 3D capabilities. Nonetheless, the most important thing is to make sure the experience delivered to customers is of the quality they expect. 3D still has to prove its value to convey and expand the scope of the emotions to extend the art of 3D storytelling. The recent technological advances and interest in 3DTV will result in more developed equipments and delivery tools and new 3D projectors, as 3D production tools and 3D home equipment are introduced to the market every year. The possibility of converting 2D to 3D content using existing 2D gear equipment sis also necessary to avoid expensive replacement of home entertainment tools. The majority of 3D fans are waiting every day to invest in the practical 3D home theater technology for real time 3DTV broadcasting. AVATAR once proved the actual 3D standardization of motion features in cinema. When research and technological innovation solve the technical and artistic challenges of 3DTV at home, 3D televisions will be appeared in every living room across the world.

References


The interaction between technology, people and society
——In the case of Happy Farm

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Abstract
Since the popularization of computer, online game became ubiquitous around us. It was currently an essential part of our life. Although it appeared that these games were constructed by all kinds of technologies, as a constituent part of the society, it can not avoid being affected by other social factors. This article aimed to explore how society exerted an influence on technology such as computer games and how these technologies exerted a reaction force. Taking an emerging and very popular online game Happy Farm as the case of analysis, this article tried to research the interaction among technology, people and society. It sought to answer following questions: is there a mechanism among technology, people and society? How this mechanism worked?

Keywords
HAPPY FARM • ONLINE GAME • TECHNOLOGY • SOCIETY • PEOPLE

Case study of Happy Farm
Happy Farm was an online social game developed by Five Minute Company in 2008. In this game, players played the role of an owner of a farm. In the farm, players can experience the whole process from buying seeds, cultivating, watering, applying fertilizer, spraying insecticides to harvesting and selling products to the market. By working hard virtually, players can feel a sense of accomplishment brought by the growing of their own crops and operating of the farm.

Happy Farm has gained a huge market success based on following features:

1. Interactivity. On the one hand, the player can water and spray insecticide for their friends. On the other hand, they can also steal the products of their friends. No matter what kind of role they chose to play, they can not play the game individually without any interaction with their friends.

2. Relating to the market. Prices of the vegetables and fruits were floating and not fixed. Players may feel that they were dealing in a real market. It was really exciting.
3. Personalized decorations. Game developers provided players with colorful decorations allowing them to decorate their farms and build them into an ideal paradise. This realized people’s dream of beauty.

According to the latest statistics, the largest number of users of this game was up to 16,000,000. Revenues brought by the game were up to 50,000,000 per month. (Wiki, 2009). After the huge online success, a real version of Happy Farm began to appear. According to a report from Beijing Youth Website, in Beijing people now can rent a small piece of land in suburb where they can grow vegetables and flowers. This kind of farm, which was similar to the virtual farm in the game, was very popular among urbanite. They gradually choose spending weekends on the farm as a major leisure activity.

**Reflection on Happy Farm**

The advantage of Happy Farm was obvious. On the one hand, it was very easy to play and do not need complex strategies and sophisticated weapons. On the other hand, this game was also a good talking topic to increase the interpersonal communication with others. On some occasions if you do not know how to play this game, you will be viewed as an outsider.

In addition to the advantage of the game itself, the social factors behind it also contributed greatly to its spread. Increasing social pressure pushed people to find an effective relaxing way. In current world, people had to face all kinds of challenges from family, study, and career and so on. Fast tempo brought them high pressure. They needed to find a way to relax. Happy Farm was such a good way. In this online game, players can build their own farm. They could grow vegetables, raise animals and then sell them to make a fortune. In this virtual paradise, they would not be disturbed by troubles from real life such as emotional problems and economic pressure. They would be paid as long as they work hardly to run the farm. If they could not solve these problems in real life, they would turn to these virtual technologies for help.

1. Alienated interpersonal relationship force people to find a new communication channel.

According to the latest data from China Internet Network Information Center, 63.4% respondents chose Happy Farm because of their friends’ recommendation (CINIC, 2009). It indicated that friendship plays an important role in the choosing of games. In such a society with fierce competition, the interpersonal relationships among people were become more and more cold. Every person as an individual was easy to be isolated from
the whole society and the social network. In order to avoid this trend and build a positive and healthy personal network, people need to seek a new communication channel to connect him with his friends and colleagues. Computer games can provide chances for people who have few friends and are separated from the society to be connected with a new social network (Joost Raessens & Jeffrey Goldstein, 2004). Happy Farm satisfied the above respect of people. When playing Happy Farm, people first need to build a player group. This provided a communication platform for different friends. In the process of playing, people may steal their friends’ vegetables and be stolen by their friends. This to some extent added the possibility of interaction. Apart from this, having the same leisure activity, people have a common topic to talk in their offices and could significantly create a friend atmosphere in workplace. Not only strengthen the connection with old friends, Happy Farm can also provide an opportunity for meeting new friends. If you were added into your friends’ group, it meant that you are introduced to all his friends in that group. It could greatly broaden people’s social network.

2. The sense of self-fulfillment forced people to seek a spiritual paradise

According to Theory of Hierarchy of needs, every people have a need of self-fulfillment. Emotion theorist Keith Oatley said one of the major enjoyments that games offer lies in the goals it set for players (Bernard Perron & Mark J. P. Wolf, 2009). In the world of online game, people can easily gain a sense of accomplishment by reaching all kinds of goals they may not manage to do in everyday life. Take Happy Farm for example, people can realize their dreams to be a successful farm owner, can realize their dreams to live a peaceful life and can realize their dreams to be a team leader.

Based on people’s original incentive to join the game, we could get such an idea that social factors play a significant role in forcing people to choose technologies.

Social factors pushed people to use technologies to build a virtual ideal world. But technology was far from being a passive role waiting to be selected. It could also affect people and society to some extent.

1. The virtual world built by technology could be moved to the reality by people.

“Technology can be designed and produced in ways that systematically reflect and
embody the interests of some groups in society.” (Graeme Kirkpatrick, p2). In the case of Happy Farm, the interest of the users was expressed. The whole society found that so many people were interested in farm life. So after the emergence and popularity of the online game Happy Farm, real versions of Happy Farm have emerged in some cities of China. In these real farms, people can grow real vegetables and raise real animals. These farms were getting gradually popularity among people. With little rent, people can rent a small piece of land from the owner. Then they can grow everything they want. In the process of plowing and weeding, they exercised their physic body, interacted with their children and got close to the nature. When harvest, they can get fresh and green fruits and vegetables. With so many advantages, real Happy Farm has become a brand new life style and was becoming more and more popular among urbanite. The virtual world built in Happy Farm was gradually being moved to the real world.

2. Psychological effect put by technology can affect people’s behavior

From its birthday, computer games have always been connected with several kinds of psychological effects, not only negative but also positive (Joost Raessens & Jeffrey Goldstein, 2004).

Major psychological effects caused by Happy Farm lied in its two most controversial side effects: the problem of addiction and bad example setting. The former one was very common among online games. Happy Farm was of no exception. After the emergence and popularity of the game, it was quite often to see following reports on newspaper and television: a mother got up at middle night to receive vegetables for her son; an office lady quit her job in order to steal others’ vegetables on time and so on. “Evidence for addiction or dependency stems from an indication that playing computer or video games eats into time spent with other activities to an extreme degrees” (Joost Raessens & Jeffrey Goldstein, p146). A lot of people waste their time on playing online games. Students were addicted to it forgetting study; white collars were trapped in it leading to giving up job. Some behaviors of these players were very ridiculous for us to accept. But they did really exist. Computer games became the most important thing in their life which lead to a disorder of formal daily life and finally would lead to a disorder of the whole society.

The other bad impact of this game was that it set a bad example in affecting people’s conduct. One of the most important aspects in this game was to steal vegetables of others. If you want to build up a great deal of fortune and upgrade quickly, you may need to pay
some attention to others' products. When their vegetables and fruits became ripe and they have not received them yet, you can go to steal them and change them into your own fortune. This game play was very popular among players. It was nearly impossible to find a player who had never stolen others' products. If it was only a joke between friends, it should not be criticized. But if someone acted like this in the real life, we should put some reflection on it. It was reported that some people really conducted stealing after play this game. They might get lost in the virtual world and could not distinguish the boundary between the virtual world and the reality. In the process of playing online games, their realizations were shaped by the rules in the virtual world. It would not be punished to steal so they may form such a realization that stealing is acceptable. Then when they came back to the real world, they would also act under the guide of such a realization. It would not be strange for them to do real stealing.

But computer games also had some good functions. “Empirical evidence has emerged that computer games can yield direct and positive effects for players both in terms of knowledge acquisition and cognitive skills development” (Joost Raessens & Jeffrey Goldstein, 2004). This indicated that Happy Farm as an online game also has some positive aspects. On the one hand, it could do some help to increase people's ability of running a small business which was not easy to practice in reality. On the other hand, it provided people with a platform to using their imagination. They can decorate their farms as any style they like. As a result, if online game such as Happy Farm be used appropriately, it would be very helpful to people's psychological development.

From above analysis, it could be said that technology was not an accessory of human beings. Although it was designed and developed by people, it could exert a reaction force on human society. In the case of Happy Farm, technology functions in such a mechanism: first, it built a colorful virtual world that attracted people to join in. Then, this virtual world affected the realization of people about the real world. When people got back to the reality, they more or less brought some elements from the virtual world with them.

The human beings were the most active creature in the planet. But in this process, people were more like a passive transmitter. On the one hand, it received signals from society and
changed this signal into different technology to relieve them from the reality. On the other hand, the mind of the transmitter was easily to be affected by the technology and finally lead to the change of their behavior in the real world. Some scholars pointed out that most players suffer from some kinds of effects on both their body and mind when they join the world of games (Ken s. Mcallister, 2004).

But it is unfair and incorrect to conclude that people are totally passive receivers. To some extent people can control this process. In the first stage, some people have the ability to resist the attraction from technology. Some group boycotts against Happy Farm was the best example. They had the ability of control to decide what kind of technology could be adopted and whether it could be prompted to the market. So people had the power to decide the final fate of technology. In the second stage, people had the subjective initiative to select good behaviors to benefit the society. Some bad conducts caused by online games could be corrected by people. For example, when more and more people were addicted to the online game, people were united together to fight with the problem including school education and net addiction treatment.

Conclusion

From the whole article it could be found that technology, people and society were not only three isolated individual factors. They were tightly connected with each other and worked as a whole. Technology, people and society formed a linear mechanism with people in the middle and technology and society at the two ends respectively just as following picture shows.

Technology  People  Society

The above is the interaction mechanism between technology, people and society. With “people” at the centre of them exchanging information of those two, “technology” and “society” can communicate and interact with each other. On the right, society can put some pressure such as economic pressure and emotional problem on people. Forced by these pressures, people automatically turn to technology for help. They use technology as an efficient tool to release them from social pressures. On the left, technology can plant itself in people’s mind once they get into the world of technology. Affected by the technology unconsciously, people will gradually behavior according to rules from technological world even in their real life. Technology successfully shapes the society by the hand of people.
What is worth noting is that “people” is crucial in this process. It is not only a bridge but also a transmitter. This reveals the importance of us people and how we can do to make a better use of technology and do good to the society.

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Technical solutions to business challenges: the Content Management System of today

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Abstract
In an organisational setting, the intranet has firmly established itself as a necessary business tool. Commonly built on a Content Management System (CMS), the intranet of today is significantly advanced from what it was only ten years prior. Business appetite for integrated information systems has encouraged software developers to create a CMS that is more than an information storage and retrieval database. Today’s CMS is a multifunctional information and collaboration device providing various avenues for sharing capabilities help facilitate knowledge and information transfer, thereby making business processes more efficient.

Keywords
CONTENT MANAGEMENT SYSTEM • INFORMATION • KNOWLEDGE• CMS • SHAREPOINT• POLITICS

Introduction
The advancements made in information and communication technology in the 20th century have transformed the organisational model where ‘...operations are electronically integrated and linked together’ (McLoughlin 1999 p.1.). The mobility factor of an electronically based organisation means that information can be accessed, and processes enacted irrespective of location and time. The ‘virtual organisation’ (Handy 1995) can be realised via a type of system, the Content Management System (CMS). A CMS is employed by an organisation to facilitate information and knowledge transfer and act as a vehicle for communication. However, implementation of such technology alone does not solve embedded issues in capturing organisational knowledge, nor does it address the behavioral aspects of promoting transparent information and knowledge flows. This article firstly juxtaposes information with knowledge, demonstrating that the differences between each need to be understood to ensure appropriate strategies are developed that target retention of both. It then analyses the way in which CMSs are used
to capture organisational memory. A feature set of a CMS in today’s market, SharePoint, is investigated so as to provide insight into the potential of this system as a business tool. The article then inquires into the human forces at play on which a CMS hinges. It looks at the politics of knowledge management practices and proposes a framework by which a collective can improve the practice of content contribution in the operation of a CMS.

Distinguishing between information and knowledge

Today’s society itself is in an era labeled ‘the information society’ in which our curiosities are often satisfied by a search on the web. The Internet provides a point of access and delivers a vast array of content results to any search term. Information is everywhere. Yet unless we understand the context of information presented to us we fail to interpret its meaning, and thus fail to acquire knowledge.

The application of the word ‘information’ to a vast array of matter leaves us struggling to definitively ascribe a set meaning that is all encompassing. As Sholle (2003) identifies the semantic meaning of information is at odds with the way in which it is understood in fields of cognitive science, information theory and cybernetics. It is important to note though that information sciences do differentiate between information and knowledge. By understanding the distinguishing features of one in relation to the other we can come closer to understanding the unique qualities of each. Sholle (2003) identifies three differentiating qualities of information and knowledge:

1. Multiplicity. Information is piecemeal, fragmented, particular. Knowledge is structured, coherent and universal.
2. The temporal. Information is timely, transitory, even ephemeral. Knowledge is enduring and temporally expansive.
3. The spatial. Information is a flow across spaces. Knowledge is a stock, specifically located yet spatially expansive. (Ibid).

Understanding these differentiations and accepting Machlup’s (1983) idea of information as process and knowledge as a state we then can see the comparative ease of capturing fragmented information over imparting or gaining knowledge that may be spatially or temporally expansive. For example, consider the entry of a new team manager to an organisation. The manager may be presented with piecemeal information on budgets, the salaries of each team member, and the key performance indicators of
the team. Armed with this information alone, the new team manager has little, if any understanding of implicit working relationships that are not defined by recorded processes. This is not suggesting information is useless. It is a crucial basis from which knowledge is developed.

In an organisational setting the perennial challenge of how to contextualise information so that it forms a body of knowledge and how to extract the most elusive organisational asset, tacit knowledge, is ever present. Information systems such as databases and CMSs aid the knowledge imparting process if well planned, understood and deployed. At the very least, a CMS provides an interface that diagrammatically represents an organisation’s information, processes and functions. Its use of menu navigation, information hierarchies, branding and hyperlinks can serve to contextualise information and thereby impart limited meaning to a user.

**The birth of Content Management Systems**

As the name suggests a CMS manages content. Or does it? Do systems manage things or do people manage systems? It is not the aim of this article to debate technological determinism against social constructivism. Analysing the implementation, role and effect of a CMS in any organisation suggests that factors of each theory are present: technology has independent effects which can change the way in which human agents operate and, the way in which human agents operate influences the way in which technology is chosen, implemented and structured (MacKenzie & Wajcman 1985). The definition of a system, from a systems analysis perspective, is ‘an organised or complex whole, a set of interrelated and interdependent parts that form a collective entity’ (Heywood 1999). CMSs perfectly fit that definition.

In an attempt to more precisely describe a CMS we can say it is an online information repository. That definition may have sufficed a decade ago, but today it is a fairly anemic description of the increased capabilities of a CMS. For this analysis a CMS is defined as a repository of information, a communication medium, and a collaboration tool. A CMS is symbolic for it transcends organisational constructs based on Fordism and Taylorism that are spatially and temporally dependent. They are an embodiment of ‘human relations theory’ where ‘technology and work behavior are intimately related’ (Rose 1985 p.176).
Although there are a variety of different CMSs on the market, each with its own strengths and weaknesses, the common feature set of today’s CMS offers benefits such as What You See Is What You Get (WYSIWYG) editing tools, document management capabilities, search functions, online collaboration and interactive communication tools. This article uses SharePoint - a Microsoft product - as its point of CMS reference. Through its own online advertisement SharePoint is described as a ‘business collaboration platform’. In this description the use of the word ‘platform’ is significant. It is a shift away from the earlier CMS terminology of ‘portal’, signifying the development of CMSs into holistic business solutions, rather than a discrete adjunct. CMSs are employed by organisations for managing both a privately accessed internal site (intranet) and the external facing site available on the World Wide Web. This analysis is focused on the employment of CMSs serving as intranets. As an intranet a CMS represents one of the most important organisational assets for its deposits of a cross section of information that, without information and communication technology (ICT), would reside within individuals.

**SharePoint as a solution**

To effectively examine the usefulness of a CMS as a business tool we must first understand its capabilities, and how those capabilities solve identified business issues. As stated, SharePoint will be used as a point of reference for this assessment. The following is not an exhaustive list of all the product features. However, it is representative of the various features specifically designed to provide solutions to a cross section of business units within one organisation.

1. Storage capabilities - common content types such as PDF, Microsoft Office documents, web pages and binary files can be stored and enhanced through applying metadata, enabling version control, and are searchable via the search function. As a Microsoft product, SharePoint integrates with Microsoft Word, Excel, Project Server and Visio.

2. Governance - security and permission sets can be built into the CMS infrastructure and thereby tailored to an organisation’s preference. Governance supported by technology provides an important capability through supporting both a centralised and decentralised administration structure. Additionally, workflow and approval processes can be implemented so that content can be approved prior to release. This feature provides flexibility for the various risk appetites of organisations in releasing content.

3. Deployment - While there are many ‘Out Of The Box’ (OOTB) solutions, SharePoint
is flexible enough to be customised to suit specific needs. Its deployment can be in a holistic manner, for example serving a large enterprise with geographically distributed employees, or can be distributed supporting a small team site. It can be utilised as both an intranet and external web site.

4. Site model variables - all infrastructure for sites is based on templates. There are various OOTB templates to leverage off, or a fully customised site template design can be created and deployed. Different templates can be assigned to different site purposes. For example, for consistency, a corporate intranet may be based on a template which includes the stable navigation representing important business functions, corporate colours and consistent site features. However an individual team site template may be purposed in accordance with the teams needs and therefore may include features such as wikis and blogs.

5. Extensibility - it can integrate with other applications that may be crucial to function as an organisation, for example specialist programs. Additionally XML web services can be enabled.

6. Collaboration features - document collaboration, wikis, blogs, RSS support, discussion boards, project task management, contacts, shared calendars and task lists, email storage and management are possibly amongst the most attractive features to the daily functioning of a team. Additionally SharePoint offers multilingual support and audience targeting - useful when certain content is for a specific audience, or to provide content within a site in alternate languages.

The human factor

Research into the advertised specifications of the SharePoint content management system returns a checklist of common features as stated above. The lynchpin to making any of these features work however, is seemingly absent: technology requires human understanding and sense making of the system. Hill (1988) observes that ‘unless we know what machines are for, and how to use them, they remain as rusting and inconvenient pieces of matter that we must negotiate our way around in everyday life.’. The implementation of a CMS is complex, requiring input and collaboration from various professional disciplines. It is at this point, that we see fault lines emerge. To tease out the fault we need to understand the various stakeholders required to effect content management success.
With the plethora of CMSs on the market, an organisation must firstly make a decision on the particular brand it will adopt. A generic analysis of a likely business decision making process is herein posited. Ideally, the first investigations into a suitable CMS would follow an evaluation of the business’ needs. Only by understanding the needs of the business and subsequently researching CMSs that are able to accommodate those needs would an appropriate choice be made. Theoretically, business analysts would be charged with such an investigation. Having made a choice and purchase, IT resources would then be required to install and architect the software. Once installed, information architects, graphic designers and content experts would need to collaborate to structure the areas for the content to reside. The business unit allocated custodial responsibility for the CMS would need to develop a governance framework so that rules and processes are followed.

Effective implementation and uptake of a CMS, or any technical system, is based on assumptions that those involved with managing and maintaining the system understand and trust it. As we can see by the collaborative feature set already mentioned, individuals cannot be expected to immediately know how to engage with various features. Effective uptake is likely to only follow business consultation and training programs. It is at this point that good quality information becomes difficult to capture. As employees are hired to fulfill specific roles within an organisation, competing priorities within the role they are tasked to fulfill will naturally supersede the additional task of contributing information in a specific way into a CMS. While an organisation may appoint a knowledge manager to strategise best practices for eliciting information and knowledge from resources, it is an impossible task for one resource to know the critical details of all roles. It is evident therefore that an organisation must create a culture that encourages information contribution and knowledge management practices within all roles. Without such a culture the very basic potential of the most sophisticated CMSs will not be brought to fruition.

The battle of knowledge management and politics

For any organisation knowledge is arguably the most ‘important source of sustainable competitive advantage’ (Davis, Subrahmanian, Westerberg 2005). Yet, how can an organisation capture knowledge if, as we determined earlier, it is a state? Knowledge practice studies are prolific, yet the struggle organisations have with implementing new knowledge systems suggests the elusiveness of effecting or ingraining best knowledge strategies. However supportive of knowledge strategies a CMS purports to be, technology itself lends no respite to ingrained organisational issues surrounding
information politics where the perceived power in beholding crucial information instills a sense of job security. ‘As people's jobs and roles become defined by the unique information they hold, they may be less likely to share that information- viewing it as a source of power and indispensability....’ (Davenport, Eccles & Prusak 1992).

Davenport et al (1992) studied a range of organisations in a variety of professional fields. The result of the study was the identification of five models of information politics that aptly parallel the names of political systems. Organisations, irrespective of the profession, seemingly default into one of the five models when approaching information or knowledge management. Each model is herein surmised:

1. Technocratic utopianism - technology is the predominant solution to information issues. Technical solutions by way of databases or information systems are relied on to serve the management of information.

2. Anarchy - employees are unsupported by a centralised information management strategy and as such build their own information systems or database - be they technical solutions or otherwise.

3. Feudalism - business units or departments generate their own purpose information. That same department reports only a subset of the information to others outside of the unit.

4. Monarchy - at a high level, information categories are established by the organisation's leaders. Business units produce the required categories of information to the leaders. The leaders then decide whether the information will be disseminated to other areas of the organisation or not.

5. Federalism - negotiation is the key factor in merging information from all fractions of the organisation. (Ibid).

Understanding the five models that categorise the information practices of organisations Davenport et al (1992) propose complimentary people management strategies. These entail acknowledging the current political environment around information practices, developing strategies most applicable to the culture and choosing an appropriate technology that works with the climate of the organisation. What can be extrapolated from this strategic proposal is that appreciating human behavior is as important as the planning efforts made for technology.
An organisation could improve the interrelated working of its CMS by embracing the recommendations of this study and could further strengthen their approach by adopting Benkler’s suggestions for understanding communications systems (Lessig 2002). Benkler identifies a communication system to be comprised of three layers: the physical – the medium communications travel through, the logical – the code such as protocols that enables hardware, and the content layer – the communications. If an organisation were to apply this division to a CMS and assign human counterparts to each of the three layers, it would begin to establish a distributed network of stakeholders. This addresses the need for a CMS to be jointly managed by professionals with the respective areas of expertise. Only through distributed ownership and proactive behavioral policies can a CMS increase its value as a business tool.

Conclusion
The marketing pitches of CMSs today invariably claim to increase business efficiencies, streamline processes and act as a knowledge or information repository. Taken together such systems aim to empower users, and therefore have the potential to become an important corporate resource. However, as this analysis has demonstrated, any technical implementation in and of itself fails to address a variety of complex issues concerning information, knowledge, power and behavior. This study has highlighted key differences between information and knowledge with the aim of demonstrating that information devices, such as CMSs require more human attention if they are to be a valuable business tool. The generic capabilities of a CMS were identified, with more specific analysis made of SharePoint. This paper addressed the relationship between technology and its human counterparts. In so doing it has shown that complimentary policies and strategies must be developed and accepted by the organisation to effect good sharing practices. While the impressive feature set of SharePoint provides a technical solution to internal organisational challenges, creating a trusted climate that lubricates information flow and uptake of CMS technology by all employees are key determinants in CMS success.
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Hidden Consumerism: ‘Advergames’ and preschool children. Parents give the thumbs up?

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Abstract

This article examines parent perceptions and understanding of preschool children’s use of ‘Advergames’. The paper analyses blog posts of parents to gain a perspective of their underlying believes and values of young children’s game use as well as current literature. ‘Advergame’ websites are becoming a popular phenomenon of social interaction, which are promoted apparently as safe and educationally sound, but in reality are driven by enticing monetized advertising. This study found an overwhelming acceptance of the use of ‘Advergames’ for preschool children by their parents with no indication of concern of the use of monetizing on the sites.

Keywords

MEDIA, CHILDREN, PRESCHOOL, CHILDREN, AUDIENCE, ADVERGAMES, LITERACY

Introduction

Research on parental acceptance of preschool children’s use of ‘Advergame’ sites as a branded environment on the Internet is limited. This study reports on the perceptions and motivations of parent’s and their preschool child/ren’s use of ‘Advergames’; computer games sites, which have purposely been designed for games playing and social networking. In clearer terms, the sites are supported by advertising, where

“the game is made to promote the brand” (Kretchmer 2005). Blog posts of parents from Yahoo.com and the social website Kidswirl along with supporting literature are used in this ethnographic study on parent perceptions of children and Advergames. It was considered that online blog posts were worth investigation as Gosling & Johnson (2010 p. 5) consider the Internet to provide a rich and diverse source of online behavioural data not easily accessible through normal research channels.

This study is also supported by a large empirical study from the American research organisation, the Kaiser Family Foundation in a paper by Rideout & Vandewater (2003), Zero to Six: Electronic media in the lives of infants, toddlers and preschoolers. The survey looked at responses of over one thousand parents involving questions dealing with children from 6 months to 6 years of age who use the Internet.
The aim of this ethnographic study revealed through an analysis of online parental blog posts, a general acceptance of their young children preparing for the future in these hypertexted, consumer environments as an important skill.

**Young children as consumers/producers**

Children are becoming younger and younger users of this new hypertext freeway, which is being explored as to the changes in literacy amongst these new audiences. A hypertext environment, explained by Weinberger (2010) is a ‘type of punctuation which instead of ending continues and encourages further exploration to a new ‘thing, page or world’. The environment allows for a joint connection of ideas and creates a map or a bottom up creation of a linked world’ as opposed to an expert who dictates the navigation.

These new media mixes have been examined in recent terms, as it is being suggested that new definitions of media literacy are becoming a critical component to future education (Livingston 2004; Buckingham 2007). The argument surrounding children as consumers is whether they are becoming ‘passive victims of a consumer society’ or are actively making decisions on whether the product fits their cultural needs. Interestingly, what is being revealed is that researchers and their findings are beginning to align with the marketers; that children are not that easily led and basically hold the cards as to their interests and consumer powers. Children in the consumer society are capable of constructing their own identity and needs. Opposing these findings are the welfare campaigners who put forward the argument that children on websites which use advertising is immoral (Buckingham 2007 p. 3).

Jenkins (2006a) has been calling into discussion the need to research this relatively new participatory culture, where literacy’s are colliding in a new semantic space. Many authors are now asking, (Jenkins, 2006; Livingston, 2003 and Buckingham 2007, where are children positioned in this landscape between consumerism and production and how do children interpret this media. The need to educate children to understand and interpret new media is an important focus.

David Buckingham (2007) also draws on the notion of parents ‘emotional investments in children’s consumption, as many parents now spend long hours away from the family home. The guilt of a parent may also be to provide what they consider ‘edutainment’ where the parent perceives the online community as beneficial to the child’s development and keeping abreast of technology. On the flip side of games as an engaging media for young children, consumerism in children’s spaces is crowding creativity and media production.
Peppler and Kafai, 2007 explore media production as an important aspect to media literacy and emphasise the importance of children being creative producers and enhancing their own ‘cultural practices’ and critical reflection. Children in this space take part in semantic understanding which may define their digital culture.

While there are many concerns and questions being asked cognitively, how can the youth benefit from a social digital culture leaping into the acquisition of knowledge through social technology? Are children the future creators of the 21st century or are they at the hands of marketing and advertising companies who vandalise children’s intellectual property and thus destroy and undermine a child’s cultural participation? Or does this culture move on from the past and equally benefit and support a child’s development?

From a developmental perspective of the child, the debate concerning the age in which young children begin to use the Internet is another concerning issue where regulation is now focused on parental responsibility. Eagle (2003) considers this lack of knowledge an important focus for research as she states, there is ‘little understanding between advertising, parental concern and children’s awareness and intent of the use’ of ‘Advergame’ sites.

The need for policy change to ‘mitigate the parental knowledge gap’ on new media and increase awareness of both parents and young children’s educational gaps should be further considered by regulators.

**Government regulation**

On top of this phenomenon, child consumerism culture is shifting away from government regulation in some countries such as England, Australia and the US. With an emphasis on parents and schools to educate children in their use of the Internet. Australia has its own website, the Australian Communication and Media Association (ACMA) which is responsible for regulation on the internet, however this site also has a ‘how to’ section for children 2 -18 years and how to navigate safely within this sphere.

With the responsibility being passed to the parent, child, and schools the notion of researching and promoting a new ‘media literacy’ is a relatively new concept for supporting the child consumer in the hypertext highways.

**Parents/children and advertising on the Internet**

According to some researchers, the use of ‘Advergames’ by preschool children unveils some of the hidden truths behind consumerism and the future perils of a hypertext
environment.

The survey also suggested that parental concerns regarding advertising were more focused on TV and that children were exposed to ‘too many ads’. There was no suggestion or notion, of the marketing campaigns occurring on ‘Advergame’ sites that their child may be engaging in. In another survey by the Kaiser Family Foundation (2003) parents of 0-6 year old children reported that most parents have media-related rules but were more concerned with the content of what their child engaged with.

**Advergame site - Kidswirl**

Exploring the digital space of Kidswirl a self proclaimed FaceBook like site for kids, as young as two years offers the usual spaces similar in colour and texture to FaceBook, where games can be played and new groups can be formed. Profiles with children, some infants are designed with personal details and their status sometimes protected, others times exposed. Surrounding these online ‘kids only, but the parents are in control’ communities are flashing monitized advertisements ranging from food products to toys with the odd ad appearing out of place. More concerning is the suggestion to collect coins by clicking on these ads. If you click more than 20 times a day, you get extra points where you can purchase various items in games. There is also a page for the champion coin collectors.

**Blogging Parents and ethics approval**

Ethnography’ is the approach of this short study which begins with the question, what are the perceptions of parents of their child’s engagement with Advergames? As the social actor of this investigation and outside the child’s digital culture, I will investigate various websites where parental discourse is drawn through the use of blog postings of interests into how their child navigates this space.

The all encompassing question of acquiring ethics approval for online behavioral research has been concerning with discussions to the University ethics department, however on the guidance of Gosling and Johnson (2010), *Online Behavioral Research*, the social actor/author has been persuaded to accept that trawling online for data or blogs in this instance does not require ethics. More specifically, informed consent is not needed as these openly online postings ‘represent the public domain’. Gosling and Johnson (2010) mention that researchers do not need to obtain informed consent in this instance. What does need to be mentioned is that this area of ethics approval is currently unknown and open to debate.

Beginning this journey into parent perceptions, or lack of, hopes to unveil some of the
hidden truths in the digital culture of preschool children, which is reinforced through parental beliefs. Some of these beliefs include a) their child will be behind if they are not exposed and engaged in these educational games; Advergames in most cases b) to support fine motor skills with better mouse control and c) getting their preschooler ready for school. With so many new sites available how do parents make informed decisions on what is safe and what is not? What does their child do in these sites, are they making friends or foe, how educational are these sites.

Education

The most noted blog comment from parents was their interest in the educational value of the Advergame site. In a study by The Kaiser Foundation (2003), it was found that parents have ‘faith in the educational value of electronic media” and the majority of parents thought that the use of a computer “mostly helps” children’s learning. Parents of 0-6 year olds thought that TV, “mostly helps” children, but no study was used for Advergame media. As there is strong suggestion that TV supports young children’s learning, the study revealed only 43% who thought that educational computer games are important to a child’s intellect. Books, however, far outweighed the educational value over electronic media in the survey. The following blog post highlight’s parents interest for educational support for their child on the net.

I have a daughter, aged 4 and, I want to educate her and prepare her for school. What are some online resources available to help me?

The response to the parent was the suggested sites.

http://www.childdevelopmentinfo.com/

Teaching children mouse control.

http://www.bbc.co.uk/schools/websites/pr...

http://users.bentonville.k12.ar.us/ohms/...

http://www.canteach.ca/elementary/recipe...

Responses were plenty with great advice of new and educationally sound websites for their young preschool child. Some lists were even more informative listing over 60 different sites to choose from with the majority containing some form of advertising.

A recent study into parents perceptions include Eagle (2003), where parental observations of website addresses, had close links to other words, where if misspelled would lead children into ‘objectionable sites’.
*My toddler loves the following sites (in order -- hehe):

**FIRST:**

http://www.starfall.com/

**SECOND:**

http://disney.go.com/playhouse/today/ind...

**THIRD:**

http://www.tumblebooks.com/

**AND, LASTLY:**

http://www.ictgames.com/index.html

In this blog site, parents seem very willing to share advice and sites, which they found beneficial; how they made their judgment was difficult to reveal. For example, what makes a site educational in a parent’s eye? How can parents ensure that the site was safe and conformed where some elements of producing were evident in the medium?

“What are some good websites for toddlers or preschoolers to play online games?”

Parent comment – “We’ve been all through Fisher Price website and a few others. My 3-year-old has her own little mouse and can work it pretty well, we just need a few more places for her to play!”

There are a growing number of researchers who question the privacy laws that Advergame company’s use. Chung (2007) explores privacy issues in children use of sites, where unknowingly personal information is aggregated or what is known as data mining and claims that the individual rights to privacy is being violated. In another parental response the questioning of names is highlighted. Why does the child need to put in a full name where the parent only requires the first name?

“The parent panel will be secured by a password that is set up by the parent so that the child cannot make any changes without parent approval. However, there is no such feature that I could find and this site has several other features that make me feel uncomfortable as a parent: 1. The real names of kids who are online appear on EVERYONE’S profile page. 2. Kids have to sign up with first and last names (why this is necessary since each person also has a profile name I don’t know) but adults only have to list their first names. Seems like a strange thing”.

Shade, Porter, and Santiago (2004) report that young children have difficulty understanding ‘questions about privacy and know very little about common Internet business practices such as sending “cookies” to track users, and often do not fully comprehend why personal information should not be divulged online’. 
"too many ads.. they even put in text ads"

**Conclusion**

This short discussion opens a window into the minds of parental beliefs, concerns and considerations highlighting that parents generally accept the need for their child/ren to interact in online spaces and have expectations that these sites are educationally sound. There were no blogs found expressing concern over the monetising of the sites, except one, which mentioned there were ‘too many ads’. As Buckingham (2007) and others are now questioning, how are these children’s literacy’s changing outside of school, especially if there is an overwhelming acceptance of these sites, where parents feel they need to prepare their preschool child for the future. Are these sites, as new media accepted in a similar fashion to Children’s TV programs, such as *Teletubbies* and in fact do have powerful educational strategies to enhance a child’s literacy’s and digital cultural world. Children’s TV programs which are widely accepted as educational also have ads, however children do not interact the same way with advertisement on the TV as they do in Advergames, i.e. a child is actively participating in gaining coins and is rewarded for their efforts.

The growing interest in media on the net also comes with a growing need for media education both for parents and preschool children jointly to provide a foundation for children’s future use. Understanding this new semantic space for educating young children also needs to address where the preschool child sits between as a consumer or creative media producer.

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Google’s library of Alexandria: The allure and dangers of online texts

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Abstract
Through its development of Google Books, Google is acquiring a position of power over older media and it is important for digital research and publishing to be aware of the potential implications of the privatising of information previously held in the public domain through public libraries. The article neither seeks to portray Google as an evil empire nor a utopian force for good, but rather to explore some issues associated with the Google Books project that should inform the user’s experience.

There are four key points to consider when examining the role of Google Books in society. The first issue is that of copyright, and how it is addressed in America through the Google Books Settlement Agreement. Secondly the article looks at how, despite the utopian language surrounding digitised book projects, Google Books cannot really claim greatly increased accessibility until the problem of the digital divide can be overcome. The article also hopes to examine how Google does not provide equal representation of texts from around the world, this is primarily due to the copyright restrictions imposed, which are resolved for American texts due to the settlement, however this creates a bias in origin of texts provided online. Finally the contentious issue of censorship is discussed, Google does not actively censor itself, however like all companies it is required to work within the laws of the country in which it operates, in this point the article also discusses the library as a public good, and the potential concerns associated with this good being privatised.

Keywords
GOOGLE • GOOGLE BOOKS • COPYRIGHT • ACCESS • DIGITAL DIVIDE • CENSORSHIP • GOOGLE BOOKS SETTLEMENT AGREEMENT • PRIVATISING PUBLIC GOODS

Google Books: The New Library of Alexandria?
The world has been ‘Googled’, we have created a place for Google in our lives which can be filled by no other company, indeed, can be filled by no other entity. Google represents, in a way, the complete online knowledge available to any one person, the knowledge of the world redirected by one company to the user. Google has always asserted that its role is one of service to the masses, informed by ‘dedication to our users and our belief in the possibilities of the Internet itself’ (Google 2010). In recent years however, Google has become far more than a hugely efficient search engine giving the user access to the vast amount of information on the internet, the development of Google Books has challenged our most basic ideas about ownership and authors rights. It is time to question to what
degree we will allow the tradeoff between convenience and values, between our faith in Google, and the concerns of authors and publishers. The goal of this article is neither to condemn Google nor to encourage complete faith in its mission, but rather to explore some aspects of Google's behaviour and history and encourage more informed use of Google Books.

This article considers the copyright implications of Google's actions in the creation of Google Books, as well as the potential ethical concerns associated with a private company making decisions regarding the reading material made available to the world.

**Knocking Copyright on its Head: The Concerns of Authors**

Patricia Schroeder, head of the Association of American Publishers, described Google's actions in its Google Books project as one which 'knocks the notion of copyright on its head' (Martens 2005, p. 2). Her assertion was made in regards to Google's 'opt out' response to concerns regarding the potential breaches of copyright involved in the scanning of and making available copyrighted text. Using the 'opt out' option, authors or publishers of copyrighted text could contact Google and request that their material not be made available through the Google Books service, if the material was already online it would be removed, otherwise it would not be included in the range of texts to be added to the online library. The concern of authors associations is understandable. Copyright as we normally understand it 'protects the way ideas or information are described or expressed (for example, in a document or a drawing)' (Australian Copyright Council 2010), that is, the protection from public use is assumed, to insist that individuals enforce their copyright rights seems an insult both to copyright law and to the rights of content creators. Lawyers for the Authors Guild, who took out a class action against Google, pointed out that Google's actions effectively reversed copyright law; as copyright was a right of the authors it was a requirement that Google seek permission to use the texts, rather than forcing individuals to contact them.

Beyond the question of the 'opt out’ for authors, other copyright issues must be dealt with. Google, regardless of how much text is made available from each book, scans the complete text and holds the entire file in storage. Bracha (2006, p. 13) asks a vital question in regards to this process: 'Is the scanning of the full texts into Google's digital database—an action which is necessary to facilitate the project—infringing, despite the fact that no human eye will see this scanned full text?'. In reality it should be considered an infringement, even if it is not defined as such in law, if for no reason other than a copy of the text is made and
held, in full, without payment being made to the creator.

Now that the Google Books Settlement Agreement has been made many of the breaches of copyright have been dealt with, authors are now paid $60USD for each complete work scanned and displayed, and smaller sums for snippets displayed (Book Rights Registry 2009), this is funded, at least in part through subscription deals, as well as the publishers advertising on the pages.

The Utopian Dream: Equalising Access?

Perhaps then, with the settlement, we can overlook the copyright concerns brought up by the Google Books Project. After all the attraction of Google Books is obvious, if nothing else it is a student’s dream, instant access to books, even in snippet form, at any time, to finish that last minute assignment, provide much needed extra padding for a bibliography or for the perfect quote to prove a point. It is, as Kelly (2006, p. 1) simply puts it ‘a very big library’ available full time, to anyone, not just the elite. Of course, this is something of a utopian dream, Kelly goes on to promise access to ‘these underbooked — students in Mali, scientists in Kazakhstan, elderly people in Peru — whose lives will be transformed when even the simplest unadorned version of the universal library is placed in their hands’ (Kelly 2006, p. 8), a beautiful vision of a future where anyone who wants knowledge can find it, Oxford goes to Kazakhstan. While this vision is very appealing, and is one which has driven the development not only of Google Books, but also of earlier attempts at digitising books, like Project Gutenberg, it overlooks the digital divide. The language barrier and even the level of ability — particularly of the ‘elderly people in Peru’ (Kelly 2006, p. 8) — of the global citizen to access the books made available through Google Books. This question of access refers not only to hardware and software, but also to the level of education required to create a framework for understanding information found on the internet.

As with much of the techno utopian literature written about the internet, Google’s hope to make all knowledge available to all people in a linked style misses some critical concerns that have been raised about the internet as a whole (Hindman 2009). The digital divide is of particular concern, Norris (2001, p. 11) notes that, even within America ‘notable divides still exist… between Americans of different levels of income and education, different racial and ethnic groups, old and young, single and dual parent families, and those with and without disabilities’. It is wonderful to dream of a whole world with total equality of information access, but when even America struggles to provide equal access to its citizens, it seems overly ambitious to predict Kelly’s dream world coming about directly from the creation
of Google Books. The digital divide provides a major challenge to any technology seeking to equalise access to information and learning across the world, however the technology itself is a helpful tool for those who can access it in a meaningful manner.

The Question of Representation

Of equal concern are the broader ethical questions arising from the primacy of Google in our society’s information systems. Google is, despite its many branches across the globe, essentially an American company, it has American values and, notably, the two major parties fighting Google over Google Book’s breach of copyright, the Association of American Publishers and the Authors Guild is also both American. Due to the Google Books Settlement Agreement, only copyright laws in America have been dealt with, which results in an uneven representation of texts. Where, therefore, does the literature of the rest of the world stand in terms of representation in Google Books? As of 16/3/10, four of the six books listed as ‘Interesting’ on Google Books Home are American, and none are from continental Europe or Asia, little has changed since then, though the range is updated with great frequency. The user must ask themselves if this bias is due only to Google’s American origins, or a combination of its origins and the legalities surrounding its project.

In terms of the layout of the site, it remains challenging to find the actual copyright details pertaining to each text, the user can either navigate through the page views available to them or they can go to the ‘Overview’ page where full details can only be found at the end, under the heading ‘More Book Information’, notably these details are missing the copyright information found on the front page of the book itself. Google may not be violating copyright, as it has made the Google Books Settlement Agreement, however the traditional emphasis placed on the author and publication rights is greatly reduced. It could be argued that while Google Books provides greater access to the text itself, the author takes second place to the provider.

Google, through its remediation of online content (Bolter, Grusin, 2000), is the creator, while authors write the works themselves; for the most part Google is the one who makes those works into an accessible online form. This is a huge shift in roles for Google, who assert that their main goal is perfecting the search function to ‘provide continuous improvements to a service that already makes finding information a fast and seamless experience for millions of people’ (Google 2010). Now, as a part of their mission statement, Google wishes to increase the rate of digitisation of content (Google 2010), to allow for
greater access to information from the searches made by users. Google is now more than a content search and provider, Google actively makes new content available through the digitisation of other forms, particularly books.

Is Text Choice Censorship? Libraries and the State

As Google works to compile its library of Alexandria, a complete collection of all books ever, we must wonder, by whose standards are books being judged? Traditionally public libraries choose books based on local standards, interests and by making judgment as to what is appropriate for their audiences, one might not, for instance, put *A Clockwork Orange* in a primary school, or *Spot the Dog* in a law library. Should we be concerned about the potential for censorship? The American Library Association, quoted in Wired points out that ‘Although public libraries have often contended with demands to eliminate or restrict access to specific books, any collection management decision by a particular librarian affected only that community. Here, by contrast, if Google bends to political pressure to remove a book, it will suppress access to the book throughout the entire country’ (Singel 2009, p. 2). Google has responded to concerns about its censorship practices, though not directly related to potential book censorship, with the release of the ‘Government Requests’ page on its website, asserting that ‘we believe that greater transparency will lead to less censorship’ (Google 2010 in Forbes, p. 1). The page lists the amount of requests made by governments for information about users or the removal of information, though it does not list any results for China.

Concerns regarding censorship have often been a problem for Google, the company has a history of submitting to state censorship. The Google China website, launched in 2006 was created because ‘while removing search results is inconsistent with Google’s mission, providing no information ... is more inconsistent with our mission’ (Google.cn 2006, p. 1), Google.cn argued that its compliance with Chinas censorship laws is in keeping with its practice in Germany and France, where displaying Holocaust denials or hate speech is illegal, however it could be argued that these topics deny key events in the history of the two countries, while Google.cn alters searches for ‘the banned spiritual sect “Falungong”, “Taiwan independence” and “human rights”, show[ing] scores of links to sites that support the Chinese government position’ (News Limited 2006, p. 1). Google is also known to moderate the content on YouTube and provides optional family content filters for its searches. In 2010 Google moved its Google China service to Hong Kong, and made the groundbreaking decision to stop self censoring searches for China, though content viewed in China would still be filtered by the government (Branigan
As with all companies, Google is bound by the laws of the state in which it is operating, so while it does not actively censor through its own volition, the results it produces in each country will vary.

So with a Google that is more aware of censorship issues, and more willing to be open about where and when requests for censorship occur; should we stop worrying about the future of Google Books? The true concern here is, perhaps, not with copyright or even censorship, but the power of an individual company, Google holds ‘more than fifty percent of the web search business in the United States’ (Ferguson 2005, p. 13), it is one of the most powerful companies in the world. However it remains just that, a private company, but it is increasingly taking on public responsibilities. The library has been a public good for decades, despite what Kelly (2006) argues, the public library, at least in the western world is not really an elite form, indeed it is no more elitist than Google Books itself, when considered in terms of the digital divide. Braverman (1982), argues that the public library, as an extension of the state, is responsible for the ‘public good’ and insists that libraries must serve the needs of the whole community in which they are situated. Almost thirty years later, it seems the largest public library will not even be created by a state entity, rather a private company will make decisions about what books can and cannot be included in it, a company with shareholders and subject to the whims of the states in which it operates.

Conclusion

Where then, does all this leave us, the user? Realistically, all the discussion of censorship, copyright and the ethics of a private company making choices for the public cannot deny the power and allure of Google. ‘Google plays a peculiar and powerful role in our information culture. It is a ubiquitous brand, used as a noun and a verb everywhere from adolescent conversations to scripts for Sex and the City’ (Vaidhyanathan 2006, p. 14), Google makes our lives easier, by giving us a portal through which to view the internet, and increasingly through its other services, of which Google Books is only one. Google Books has overcome many hurdles standing in the way of its vision, altering our perception of copyright law and of the rights of the author, changing its role from content provider to content creator and changing the place of the public library in society by putting it in the hands of a private company delivering it to the world. It must be hoped that the utopian view of Google Books can be realised, but it is at the cost of authors, publishers and the traditions of property rights. Users should maintain an understanding of where their information comes from, including unpleasant concerns about censorship and text choice, while using Google Books.
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Google’s Taking on China: an Ingenious Publicity Campaign

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Abstract:
Since last January, web giant Google has created a global media frenzy through its open defiance toward Chinese government. Journalists and news consumers have been speculating on the reasons behind its action, offering a myriad of opinions. Some hail Google as a free speech hero, some criticize its business mismanagement, and some mock Google’s American arrogance and aloofness. This article will deduce Google, while more or less consistent with these interpretations, has intended to cultivate a publicity campaign both to facilitate the national interest its home country and to enhance the company’s ‘don’t-be-evil’ image in the bid for the public support of its increasing hegemonic control of the digital market.

A rhetorical perspective will be applied to provide reasonable interpretations of meaning for how the world is seen from a particular vantage point of view (Mckenzie 2006: 35). This ‘vintage’ has been made possible by a range of reportages and analysis done by a selected host of global news media and tech-bloggers.

Keywords:
GOOGLE PUBLICITY CENSORSHIP CYBER ATTACK MARKET SHARE PATRIOTISM

April 22, 2010 had been a regular, smoggy Beijing spring day until the moment Google made the official announcement that the company would pull its search engine out of China. In many ways it was the moment Beijing and the rest of the world had been waiting anxiously for over three months after Google had fired its first shot at the Chinese government, both condemning its hugely unpopular Internet censorship and implying it was the force behind the cyber attacks aiming at the company’s email system. The Chinese government, conversely, had been vehemently refuting Google’s accusation, while launching its own media campaign accusing Google had acted on behalf of the United States government to infiltrate the latter’s political and trade agendas. Although the dustup has seemingly lost much of its intensity as the media, with its short-attention span, has since shifted its attention to other newsworthy issues. Puzzle and doubt remains strong about the real motive behind Google’s decision. This article will attempt
to offer an explanation through the examination of:
  Google China’s business performance;
  Censorship and cyber attack; and
  Power and assumed responsibility

With 137 million Chinese Internet users in mind (the number has since nearly tripled by December 2009 to 384 million -- Womack and Childs 2010), Google set up its China shop in 2005. Nearly five years later, although ‘armed with America’s bleeding-edge technology, cash, intellectual property and an ability to manage complex networks and introverted workers’ (Barboza and Stone 2010), the web giant could not make headway against its Chinese rival Baidu, which holds 63 percent market share, compared to Google’s 33 percent.

As on what have contributed to Google’s underachievement, many industry analysts blame the company for its inflexible management style. Like many foreign companies that are also struggling in China, Google did not ‘trust local executives’ and disregarded the cultural relevance of different markets (2010). Li Kaifu, Google’s Taiwan born, Columbia educated director later would reflect on the constant ‘pressure from the Headquarter’, demanding Google China to be in line with the company’s existing business model (Leadership 2010). However, many Chinese Internet bloggers suggest the reason lie somewhere else: it has something to do with the rising Chinese nationalism that is materialized through media choices.

The profound changes in the international media and communications at the threshold of the new millennium, observed Jeremy Tunstall, the author of Media Were American: U.S. Mass Media in Decline, are ‘the resilience and probably increasing strength of national culture, national sentiments and national media’ (2008: IVV). His view was readily shared by Ying Zhu, a professor from the City University of New York. According to Zhu, due to ‘the general lack of faith in ‘political and economic self-alliance and self-regulation of individuals and companies’, majority of the Chinese population that represent ‘intellectual, popular and commercial interests’ has endorsed the government’s new rhetoric of ‘harmonious society’ and ‘nation unity’ (2008:127). This movement, which is further aggravated by the constant negatively portrayal of China by western governments and media, has turned against the arbitrary and missionary style of the West, typically the United States, in pushing through their liberal democratic ideology. And over time it has amassed a immense number of followers, most being the less educated youth that compose
a large proportion of Chinese netizens. Google, which explicitly wears the western liberal ideals on its sleeves, has been seen as the representative of the ‘meddlesome’ West, and deliberately shunned (Xiao 2010).

That much said, Google does have a significant number of Chinese followers. Most of which are the newly formed middle class, with a relatively good education and taking pride in associating with all things modern, trendy, and foreign. They make up the key constituents among Google China’s 33% market share in 2009, enabling Google to amass a revenue estimated about US$600 million (Einhorn 2010). Therefore money does have spoken in this case, by confronting the claim that Google’s withdraw is because the company has not made any money in China and proving otherwise. This conclusion then leads the article’s inquest to the censorship and cyber attacks.

Back in 2005 when confronted by questions why a company that advocated democracy and ‘freedom of speech’ then wanted to do business with China that was infamous for its hush treatment of dissents, Google reasoned that the company believed its presence in China could help to provide the ‘under-informed’ Chinese with much-needed information. Five years on, Google had indeed realized this promise. It had been a common knowledge among Chinese netizens that Google site offered the easiest way to bypass the much-condemned ‘Great Firewall of China’. The user only needed to click the ‘Google.com link’ at the bottom of the Google page, which would link the person onto the site of ‘Google international’, the gateway of grand cyber freedom. However, question is then raised: why Google suddenly has to cut this precious access off Chinese netizens’ limit.

The confusion Google has caused is not limited to the media and regular Joes on the street. Intelligent as Bill Gates, chairman of Microsoft, is equally puzzled. During his interview with an New York Times journalist last January, Mr. Gate had thus responded to his Silicon Valley rival’s action: all foreign companies should comply with the rules of their host countries. ‘One may or may not agree with the laws in China... but nearly all countries have some controversial laws or policies, including the United States’ (Lohr 2010).

And to further complicate the matter, facts have been churned out that Google, while blaming Chinese government’s censoring stance, is at the same time willingly cooperating with many other countries to regulate their web contents. In Turkey, for instance, Google goes along the rules that deems any activity to ‘defame the country’s founder, Mustafa Kemal Ataturk or to ridicule ‘Turkishness’ be a crime. In Thailand, Google carefully makes sure there is no material among its contents denigrating the Thai monarch. Even in its home country, Google frequently removes links or video contents that infringe copyrights or related to child pornography (Goldmen 2010). It is not surprising that the puzzled Mr. Gates has thus exclaimed: they’ve done nothing and gotten a lot of credit for it... Now, if Google ever chooses to pull out of the United States, then I’d give them credit’ (Lohr 2010).

Subsequently, if censorship is not the likely cause of Google’s China outrage, there is only one more possibility left: the cyber-attacks that Google has hinted to be orchestrated by the Chinese government. On March 3rd, CNN quietly post an unassuming report onto its website, confirming the Google-China attack had been driven by amateurs that ‘used unsophisticated software with five-year-old code’, a sign of being ‘not well funded, and least to be state-sponsored’ (Voigt 2010).
Google did not confirm or deny this finding. The rest of the international media that had been wild with speculations and accusations toward China until this point also chose not comment.

When the Google vs China news first burst out in last January, the Mandarin language program of SBS radio (Australia) had invited Professor Wanning Sun from the China Research Center of the University of Technology of Sydney to comment on the Google incident. When being asked about the possibility that the Chinese government was behind the cyber attack, Professor Sun relied that she would not comment on any allegation that was not supported with any evidence; and she was deeply concerned how the western media had ‘maneuvered’ this allegation into a de facto truth. The media in the West, she observed, in believing their audiences liked to hear the negative China news, tend to cash in on the newsworthiness of such news by only offering ‘shallow and simplified interpretations’, and rarely bother to follow-up the end result (SBS 2010).

With business failure, censorship and cyber attacks all being put aside, it is time to find out what is really behind for Google’s China action. The riddle, according to some industry insiders, is embedded with Google’s cozy relationship with the current United State government.

According to the New York Times report, ‘Google managers and employees were among the strongest supporters of candidate Obama by making $803,000 donation to his presidential campaign’. Soon after the 2008 election, Google’s executive Eric Schmidt ‘sits on Obama’s Council of Science and Technology Advisers’ and a handful of Google employees were hired to advise the Obama transition team -- a few being granted various roles in the administration. The best example is Andrew McLaughlin, a global public policy executive at Google, is not the administration’s deputy chief technology officer in June 2009 (Goldman 2010).

Being friends means to help each other out at the time of need. One of the many troubles has been agonizing Google’s White House friend is the Chinese currency exchange rate. For years China has pegged its currency Renminbi (also known as the yuan) against the American dollar and had kept the exchange rate artificially low. A popular belief in the U.S., although being argued differently by many eminent economists, regards it as the reason why China maintains a trade surplus with the U.S. and why it has accumulated a huge foreign exchange reserves (Christie 2010). Many bilateral talks had been initiated by the U.S. government but ended with no result as China insisted its currency be a sovereign
issue and not be interfered by any foreign country. Over time, political resentment has been built up in Washington with some Congressional members openly accusing China of currency manipulation and pressing the White House for action. Unable to offer China an ultimatum for fear of triggering a trader war, President Obama was advised to ‘find a carrot and at least the shadow of a stick’ (Johnson 2010) to teach China a lesson.

The role of the stick was fulfilled Google. But the company hadn't undertaken the task as a mere favor to its government friend, but as a bargain chip for two of its most wanted items. As the extent of Google's business expansion has snowballed over the past decade, the company has openly displayed its intention to ‘play a more ‘powerful role in public policy debates over everything from patent reform to foreign policy’ (Powell 2010). By and by, Google has been joining force with the sprawling lobbying groups in Washington: the money spent for 2009 alone is around $6 million and concerned with 16 bills in Congress (Goldman 2010), turning the company into ‘one of the big boys in Washington’ (2010).

Since 2009, Google had been trying to lobby the federal government to pass the legislation on ‘Net neutrality’, allowing equal access to all content on the Internet without restrictions. However, the bill, being fiercely opposed by phone and cable companies, eventually was 'out-lobbied' (2010). The second item on Google's barter list was the proposed acquisition of mobile ad network AdMob. At the time, the U.S Federal Trade Commission was reportedly mediating ‘a possible legal challenge’ of Google's intention (Temple 2010). To win these uphill battles, Google then needed ‘a huge PR hit in order to gain ‘some sort of government regulation approval’ (Gross 2010). That was how China strategy was plugged out.It is hard to guess, between the White House and Google, which had initiated the notion of taking on China. Nonetheless it has proved to be an ingenious move.

For Google, the taking on of an authoritarian regime that operates the notorious Great Fire Wall, not only serves an ideal publicity for ‘Internet freedom’, but also adds a shine on its carefully nurtured ‘don't-be-evil’ image to gain public acceptance of its ever-growing size. For the White House, it was the prefect ‘shadow of a stick’ to force the Chinese -- the stubborn Middle Kingdom known for its dislike of international criticism, typically of those who are morally sound even though impractical or inconvenient to its tastes -- off its exchange rate high horse. As there is so far no inside report or participants’ confession to prove the existence of a behind a scene deal between Google and the White House, one can only draw on circumstantial evidence, like the timeline below:

Oct. 16, 2009: the U.S. Treasury Department criticized China for ‘the lack of flexibility’ on yuan (Chinese currency) and for the buildup of foreign exchange reserves (Christie 2010).


Nov. 9, 2009 Google Set to Acquire AdMob for $750 Million (Helft 2010).

Dec.12, 2009: China United Mobile, a major Chinese telecommunication company that has contracted Google’s Android mobile phone platform, was informed that Google didn’t want its logo shown on the exterior of the phone (Hexun 2010).

Jan.7, 2010: U.S Secretary of State Hillary Clinton hosted a dinner for ‘Google CEO Eric Schmidt and a group of digital doers and thinkers' (Kafka 2010).
Jan. 12, 2010: Google announced it would stop censoring its search results in China and may pull out of the country completely (Google 2010).

Jan. 12, 2010: Hilary Clinton issued a statement in Honolulu, where she was en route to the western Pacific, that she was very concerned about the ‘Google incident’ and ‘look to the Chinese government for an explanation’ (Burns 2010).

Jan 23, 2010: Obama weighs into Google-China furore, claiming ‘troubled’ by cyberattacks on Internet giant Google and wants answers from China (ABC News).

Feb. 23, 2010: Qin Gang, the spokesperson for Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs accused Google has acted out of ‘ulterior motives’ (Xinhua 2010).


Mar. 22, 2010: Chinese Premier Wen, Jiabao told a group of foreign businessmen that China wouldn’t have ‘trade and currency wars’ with the U.S. (Powell 2010).

Mar. 23, 2010: Google took its search engine out of Mainland China.

Apr. 07, 2010: U.S. Treasury Secretary Timothy F. Geithner embarked on an unexpected trip to China to discuss its currency appreciation (Christie 2010).

Apr. 12, 2010: President Hu Jintao met with president Obama in White house, expressed that China would ‘move away from its fixed currency peg to the dollar’, ‘but won’t be advanced by any foreign pressure (The New York Times 2010).

Apr. 19, 2010: Bin Xia, the Director of the Chinese Financial Research Institute of the State Council told reporter that China will not be dogmatic on its foreign exchange policy (You and Pan 2010).

April 21, 2010: China would allow the yuan to appreciate by June 30 (Wong 2010).


In a way, according to Professor Huisheng Zhao, the Director of Sino-US Cooperation Center at Stanford University, Google China’s withdrawal ‘not only has something to do with the free flow of information, but the investment environment in China, with the Sino-U.S trade competition typically regarding currency exchange and trade deficit. All in all, ‘Google's action has served up as an effective propaganda on behalf of the United State government’ (Leadership: 2010).

A month after Google’s ‘official’ exit from China, it turns out to be a surprising win-win situation for all parties involved. The U.S, government seems to be content about the effectiveness of ‘the shadowy stick’. President Obama not only fended of the calling on his naming China as the ‘currency manipulator’, but promises that ‘he won’t hold Beijing to a deadline for action’ (Schroeder 2010). Google, while awash with the praises and tributes towards its heroic act, are happy with the result of its strategic move to Hong Kong. So far for the first quarter of 2010, it still holds about 30 percent of the Chinese searching engine market. ‘We are still taking ads from China’, Schmidt proudly announced recently, ‘and still maintain our business relationships and our engineering centers in China’ (Womack 2010). Although, on the surface that China seems to be the losing side by being ‘maneuvered’ into a currency concession, a step it should have taken long time ago as a big player of international trade, it did get the antagonistic American government and western media off its back, at least for now. As for how the rest of the world should reckon the ‘Google vs. China’ incident, the best possible
approach is to look at it from the following two perspectives:
One is to adhere the claim made by the CEO of Liberty Global, Mike Fries, during his ABC (Australia) ‘Inside business’ interview: we are all opportunists in money making, as that is what capitalism is’ (ABC News 2010).

The other is meditating on a commentary made against the interactive computer game *Heavy Rain*: for this kind of game, ‘there is no right or wrong way to play ... no matter what your outcome is, the game will move forward and adapt to the consequences of your actions or lack thereof (Anderson 2010)’.

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Redefining Glamour: Capturing Queer Subculture on TheNight-Bloomers.com

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Abstract
This article discusses the representation of glamour on TheNightBloomers.com, a photography site which depicts the queer subculture of Barcelona. The article discusses glamour as a mainstream construct used by traditional forms of print and screen media to sell heteronormative, capitalist ideals to a mass audience. It discusses the way in which TheNightBloomers.com, along with other forms of new media, debase and re-contextualise notions of glamour, allowing users to reinterpret the construct in a way that is personally meaningful. The article looks at what happens to our notion of glamour, a construct based on mystique, when one is able to destabilise the premise on which it has evolved. It makes a suggestion that such previously hierarchical constructs are changed beyond their original meaning and makes suggestions for what this could mean for the way we create meaning from constructs in the context of the “bricolage” form of new media.

Keywords
DIGITAL MEDIA • QUEER SUBCULTURE • PHOTOGRAPHY • ONLINE MEDIA • GLAMOUR

Its 2am in Barcelona and down a small alleyway in the barrio of Raval - an area of the city famed as much for its transvestite prostitute locals as it is for its hedonistic drinking dens - young, attractive twenty-somethings cram into bar Plastico to dance, drink and socialise with other members of the city’s lively queer subculture. A group of young, Catalan photography students capture the nightlife of this subculture, depicting the participants on their website TheNightBloomers.com (TNB). The photographers who run the site portray the members of the Catalanian capital’s queer culture in images that suggest theatricality, beauty, allure, a seductive air of opulence and, perhaps most importantly, mystique. Such aesthetic traits, as argued by Stephen Gundle, make the basis of our modern day construction of glamour (Gundle 2008). As this article argues; glamour, as a construct that has traditionally served mainstream, heteronormative audiences, is repurposed and recontextualised by and for a queer audience on TNB. TNB plays with notions of glamour to the extent that its meaning is deconstructed and debased from its traditional use in mainstream society to one that is culturally specific to those portrayed on its pages. To
this end, this article will look at the widely discussed democratic use of new media while looking at the ability for subcultures to reclaim and repurpose the mainstream in such a way as to create meaning within their own group.

Many writers such as Deuze have described the democratic possibilities of the Internet as a medium by which users can reclaim the ability to tell stories in a manner that is personally meaningful (Deuze, 2006). The Internet marks a move away from hierarchical forms of storytelling whereby the focus for providing and interpreting information shifts from mainstream media and is put in the hands of the masses. For Deuze, we are now all *bricoleurs*; whereby we continually assemble, disassemble and reassemble our “mediated reality” (ibid. p.65) to make sense of the world we live in. He argues:

‘Instead of relying on journalists, public relations officers, marketing communications professionals, and other professional storytellers to make sense of our world, we seem to become quite comfortable in telling and distributing our own versions of those stories.’ (Deuze, 2006, p. 66)

For many queer and feminist writers, the mainstream storytelling devices of print and screen have largely ignored perspectives other than that of the white, heterosexual male (Butler, 1993). The democratic potential of new media thus has obvious implications for providing a storytelling outlet to cultures and perspectives that counter the voice of the hegemonic majority. While recent print and screen history has given a voice to queer artists and personalities, media groups such as GLAAD argue that these representations are marginal and rarely let the community speak for itself (Paxton, 2009).

Yet hierarchical storytelling was crucial in the mobilisation both of the queer movement and of the construction of glamour as we know it today. Glamour was used by the influential (albeit marginal) queer voices of the 1970s. Glam rock personalities David Bowie and Elton John, niche filmmakers Andy Warhol and John Waters, all used glamour to subvert a construct that had, until then (and arguably, since then), underlined the accepted status quo of heterosexual society (Gundle, 2008).
Glamour is a term borne from print culture. Its traditional use referred to a mystical power to trick or deceive, to make one seem like a “magnificent version” (Gundle, 2008, p. 6) of oneself. However, following 19th century industrial and financial revolutions, upward mobility became possible and newly established print culture allowed for the rewards of mobility to be depicted to wide audiences in an aesthetic now recognised as glamour (Gundle, 2008). Gundle describes this new aesthetic as:

'[A] shared language of allure consisting of materialism, beauty, and theatricality… Glamour contained the promise of a mobile and commercial society that anyone could be transformed into a better, more attractive, and wealthier version of themselves.' (Gundle, 2008, pp. 6-7)

Similarly, while glamour previously referred to both sexes, the term became a gendered construct whereby its associated imagery favoured a male gaze and focused upon the female form (Dyhouse, 2010). This form of glamour was canonised by the 1930s Hollywood studio-era star system whereby the patriarchal heads of Hollywood’s ‘dream machine’ manufactured and marketed personalities such as Greta Garbo and Joan Crawford to audiences. These stars embodied the promise of upward mobility, their bodies fetishised as objects of consumer success (Pjoanski, 2007) and heterosexual male sexual desire (Gundle, 2008). Post-war Hollywood continued this trend, selling society what it apparently craved most: stability.² An idealised, glamorous lifestyle was represented, based on the solid social structure of the heterosexual family unit (Wilson, 1982). Film, print, and an emerging television culture, all largely manufactured and produced by men, encouraged women to strive for glamour as a means to seduce and secure male partners. Men were the producers of this construction of glamour, identifying the glamorous ideal that women should strive to achieve (Wilson, 1982).

While the women’s liberation movement of the 60s led to glamour being temporarily cast aside from mainstream tastes,³ glamour fell back into fashion in the 80s reintroduced as

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² Examples of this are best represented in 1950’s suburban sitcoms such as Leave It to Beaver and Father Knows Best. Haralovich, Mary Beth, “Sitcom and Suburbs: Positioning the 1950s: Homemaker”, in Morreale, Joanne, Critiquing the Sitcom: A Reader, New York: Syracuse University Press, (2003), p74.

³ Glamour in the 60s and 70s, it seems, was only used subversively by the queer artists previously mentioned in this article. See Gundle, Stephen, “Style, Pastiche, and Excess”, in his Glamour: A History, Oxford: Oxford University Press, (2008), pp. 317-320.
a means to portray an idealised heterosexual lifestyle (Dyhouse, 2010). Its use continues in popular culture today with films such as *Sex and the City* (King, 2008) aligning heterosexual femininity and glamour in a complicated marriage of third-wave feminism. Pjoanski (2007), Goldberg (2000) and Dyhouse (2010) all note that this new form of glamour is heavily tied up with capitalism and mainstream values regarding accepted gender definitions. This form of gendered glamour, while potentially empowering in its portrayal of femininity, is still problematic when discussing notions of feminism that seek to reject predetermined or assumed gender roles. Femininity is still lineated within a certain model and relies heavily around notions of a consumerism that ultimately serves an assumed heterosexual market. Again, such notions of glamour tend to exclude queer voices.

Yet queer theory has had an active role in the subversion of hegemonic constructions of meaning such as that of glamour (Case, 2009). For Doty, queer thinkers play a role to ‘challenge and break apart conventional categories’ (Doty, 2009, p.xi). Yet unlike Doty’s definition of queerness, *TNB* does not represent a community made up of members necessarily ‘contra-, non- or anti-straight’ (Doty, 2009, p.xi), but rather subjects with a queer sensibility - they do not subscribe to “essentialist” gender and sexual roles in society. Queerness in this article refers to the term as put forward by writers such as Butler (1993) and Case (2009) whereby sexuality and gender are constructs performed by individuals rather than essential to their being. Such performance, along with artifice, theatricality and excess are key to Gundle’s definition of glamour and, for Cohan, have a large affiliation with queer sensibility (Cohan, 2004).

Glamour is increasingly undermined and debased by the democratic form of new media journalism, most notable in forms developed by queer authors. This is perhaps best illustrated in the changing manner by which celebrity and fashion, arguably the ultimate symbols of glamour, are viewed by mainstream society. Yvan Rodic (2010), regarding his blog *Face Hunter*, argues that fashion blogging has encouraged a decentralised notion of glamour, style and fashion. For him, individuals are now influenced by street fashion from all over the world, with the big fashion houses looking to his blog for inspiration for current trends to include in their runway shows. He argues that contemporary ‘fashion is not a monologue, now it’s a conversation.’ (Coletti, 2010) This form of influence is one that
is based on a democratic, populous notion of glamour rather than one fed from centralised media to a mass audience. The elimination of print culture, and its inevitable reliance on a consumerist notion of glamour that appeals to the masses, Rodic’s blog creates a version of glamour with an emphasis on the ordinary person on the street, a heightened feel of everydayness.

The glamour of celebrity has similarly been undermined by sites such as PerezHilton.com and Twitter. By way of the internet, the glamorous star image goes through a demystification process. Celebrity twitter feeds take away the allure of a lifestyle that relies on mystery to create effect. Hadley Freeman comments:
“[Twitter] is a means of destroying whatever mystique celebrities still had in this post-sex tape era. Once, a celebrity’s words were filtered through a PR. Thanks to Twitter, any attention-seeking, under-employed celebrity can say whatever pops into their heads to everyone in the world.” (Freeman, 2010)

In a similar manner, PerezHilton.com demystifies the star image, adopting a style of journalism heavily influenced by a queer sensibility to undermine heteronormative assumptions. Hilton uses a grotesque style of humour where “glamorous” celebrity images are defaced, “upskirt” photography is released, sex tapes are published and celebrity sexual preference is speculated on (Hyde, 2010). By questioning the heteronormative construction of celebrity, Perezhilton.com essentially demystifies the glamorisation process, revealing the artifice behind a construct that has traditionally excluded (yet fascinated) queer audiences.

Such demystification takes away much of the allure that celebrity once held over audiences. Key to glamour, as evolved from print and screen culture, was the use of manipulation to create mystery and allure. Yet while Gundle (2008) argues that it is glamour’s apparent achievability that makes it so appealing, I would argue that the appeal comes from its apparent unachievability and artificiality. Celebrity image requires artificial transformation for effect. Gundle discusses the way in which make up was used in order to “depersonalise” (Gundle, 2008, p. 174) the human features of 1930’s Hollywood actresses, Morin similarly describes how the “natural beauty of the actress and the artificial beauty of the make-up join in unique synthesis” (Morin, 1972, p.43). Key to the appearance of glamour is a seeming separation from the norms of humanity. Modern day Hollywood continues this trend, airbrushing celebrity images in glossy magazines and film posters (Cocossa, 2010).

I would argue that glamour, in the mainstream, is a utopian construct based on consumerism, an aesthetic made appealing by the sheer fact of its unachievability. Margaret Atwood notes that utopia, if achieved, has no meaning. Meaning is created only through absence (Atwood, 2007) – thus if glamour is achieved, it loses its meaning. Bloch argues “the contradiction between the evident possibility of fulfilment and the

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4 I use grotesque here in the Bakhtinesque sense. Hilton’s defacement of celebrity images with drawings of penises, semen, urine and other bodily fluids would make for an interesting further discussion for the use of the grotesque on such sites to undermine mainstream journalism and heteronormative sensibility. Unfortunately this is outwith the constraints of this article.
just as evident impossibility of fulfilment” creates meaning in utopian desire whereby individuals “identify themselves with this impossibility and to make this impossibility their own affair.”(Bloch, 1998, p.4) I would suggest that the artifice that makes glamour unachievable is essential in its ability to hold meaning. Mystery is key.

TNB manages to retain such mystery, essential to the construction of glamour. Rather than portraying well known personalities of print and screen; the subjects in the photographs remain anonymous. This anonymity, I would argue, is essential in the creation of mystique and allure. They are fascinating, made glamorous through the mystification process they go through when the photo is taken and through the photograph’s subsequent digital manipulation. Subjects are given a hyper-realism; images are desaturated and presented in high contrast, giving the subjects a startlingly pale complexion, removing the specificity of many facial features. Subjects are made to seem magnificent, uncanny versions of themselves.

The ability for these anonymous individuals to take part in the glamorisation process is a subversive one. By achieving glamour, individuals are necessarily made aware of the artifice that is involved in its creation. Individuals with differing levels of androgyny are portrayed in the photographs, posing elaborately for the camera. Female subjects return
the gaze while male subjects place their bodies as the object of sexual contemplation. Such performance of glamour is arguably subversive when contextualised by hierarchical print and screen forms of the construct.

\textit{TNB} tells stories meaningful within the specific community of this queer subculture. The pictures borrow from the glamorous aesthetic yet portray culturally specific representations of the construct. This is potentially empowering, revealing the Internet’s potential for alternative historical perspectives to be told. While history has traditionally been told from the perspective of the white, heterosexual male; new media forms, such as that of \textit{TNB} allow history to be told from multiple perspectives. Such reasons have encouraged writers such as Janet Murray to describe new media as a ‘kaleidoscopic’ (Murray, 1998) form of storytelling.

Ultimately, new media allows the constructs used in storytelling to be told from multiple perspectives. In the specific context of \textit{TNB}, I have attempted to illustrate the specific role queer sensibility has in subverting mainstream hegemonic constructs and the way
in which new media has opened up doors for subcultures to assemble, disassemble and reassemble phenomenon previously exclusive to hierarchical storytelling institutions. This article focused on glamour, a construct utilised in the mainstream to sell consumerist principles to a heteronormative audience. This construct, which relies on mystique and mystery in order to create *desire*, has been demystified by queer new media forms. I would argue that such subversion of a mainstream storytelling alters the semiotic meaning in the minds of those who experience glamour in this form. Yet that is not to say that this creates a new definition or evolves our semiotic association with glamour - to do so would be to ignore the role that new media takes in providing multiple viewpoints for a population of bricoleurs. Rather, *TNB* creates a specifically queer presentation of glamour that, while subversive, creates a specific *type* of glamour that differs from, yet borrows from, the mainstream. Such representations illustrate new forms of culturally specific storytelling that remix established assumptions, thus enriching the meaning we hold towards traditional concepts. In the kaleidoscopic medium of new media we are thus able to generate meaning on multiple levels.
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Patient Advocates in the Internet Age: a threat to traditional notions of authority in health care?

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Abstract

The Internet, with its many modes of publication, has facilitated the growth of high profile patient advocates by giving them a powerful platform from which to be heard. Their success in garnering a sizable audience of chronic health sufferers is playing a central role in challenging traditional notions of authority in the health care field.

This paper will specifically look at the example of thyroid disease to demonstrate how the more prominent patient advocates make use of these publication methods and how this has cemented their position as a new form of authority in the health care arena. Research including a review of relevant academic research and study of advocates’ blogs, websites and message boards has provided the insights and evidence for this paper.

By looking at the cultural and technological context which has given rise to this development, this paper seeks to demonstrate that the patient advocate is a new form of authority, challenging traditional notions of authority in health care by harnessing publication methods on the Internet to speak to and actively engage with an audience. Medical authority will be defined for this purpose using a philosophical and sociological framework.

This paper contributes to the body of related existing academic literature which has examined the impact of the Internet on traditional models of health care. By specifically focusing on the examples of patient advocates in the area of thyroid disease, this paper will demonstrate that traditional notions of authority in health care are being challenged.

Keywords

INTERNET, AUTHORITY, PATIENT ADVOCATE, HEALTH CARE, MEDICAL, THYROID, DOCTOR.

Introduction

Countless website pages dedicated to health. Blogs, Twitter accounts, Facebook groups, online petitions, radio interviews and message boards. Major health reform in the US and Australia. A substantial rise in chronic illness rates¹. Shortages of doctors, criticism of Big Pharma and medical insurance companies. Masses of information and mis-information.

¹ Data from the Centres for Disease Control and Prevention states that about 133 million Americans—nearly 1 in 2 adults—live with at least one chronic illness. [http://www.cdc.gov/chronicdisease/resources/publications/AAG/chronic.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/chronicdisease/resources/publications/AAG/chronic.pdf)
These are just some of the factors intersecting in recent years, setting the scene for a rise in what are known as ‘patient advocates’ in the health care space. The patient advocates of concern to this paper act for thousands of people, rather than for the individual, and most commonly ‘specialise’ in one type of illness. They generate a substantial following with their command of Internet publication modes, challenge traditional notions of medical authority and they are not going away anytime soon.

As far back (relatively speaking) as 1973, long before the Internet became the pervasive communication technology in the developed world, medical sociologist Marie Haug identified a trend of de-professionalisation of those working in the medical field in post-industrial society largely due to technology opening up access to information. She argued that this came about as a result of technological advancement and that the de-professionalisation is characterised by loss of “their monopoly over knowledge, public belief in their service ethos, and expectations of work autonomy and authority over the client” (1973, p. 197).

More recently, survey data from the US clearly demonstrates that both patients and general Internet users alike are accessing the Internet in large numbers for health information. A 2003 study (Von Knoop, Lovich, Silverstein, & Tutty, 2003) found that 80% of all patients go online for health-related information and that of those within a certain segment (who desire the greatest control in their health care), slightly more prefer to get their health information from the web (46%) rather than from their doctor (45%) (Von Knoop et al., 2003). More recent research by The Pew Internet and American Life Project (Fox and Jones: 2009) reports that 74% of American adults use the Internet and that 83% of them look online for health information (regardless of whether they have a chronic disease or not). However, 86% of the respondents from the most recent survey are also still getting this information from a health professional. Health information and the access to it is just one of the many factors at play in the shifting landscape of health care and the construction of authority.

This paper will look at the social and technological context in which patient advocates have come in to existence and the factors driving their rise to prominence. The focus of this paper is on the United States owing to the majority of existing research and literature originating there. However, the content is also applicable in most instances to other developed nations, due to the global nature of the Internet and similar cultural and medical constructs.
Of key concern to this paper is the impact of the patient advocates on the traditional notions of authority – are they a replacement for more traditional figures of authority or are they complementary? How do they operate and how is their impact felt? Specifically, the paper will look at the example of prominent patient advocates working in the area of thyroid disease to illustrate how traditional notions of authority are being challenged. Research, including a review of relevant academic research and study of advocates’ blogs, websites and message boards, has provided the insights for this paper.

**Traditional Notions of Authority**

A study of the relevant literature reveals that the notion of authority in the medical profession is based on numerous factors: knowledge, training or technical competence, access to information, clinical experience, qualifications and legal authority (for example to write prescriptions or perform operations) (Makoul: 1998, Blumenthal: 2002, Gesler: 1999).

Certain theorists have posited that these factors have eventuated in a particular dominant type of doctor-patient relationship that is variously described as paternalistic (Engel: 1977), authoritarian, asymmetric (Eysenbach and Jadad: 2001), with the resulting relationship resulting in a situation according to The New York Times where “the doctor gives orders and the patient obeys” (Hafner: 1998).

Citing Foucault amongst others, Segal notes that it wasn’t until the end of the 19th century that medical competence was removed from patients and placed in the hands of licensed practitioners due to a rise in certain types of technologies. Previously, Segal states that “Eighteenth century medicine was characterized by the populist notion of ‘every man his own physician’” (Segal, 2009: p.363). Requiring a prescription for medication is quite a recent development, only coming about well into the 20th century (Segal, 2009).

**The democratisation of medical power**

Access and use of information has had substantial coverage in the literature and undoubtedly plays a fundamental role in the changing nature of the doctor-patient relationship. Types of health or medical information can include: scientific research papers, symptom lists, treatment protocols, medication side effects and usage guidelines.

Scholars have identified that factors such as consumerism have seen rapid changes to health care services (Beisecker and Beisecker, 1993: Blumenthal, 1996). This consumerism
has arguably been partly facilitated by the increasing amount of health information accessible by the public which has previously been limited to health professionals. This increasing access to information has resulted in a change to the medical-knowledge gap between health professionals and the public (Hardey: 1999,2001). Lee hypothesises that the information availability of the Internet “facilitates the breakdown of health professionals’ monopolies over their own knowledge base” (Lee, 2008: p.451).

Gerber and Eiser (2001: 2) suggest that with information from the Internet, patients “potentially have a different position in the decision-making process; possessing both preferences and knowledge prior to any physician contact”, however they acknowledge that having this information does not automatically mean that the patient will want to participate in decision-making processes. Similarly, Segal cautions against making a direct link between information availability and the “empowered patient” (Segal, 2009), however it will be clear when this paper looks at the case of thyroid patient advocates that many of the issues surrounding consumers’ increasing access to information (including issues of information credibility) are significantly minimised.

Nevertheless, it is clear that information availability is leading to a challenge of medical authority, at least in regards to the knowledge gap. Lee argues that use of the Internet “may strengthen people’s ability to question health professionals and increase people’s skepticism about health professionals”. (2008: p. 461).

Other factors contributing to a democratisation of medical power include the ability of patients to order medications on the Internet without a prescription (often, this is perfectly legal depending on which country the pharmacy is in and which country the recipient is in) and the ability to order diagnostic tests over the Internet in numerous countries without a doctor’s involvement. These activities were possible before the Internet, however it is not likely that they would have been performed on such a significant scale.

Some scholars suggest that a substantial cultural shift, mainly due to the effects of the Internet, is taking place, transforming the traditional doctor-patient relationship into something more akin to a partnership in many cases (Crooks, 2006), making consumers more critical and “aware that doctors are not ‘gods’, but human beings who make errors” (Anderson, Rainey and Eysenbach, 2003: p.72). Gesler (1999: p.22) contends that “power relationships can be contested and difference can be made into a positive force for good”. Makoul (1998) developed a conceptualisation identifying two types of patients: physician-reliant and self-reliant, however both of these still involve the doctor to differing extents.
To these two types, this paper identifies a third type that is almost completely independent of doctors: the self-treating patient. It is this third type of patient where the influence of the patient advocates and social networks can most clearly be identified.

McCabe Gorman and den Braber (2008) have identified the emergence of Health 2.0: content combined with communities, as part of a major cultural change to include patients as integral partners in health care. Continuing on from this, they also predict that Health 3.0 and 4.0 will both emerge in the near future which will build on this collaboration model.

**Thyroid Disease, Patient Advocates and Patients – a case study**

As covered in the Introduction, this paper is concerned only with the patient advocates who represent thousands of patients in relation to a specific disease and will look at two types of patient advocate: the self-described advocate and an advocate that is one by default, in this case moderators on popular message board Real Thyroid Help (www.forums.realthyroidhelp.com).

In the United States, thyroid disease is estimated to affect somewhere between 27 and 60 million (Smoot: 2009 and Shomon, nd) people in some form or another and it appears to affect five times as many women as men (Smoot, 2009).

There are a number of prominent patient advocates operating in the United States and the United Kingdom. This paper will look at three of them in detail: Mary Shomon and Janie Bowthorpe from the US and Sheila Turner from the UK.

Mary Shomon is the most high profile, writing for the New York Times-owned About.com, establishing the “Save Natural Thyroid Coalition” which uses Facebook to communicate. She regularly uses Twitter, manages message boards and has published six books on the topic. Her motto is “We’re patients...**not** lab values! We deserve every chance to feel and live well!” (Shomon, nd).

Janie Bowthorpe, who has recently criticised Mary Shomon for her perceived harsh stance against patients self-treating their thyroid condition, is a self-described “radical”. She set up the now-defunct **Stop the Thyroid Madness** message boards, has published the book **Stop the Thyroid Madness**, regularly blogs, writes to pharmaceutical companies on behalf of patients and interviews experts for online radio.
In the United Kingdom, the most prominent patient advocate is Sheila Turner who founded Thyroid Patient Advocacy UK (TPA UK - http://www.tpa-uk.org.uk/). The situation in the UK is considered to be more difficult than in other countries for patients who do not respond to traditional treatment, with National Health Service doctors being ordered not to prescribe certain medications and common diagnostic testing being refused.

The last example of patient advocacy of concern to this paper is an unofficial form, provided by forum moderators on the Real Thyroid Help message boards. Although the moderators are not self-described advocates, they are by default since they provide moral support, maintain “good doctor” lists and disseminate information.

All patient advocates have one important factor in common: they are themselves thyroid patients who have spent years navigating a complex disease and even more complex and frustrating medical systems in their respective countries. This imbues them with authenticity and gravitas in the patient community. Data from the Pew Research study identifies that many Internet users seeking health information are looking “to compare their options...and to find the “just-in-time someone-like-me” who can aid their decision making” (Fox and Jones: 2009).

Following are specific details of how and why patient advocates challenge traditional notions of authority:

- **Authenticity** as detailed previously, which leads to trust – a different currency than that which traditional authority figures trade in.

- **Specialisation** Unlike doctors (even specialists), patient advocates mostly specialise in one disease type, meaning that in many cases they know more about that disease than a general practitioner. They may be considered a non-qualified expert.

- **Access to Information** Because of their position, advocates often have access to information that others do not, for example research papers, policy papers, articles by doctors.

- **Information dissemination** Advocates often publish quite complex information in accessible language via their website or blog. Because of their authenticity and the resulting trust, the often-cited issue of information reliability when it comes to health information from the Internet is substantially minimised since it has been assessed and filtered by the advocate “expert” before it is published.
- **Access to Experts** Due to their position, advocates are in contact with scientific experts and doctors – they can usually bring any information they receive from those experts to the patients, often with online radio interviews or articles published on their website or blog.

The nature of advocacy revolves around some form of ‘opposition’ to a prevailing societal norm. The very content the thyroid advocates communicate to their followers is often controversial and is not usually endorsed by the prevailing medical authorities. For example, TPA UK have taken a strong stance against the Royal College of Physicians’ denouncement of a particular type of thyroid medication (arguably without scientific basis) and are currently campaigning to defend the medical licence of Dr Sarah Myhill, a particular doctor who chooses “alternative” methods to treat patients.

In another direct attack on the mainstream medical community, Janie Bowthorpe rails against “heavy handed control of your medication”, the fact that patients stumble from “one uninformed doctor to another” and “Big Pharma apathy” (Bowthorpe: 2010)

A review of the Real Thyroid Help forums and comments on advocates’ blogs reveals that from the perspective of patients, there are numerous reasons why they have responded to patient advocates:

- **Free access to a wealth of information that is easy to comprehend**
- **Access to a global like-minded supportive community**
- **Immediacy of responses (either from advocates or other patients)**
- **Relative anonymity**
- **Difficulty in accessing an understanding doctor** This may lead the patient to rely on fellow patients for advice. They can also access “good doctor” lists maintained by the advocates.
- **Financial considerations** Rather than having to see a doctor to source information, this can be gathered on the Internet. Advocates (in some cases) also provide information about ordering medications over the Internet and ordering diagnostic tests. Indeed, numerous researchers have stated that the Internet is more convenient, accessible and less expensive than health professionals in the United States (Cline & Haynes, 2001; Fox & Rainie, 2000).
Newer Forms of Authority do not necessarily replace traditional ones

What are the results of the increased availability to information and efforts of patient advocates within the social nature of the Internet? A review of the relevant academic literature and some of the threads on Real Thyroid Help indicates that the following effects emerge:

• Patients question traditional authority figures From outright criticism of particular doctors to more lighthearted sarcasm (refer to Appendix A), patients are challenging the basis for inferred authority.

• Doctor-patient interactions change Patients may ask more questions, take in Internet-sourced information and take a more partnership-oriented approach.

• Patients feel more confident about their condition They are able to make decisions about their treatment after reading information on the Internet (Suggs, 2006). Seckin (2006) noted that a continuous exchange of information and emotional support facilitated by the Internet increased patients’ sense of empowerment and efficacy.

It is important to note that there are limitations to the challenges placed on traditional medical authority by patient advocates and the changing context within which it operates. Patients may need to be at a particular stage of their treatment to be receptive to any communication from advocates and of course, may reject that communication.

Importantly, Broom (2005, p. 334), noted,

"The reaction of some specialists to the apparent threat of a disruption to the lay-expert divide within the consultation is to create a relationship dynamic whereby the patient feels “bad” for attempting to understand or question the information being provided by the specialist. This produces a complex process of contesting, redefining, and, in some cases, reinforcing the dominance of the passive patient role in the treatment process."

There is a lack of data to conclusively indicate whether patients are now having less appointments with their doctors due to this challenge of their authority. This and the
demonstration in this paper that the basis on which authority is inferred is different between doctors and patient advocates indicates that patient advocates are a new and different type of authority in health care and that therefore they cannot replace doctors. Also, doctors, unlike patient advocates, can prescribe all types of medication, perform physical exams and perform operations.

Conclusion
Patient advocates directly and indirectly challenge traditional forms of authority in health care. Their impressive use of Internet publication modes has facilitated their emergence and growing influence. However, they are not able to replace these forms of authority as each form of authority is built on quite specific factors that cannot be transferred. The extent to which the patient-doctor relationship is being transformed is debatable although there is clearly a shift occurring. As long as certain cultural and legal constructs remain in place, for example the ability for qualified professionals to perform operations and prescribe medication, patient advocates cannot be considered a replacement for qualified medical professionals.

New knowledge about how patients use the Internet in their health care management has implications for the development of health care policies and practices, with the possibility of improving levels of health care and a more common partnership approach in the doctor-patient relationship emerging.
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APPENDIX A – REAL THYROID HELP FORUM THREAD

1. Excerpts from the thread “The doctor’s wall of Shame – Your experiences?”


User ‘mpw’:

#1 How about this one (in writing)-

“I don’t share your enthusiasm (sic) for educating myself further”.

----

User and moderator ‘crystal lyn’:

Me- “I feel bad”

Doc- “you look nice in the hospital gown”.

Doc. “the only thing that is going to help is to dig a six foot hole”.(took me a minute that he was telling me to die.)”

Doc.- “I can tell you’re not anemic because your tongue is too red.” This doc. had a tongue fetish for sure.

----

User ‘lesa’:

A specialist in a teaching hospital told me I was too sensitive to how my body works... after she saw for herself that my breasts were leaking.

I hadn’t breastfed for over 10 years. (high prolactin...I didn’t know that was a thy. symp. till recently)

Several doc’s refused to test my hormones because of my age.(mid to late 30’s)

The one who finally did still wrote the script for zoloft and a week later a message on home phone says “you’re tests are positive for menopause, come in to discuss HRT options”.

(not peri but early men. or premature ovarian failure she said)...so, a diagnosis at 40(I
still cycle at times though and I’m 48 now.)...

why didn’t they know to check my thyroid? (eary meno. is a thy. symptom I also didn’t
know about till recently...and this happened not long after I quit smoking)

I get copies of my tests now...it’s not like before when I thought they were God-like and
all-knowing.

----

User ‘cindy’:

First visit to Endo.

Me: I have muscle soreness and pain. Could that be from the Hashi’s?

Endo: No, that’s not related.

Then a few minutes later he gives me a printed flier with the symptoms of Hashi’s. One
of the symptoms listed on it was muscle soreness and pain.

Maybe he should read it sometime.
APPENDIX B – JANIE BOWTHORPE BLOG POST EXAMPLE

http://www.stopthethyroidmadness.com/2010/04/17/10-reasons-thyroid-patients-are-frustrated-angry/

10 reasons many thyroid patients are still frustrated, angry, and sick

It’s a continuing travesty, and you see it in patient groups.

i.e. many patients still find themselves sick and disabled, stumbling miserably from one uninformed doctor to another...in spite of the wonders of natural desiccated thyroid, the testimony of changed lives, the education of patients thanks to the STTM website & book, and a small but growing body of wise doctors who seem to be “getting it”,

So what’s the problem?? It lays with our doctors and the entire medical profession.

1. Heavy-handed control over your medication: You go to pick up your prescription, and find your medication has been lowered by your doctor without your agreement or knowledge, as happened to Terry here (scroll down to find her post).

2. Ignorance about adrenal fatigue and treatment: You clearly have an adrenal problem, and one doctor dismisses its existence, another doctor poo-poos the saliva test, another doctor tells you cortisol supplementation is dangerous, another doctor thrusts all his herbal supplements at you, another doctor thinks that 5 or 10 mg cortisol is enough... and on and on and on.

3. Dismissing the Ferritin test: You want to know what your ferritin is, but the doctor’s nurse underscores that they’ve already checked your iron levels, so there’s no need for more testing.

4. Dismissing you: You are wise thanks to reading, researching and living in your own body, yet your doctor calls you a problema¬tic patient on your charts, dismisses you, or gets angry.

5. RT3 huh? You have strong suspicions that your Reverse T3 is too high thanks to adrenal fatigue, low ferritin, undiagnosed gluten issues, or other reasons, yet this doctor refuses to test you, that doctor says an RT3 excess is rare.

6. Look at me! Look at me! You make an appointment with that great doc who has a fabulous website/book and who shouts that he uses desiccated thyroid with a big smile... yet any or all of the above and below occurs with him/her or his “trained” associates.
7. Continued worship of the TSH lab test: Too many doctors still think the TSH lab test is from God Almighty. So when you finally start to feel well on desiccated thyroid with a TSH at zero or below...WHAM...you must lower your meds because you are somehow “hyper” in spite of no symptoms to match.

8. Pharmaceutical addicts: You mention your lingering hypothyroid symptoms, and you are banded with anti-depressants, anti-anxietal meds, statins, BP pills, pain tablets, acid reflux pills, calcium for your thinning bones...instead of understand that these are ALL side effects of poor treatment or undiscovered issues.

9. The country you live in: The desperation of UK thyroid patients is deep thanks to a thyroid association and a College of Physicians which tightens the screws if a doctor dares to prescribe a life changing medication with T3 in it. Or just as frustrating, having a government which forbids desiccated thyroid to arrive to you in the mail.

10. Reformulations and Big Pharma apathy: Forest Labs turned one of the most popular and effective desiccated thyroid brand, Armour, into a pill with too much cellulose and too little sucrose, causing a massive return of symptoms in many, sooner or later. RLC also reformulated their Naturethroid, and though some patients still do well on it, others do miserably, and we are left wondering WHAT to take. (Thank God for Erfa’s Canadian “Thyroid”, but will we be able to continue with this fabulous desiccated thyroid product?)

And there are more reasons you might want to bring up in the Comments part of this post.

So you see, it’s no wonder so MANY patients feel forced to self-treat, yet they are also condemned for doing so. I refuse to condemn them for exactly the reasons above. Petty. All I ask is that we all try to find a good doc, but it may be quite hard when you consider all the above.

All-in-all, we still have a way to go, baby, and especially with the doctors we try so hard to get help from...but can’t.
Fashion Blogs: the new member in fashion industry

By Chi Zhang
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Abstract
Fashion blog and bloggers has taking place in fashion industry. As new gatekeepers of fashion knowledge, fashion bloggers are influences the public opinions of fashion and new fashion trend. Also, the advantage of time effectiveness of blog has influenced the traditional publishing industry, especially fashion magazines. The influence of fashion blogs has not stope, fashion logos have become a new marketing tool where designers use to receive feedbacks of their new trend. The extremely large number of visitors of fashion blogs has attracted eyes of advertisers, and made it new place advertising, just like the advertising on the bus in the old days. The effectiveness of blogs and the popularities of fashion blogs have made blogger become a new career.

Keywords
BLOG • PUBLISHING • FASHION • ONLINE MEDIA • MARKETING

Introduction
Those fashion bloggers has made their way to the forefront of fashion news and gossip. They have become fashion icon with thousands of flowers and their blogs have no less then 10,000 hit daily. Bloggers such as Susie Lau the creator of Style Bubble, Bryan boy, Garance Dore, Sartorialist's Scott Schuman and creator of Jak & Jil blog Tommy Ton are all given front-row seat at famous designer's shows, like Chanel, Dolce & Gabbana and Prada. They also appear on well-known fashion magazines such as Vogue US, Harper's Bazaar and Ella. Not to mention how many times there have been a news articles or interviews about them on each news paper, news website. Blog as a communication tool has become a sign of the changing communication. The fast and emotional two-way dynamic communication nature of web blog has pushed blog (in this article, fashion blog in particular) to a new level, where it is a communication and marketing tool that cannot be neglected. This article focus on the influence of fashion blog to the industry, analyses the nature of fashion blog in communication, compare it with traditional fashion journalism and magazines. The article will also explore how fashion blog used as a marketing tool and analyses what was does the success of fashion blogs has bought to bloggers.
Fashion style

Solomon (2006) defines fashion as “the process of social diffusion by which a new style is interpreted as a context dependent code, and then adopted by a group of consumers”. As Rickman and Cosenza (2007) analysed, “fashion contains all types of cultural phenomena including adornment, clothing and art, music and architecture”. Based on Solomon's definition of fashion, Rickman and Cosenza outlined, “‘a’ fashion refers to a particular combination of attributes”, and to be “in style” means “some reference group positively evaluates the combination”. In an analysis of Simmel (1971), Barnard (2002) reports that “without the need for union and the need for isolation, there can be no fashion”, Rickman and Cosenza (2007) then analysed that “individuals must possess the desire to be part of the larger whole, society, and also part from the society”. Barnard (2002) implies that “individuals ‘in style’ communicate to referent others, in a code manner, their inner feeling toward society”. Based on all above, Rickman and Cosenza (2007) point that “although style has morphological variability, it can be consistently defined as a manner of expression of a particular individual or group.

Blog

The channels for communicating have increased speedy in the past five years, society has adapting with it and finding new way to use this channels to communicate (Allen, 2010). Blog, as a particular form of online communication, it draws like-minded people into cohesive, stable and relatively insular forms of community (Hodkinson, 2007). Recently, there has been an increase of the use of individual use of web logs (blogs) among Internet users. Hodkinson (2007) point out that “the vast majority of blogs are created, maintained and centred upon a single individual rather then a group”. Generally, most popular blogs were characterised by their author’s passion if a particular issue or topic (2005). Audiences of such blog are group of people with the same interests or even similar aged as the author of the blog.

“Blog is media”, as Richard Jalichandra stated in the presentation based on the 2009 State of Blogosphere report produced by Technorati (2009), in fact, blog is a media that provide two-way communication. Blog accepts readers to post comments and provides links that link readers to other blogs. This conversational based communication cycle is call blogosphere, and it is one of the fastest growing areas of new content on the Internet (2005). As a fast growing media, blogs is now a strong and indispensable media with a
rising class of professional bloggers (Technorati, 2009). According to the 2009 State of Blogosphere report, produced annually by Technorati, 28% fell into the general designation of professional bloggers. This article will focus on fashion blogs.

**Fashion blog and Fashion magazine**

In essay Gatekeeper and knowledge diffusion in the fashion industry, Huage (2006) stated that knowledge transmits through “pipeline”. He pointed out that fashion companies need deliver information of their recent development and looks of their latest trends though the “pipeline” to consumers, at the same time, consumers also need the “pipeline” to receive information. Therefore, according to Huage, “media play an important role in the information diffusion of new trend style”. This paper will focus on fashion magazine, as it is part of traditional printed media. Before fashion blog had attracted public attention, the interpreter power was only hold by few fashion editors (Allen, 2010), Huage (2006) describes such interpreter as “knowledge gatekeeper”, and they play the role as mediator between producers and consumers. Editors of mainstream fashion magazines were gatekeepers of fashion ideas and they had power to interpret what is “in style”. The rising popularity of fashion blogs has made those fashion bloggers also become “gatekeepers”. Allan (2010) argued that “the Internet has not revolutionised the way we communicate, the advance in communication technology has facilitated the evolution of our communication practice”. In other word, blog provide a conversational two-way communication, and it is an evolution of one-way communication that was provide by traditional printed media (magazines). Bloggers as gatekeepers uses their blog as “pipeline” to communicate with readers and shares a more personal idea of fashion. Because the nature of blog enables reader to common on blog articles, it engages reader into a personal conversation with the writer of the blog, which is a more interactive communication compare to magazines.

Magazine editors worked carefully with educated writers, fashion journalists and professional photographers before they publish any document or visual elements, the use of langue and meaning of words in communication has discussed by precisely before the document published (Allen, 2010). Blogs are popular because everyone can express their opinion through it and share with the public, although blog is media, it is not as processional as traditional media. Misspelling and evidence of the lack of respect of conventions of grammar are common mistakes in blog articles. Journalist has to pass
a long strict apprenticeship and slowly built their reputation, Allen (2010) believes the development of Internet has result in lowering of the entry level to publishing opinions on any subject to the public. He also point out that it is also the informal but emotional writing and the conversational nature of blog that attractive to readers. Blog is more of an online diary for bloggers, for fashion bloggers, they shares not only fashion opinion but personal feelings as well, fashion bloggers such as StyleBubble’s Susie Lau are also share their shopping experiences and favourite shops around their local area. As Allen (2010) stated in his article, “blogging connects with people on a very personal and emotional level”. The informal and conversational writing style of fashion blog has made the communication personal; readers or information receivers communicate using their personal computers or mobile phone. According to Allen, “the combination of these two elements makes this ‘broadcast’ voice connect on an emotional level”, this emotion-involved connection between blogger and reader “transforms the communication into an active relationship”.

Time effectiveness plays an important role in news media, blog dose have an advantage in time effectiveness. Normally, it takes weeks or even month of prepare before a fashion magazine to be published. The process involves copy edited, photo shoot, design and set type and lot of other process. With the Internet, blogging is more convenient compare to magazine publishing, recently, in the Dolce & Gabbana spring/summer 2010 runway, well known fashion bloggers were invited to the front row, computers were provide for them, in that case, few minute after the runway, looks of the brand’s new trend is posted freshly online. The designer would receive feedback or reactions from reader (also fashion consumer) through those fashion bloggers in a very short time.

New marketing tool

Simon (1977) mentioned one of the immutable rules for business management is “every company must make decisions that reduce risk”. He explained that companies rely on suitable plan that provides valuable information of the changing dynamic customer and business environments. Forecasts are one effective way of receiving valuable knowledge, especially information of consumers. According to Hamm (2006), “shortening forecasting cycles, spotting shifts in demand, and fine-tuning your company to deliver to market in weeks, not months is the key survival in the dynamic multichannel world”. Rickman explains forecasting is “prediction of the how, why and motivation that drive customers to
behave, shop and buy”. Other then a “pipeline” of fashion knowledge, fashion blogs is also an effective medium for fashion forecast. Fashions blogs can be used as research tool for brands, companies and designers can receive valuable feedbacks of their product before the final design of that product is completed (2005). Fashions bloggers such as Susie Lau was invited to designers’ show room constantly, and write reviews in her blog StyleBubble. com, with a daily view of 10,000 people, designers can receive feedbacks of consumers though Susie in a short time. Some large company have their own blog, according to the Economist reveals, 80% customers of Ford in America research their possible purchase online before they arrive at the showroom (2005). The director of new media at GM and the responsible person of the company’s blog operation, Michael Wiley point out that “in a time when it is traditionally difficult for a company to have a normal conversation with stakeholders, blog have made it possible to have a direct line with the general public” (2005). For large companies, blog is a direct medium where they can receive valuable knowledge of their consumers, and that information is quality to be used for their business planning. International brand like American Apparel has bought advertising space in several popular fashion blogs, such as Garance Doré, The Sartorialist and Fashiontoast. Each one of the blog has viewers up to 10,000 daily, this is more benefit then having a billboard advertisement.

For small companies, individual fashion blogs are more convenient; it is a cheap and quick marketing research tool. Small companies and designers normally have fewer funds for advertising. As mentioned above, the nature blog is it provides links that leads readers to other blogs. Currently, local designers are having link at popular fashion blogs, or have their name and brand name hyperlinked when bloggers mention them. In that case, based on the large number of views of those popular fashion blogs, it would known by consumers and will link consumers to the designer’s webpage or their own blogs. Susie Lau has recently posted a article about the Melbourne based designers Clea and Nathan and their brand “Limedrop”, while mentioned the brand in her blog, Susie made the name of the brand hyperlink so readers of her blog can easily check out the Australian local design.

**Processional fashion blogger**

With the unstoppable rising popularity of blogs, and wile blogging become one effective marketing tool, blogger has become a new born occupation. According to the 2009
State of Blogosphere report produced by Technorati (2009), “there is a rising class of professional bloggers”, the statement shows that of all respondents, 9% were found to be self-employed bloggers in which blogging is the primary objective of the business, and overall, 17% reported that blogging is a primary source of income (Technorati, 2009). The statement also shown a high education level of a 75% of bloggers have college degrees, and 40% of them have worked in traditional media, out of these bloggers who has tracional media working experiences, 40% have worked in magazine. The data shows that there is chances of improve the fact that blog posts are having spelling and lack of respect for the conventions of English grammar, based on high education and professional media (even journalist) experiences.

As the 2009 State of Blogosphere report produced by Technorati (2009) has found that for 17% bloggers, blogging is their primary income, and the research has found that 40% of processional bloggers monetise their blog with display advertisements, compare to 2008, there is an increases of 12%. Others bloggers, 36% have affiliate links and 8% was paid for posting. As mentioned above, international clothing brand American Apparel has display advertisements on quite a few of popular fashion blogs. Small numbers of professional bloggers has start make income out of their blog. Some fashion bloggers also accept by the mainstream fashion industry and been commissioned of their work. For example, the London based fashion blogger, the creator of StyleBubble.com, Susie Lau is currently a Commissioning Editor of Dazed Digital, and has been invited to their product launches (Allen, 2010). Celine, DKNY, Gap and Burberry have commissioned illustrator Garance Doré (creator of Garance Doré,), and photographer Scott Schuman (the creator of The Sartorialist) for their works (History, 2009). The success of those fashion blogs has created opportunities for those blogger an entry to the fashion industry. And fashion blogs has become a part of fashion industry.

Conclusion

Fashion blog and bloggers has taking place in fashion industry. As new gatekeepers of fashion knowledge, fashion bloggers are influences the public opinions of fashion and new fashion trend. Also, the advantage of time effectiveness of blog has influenced the traditional publishing industry, especially fashion magazines. The influence of fashion blogs has not stoped, fashion loges have become a new marketing tool where designers use
to receive feedbacks of their new trend. The extremely large number of visitors of fashion blogs has attracted eyes of advertisers, and made it new place advertising, just like the advertising on the bus in the old days. The effectiveness of blogs and the popularities of fashion blogs have made blogger become a new career. The technology is still developing; the communication system will continue to change, the evolvement of blog from casual to professional has just start, it will be interesting to see the future of blogs especially fashion blogs, to observe changes with the rising number of advertisements posted on blogs.

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Twitter Wave Will Drown The World?

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Abstract

One of the hottest waves online is “social media”, which is a community-based interacted forum, that allow users to build on connections, create content, share ideas and information. The biggest social networks are including blogs, Wikis, MySpace, Facebook, iTunes, Flickr, YouTube, Photobucket and Twitter, among these the microblogging websites “Twitter” is growing at an amazing rapid rate. As an emblematic icon of mainstreaming social networking platforms in the English world, “Get up, Breakfast, Email and then how people interact and corporate in the community, the online searching and the business environment.

The purpose of my article will be focusing on Twitter studies aims to deeply exam the impact on these shifts. I will investigate how the social media with technologies development to dominate the society, to give public more power of speech, to change the way we research and communication.

This article relates close to digital research and publishing, as it will argue about social media covers, their growth and knowledge, their revelation, social implication and leveraging, which is an essential conceptual part involved within digital publishing and ideas. Furthermore, changes in political election, commercial promotion, news released, public freedom of speech and search engine issues will be defined based on the roles changing in the more and more sociable and interact publishing and marketing tasks.

An ethnographic methodology of a Twitter involved cases studies will be confirmed as the primary sources of evidence to exam that, as the easily sharing information and participating in online conversation, the web and return are less about minority and more about majority. I will also complete research on the literary sources, analyze both the published books, papers, articles and the online data, readings, journals, blogs, wikis. And it is necessary to attach the textual and artefactul online communications of websites, visible productions, and chats combined with a net technique based questionnaire in order to discern social media users’ attitude.

In addition, I will hypothesise that in relation to the social media such as Twitter, the dignity of traditional media has gone gradually Every grass roots easily accesses with right of making their real voice freely, although one people sound is week, but when thousands people are grabbing together, there will be a great power.
Consequently, in conclusion, Twitter wave is now sweeping the world. Is this wave can be seen as a national exercise? What Twitter changed is not only election? Is Twitter a new battlefield of commercial society? Dose Twitter give public own mouth? Will Twitter be mixed with Google? So will Twitter wave drown the world? The answer is not about Yes or No, is about “changing” and “participation”. To us, it is incredibly importance to know what has been changed so we can better participate in.

**Keywords**

DIGITAL MEDIA • NEW MEDIA TECHNOLOGY • SOCIAL MEDIA • TWITTER

Nowadays almost everyone has cell phones. It makes communication faster and easier. A lot has been changed in our lives such as writing process. Only a few years ago, just after online users were finished celebrating the historic birth of Blog which had a “magic” of making an ordinary person become a sparkle focus in the spotlight. Then, today those faithful blog fans start to excite once again, they find out there is no need to sit in front of computer we can still show our own words to families and friends anywhere and anytime.

Yes, Blog is not fresh anymore for quite a long time. Twitter has been spreading over the world turbulently. This is mainly characterized by “simple, quick, short”. 25th Aug, Time Magazine announced Top 50 Websites for 2009. Twitter ranked in the sixth place, which is quite higher than the famous Google and Facebook. And at almost same time, according to Global Language Monitor (GLM-an algorithms company in Texas), the word “Twitter” has became the most used English word this year. Twitter has had quite a year, its growth rate has ever up to amazing 1382%, users were upon ten million per time.

What is Microblogging? What magic it depends on to attract such many adherents? How it will change the modernists and society? Where the future for it?

**Twitter - National exercise?**

June 25, 2009, when the sudden death news of the world’s greatest pop stars - Michael Jackson had not been confirmed, many his fans had already rushed into the hospital where
Michael got treated according to the information Twitter released. In an hour of the news unfolded, Twitter appeared 66000 Michael Jackson related comments —5,000 per minute at peak— put such a demand on the site that the net slowed considerably. “Twitter brought into sharp focus the scale of the world’s shock and sadness”, said Pete Cashnore.

Britney Spears likes telling her fans on Twitter what bread she ate today, which shop she went.

American talk show queen Oprah’s twitter account accumulated 1 million followers within just 28 days form its login. When she asked how to catch cooties for her dogs, she got more than 10 thousand feedbacks in very soon.

But the actor in the movie Silence of the lambs-Anthony Hopkins who is now fighting with cancer is feeling annoying. He has been “dead” several times on Twitter, thus he has to appear personally and clear up, tell people: I am alive.

According to the latest numbers from ComScore, Twitter.com attracted 79.4 million unique visitors worldwide in March, 2010, at 316 percent increase from a year ago. But back to 3 years ago, the founder of American Blogger.com Evan Williams built Twitter as he inspired by his good friend Jack Dorsey’s creative ideals. “We wanted to capture that in the name—we wanted to capture that feeling: the physical sensation that you’re buzzing your friend’s pocket. It’s like buzzing all over the world”, said by Jack Dorsey. The definition of “Twitter” is “chirps from birds”, to extend in meaning of everyone’s express desire and sharing desire. The core is using curt and optional, no more than 140 characters displayed on the author’s profile page and to tell the word what you are thinking. Users can deliver what they are thinking about or transfer the latest news as they wish. If other users are “following” you, all of your chatter and nagging (known as tweets) will be seen instantly.

As a site with only two year history, Twitter has already become a myth like a hot beam. Its performance also never made people disappointed during the repeated contingency.
For example, previously, two luxury hotels in Mumbai attacked by terrorists and an U.S. Airways jet plunged into the Hudson River in New York. Twitters kept publishing the latest progress, videos and so on. Someone hereby said: “Is Twitter the CNN of the New Media of the New Media Generation (post on TechCruch)?” One of Twitter investors, John Borthwick even more optimistically thinks if Twitter can be the indispensable option for people searching emergency news and talk, it will to beat Google.

But there are someone disputing the dependability of Twitter as it’s full of mass fragment information. A site editor who served Associated Press (AP) before said “The information on twitter is ex parte, it do not give others chance to pursuit.”

But this can not hamper Twitter maintaining crazy. The statistics of Business week May, 2009 showed that, nearly 50 CEOs who find tweets a personal and professional delight which was almost tripped compared with 18 not even a year ago. Among English and American political leaders, Department for Children, School and Families Master-Ed Balls, London Mayor- Boris Johnson and The England Prime Minister’s wife- Sarah Brown are all faith users for Twitter. The last American presidential election is further pushing Twitter standing on a commanding elevation in internet.

**Twitter – what it changed is not only election?**

2008, Barack Obama was elected the 44th president of the United States, accomplishing an American dream as a historic victory of the first African-American to win the presidency. His accomplishment represents the evolution and development of advertising, marketing and public relation tools accompanied by the rapid reformation of New Medias and digital technology. US Presidential Election acquires electorates’ loyalty and trust by building the relationship in a closer and more interactive way.

Obama ‘s victory created many firsts: he is the first black chief executive in American politics, he is the first man who didn’t accept money in federal government election
campaign. Even he is called the first “internet president” because of he is likely to become the first president to master mass communication predominance via the internet web 2.0, attracting a large number of grass roots power, just as President John F Kennedy was known as the first television president.

Hillary and Obama both have built a Personal Home Page on Twitter, but finally Obama got 150000+ followers support, but Hillary only got 6000+ followers. After an anatomization, though they both often updated messages. The difference lied in the number of feedback that Hillary forwardly following others was zero, but Obama team did the feedback more than 10 million. It illustrated that Obama’s team were instantaneously tracking their follower movement. When someone indicated some supported emotion, the team would communicate this user by Twitter, so what this supporter felt was “Obama was talking to me!” And which should be mentioned that the number of people that Obama follows is more than the number follows him.

On the contrary, Hillary this side only served Twitter as a one-way issuing platform rather than an intercommunion tool. She didn’t pay close attention on who pay attention on her. The most forceful Twitters, the heaviest communication they had in contents. As long as long-term interaction formed at Twitter, it will be transferring into value return.

**Twitter- is it a new battlefield of commercial society?**

Jonathan was waiting his flight at New York airline terminal, and then he wrote down some concerns via Twitter. Within 1 minute, he was amazed by receiving JetBlue company email which was for answering his questions. Formerly Jetblue is using scanning systems and searching tools to real time follow up the Twitter users, in order to solve the problems for their customers, such as the inform of flight delay or canceled flight.

Whether buying tickets, consulting hosting problems, don’t need to call JetBlue customer service personnel, instead of directly logging on Twitter, everything can be found. At the same time, Twitter can provide enterprises with users tracking service to shorten
the response time between them and customer demand. It is really based on benefiting customers, and apparently it is the hidden rules why Twitter customer service success.

Twitter developed “brand channel”, on which the enterprises can create their brand pages, as well as establish multi-brands groups where the fans of the same brand can get together. Moreover enterprises can send out their information about new products, promotions. Instantaneity and mass-participation of Twitter platform make a message rapidly spread over groups, teams with same interests. Even interaction will happen within users - they may forward messages to their friends. Many American companies have taken this way. Dell, from March 2007 started using Twitter enterprise platform. Dell's website has 65 Twitter groups. Until now, dell has obtained about 100 million dollars in Twitter sales.

The increased opportunities make company direct contact with consumers, which is advantage to maintenance brand awareness and customer loyalty. If the enterprise itself has the blog, do regular publications and press releases daily, it will be very effective. But if there is no new information source to support their site, it will be too boring to attract followers. The dull, not frequently updated Twitter account is worse than nothing. NBC's official Twitter named TodayShow, their PR professionals only released extreme tedious content. It is not attractive at all for users joining the community and dialogue.

Due to its flaming popularity, every day Twitter receives callings from each big enterprise in require of purchasing its media advertising position. But Twitter does not hope to launch totally exposed hard advertising form and to disturb users browsing experience. Although Twitter has started testing text footer ads, but this is not critical point Twitter concerned.

The more interesting is, Twitter allow individuals make a profit through inserting ads into personal pages, the users can independently invite advertisers buying their advertising places. Their two sides negotiate about time and charge on ads. Twitter only charge 5% as a service fee in order to guarantee the advertisers benefits. Microbloggers and advertisers can both make decision with abundant freedom and self-determination.
under loose Twitter permission situation. These kind of open minds mostly encourage users participation passion and also typically challenge the traditional promotion way the commercial society engaged before.

**Twitter- it gives public own mouth?**

The arrival of media socialization makes every grass roots users has its own “mouth”, without any doubt Twitter is the essential position of “public feelings and opinions”. More and more companies are on track evaluation to control consensus by Twitter. Twitters these real voices can help companies quickly touch consumer psychology, feelings about brands and products, also help understand the latest demand, adopt market trends, forecast public relation crisis.

Comcast, Dell, General Motors, H&R Block, Kodak are regular customers for Twitter. They focus on Twitter reflects the power of new social media in terms of “consumers discuss brands in public”. President of Get Satisfaction, Beck indicated that the real right of speech about brands is gradually transferring into consumers’ hand, due to the power of new technology.

Johnson Company released a video advertising in Motrin.com to promote its pain-killer. However, as a result of improper ideas, the company suffered a strong protest on internet. In the traditional era of Internet, there is not a big scale of communication exit for the feedbacks from net citizen. However Twitter gives “mouth” to them. Only a few days, animadversion aimed on Motrin became the hottest topic on Twitter. Google search results appeared substantive negative information of Motrin. Motrin so embroiled in a public crisis.

By contrast with past, the traditional mainstream medias are used to stand on a dominate position, play a role of master control in communication. But now it seems this dignity of traditional media has gone forever. Every grass roots easily accesses with right of making
their real voice freely, although one people sound is weak, but when thousands people are
grabbing together; therewill be a great effect. Face Twitter this social media, any tiny news
are likely to be immeasurably blowing up.

**Twitter- it will mix with Google?**

Because the air-conditioner is broken, a young woman lived in Chapel Hill, N.C (N.C. a state in North America) waked up. She knows she needs to buy a new air conditioning: good capability, ease to install, reliable and durable, and the price can not be to expensive. She immediately surfs on the Internet, and writes on Twitter: “Help. I need a new air conditioning today; budget should be under around $250. This message was updated automatically. Before long, she got many replies from her friends, some are suggestions about air conditioning dealers and brands and some are suggestions to tell her how to keep cool without air conditioning. And a nationwide chain stores in reply to her twitter: they got $250 air conditioning to sell in the area of Chapel Hill and left her a link.

This is a new way of the search for information online, “search” and “social media” is mixing, a kind of new search mode is on the rise. Information from “whom” in this case did greater impact on creditability rather than information from “where” did. We can shrink search range to those we trust in by social media to establish trusted sources of information. And it depends on how “social” it is.

Does it mean that except the traditional search channels, lots new challenges and opportunities are emerging.

The first wave of search engines just emerged in the surface of the page and content, sorting only based on number that a certain key word showed in page or the Meta tag.

With the birth of Google, search engine focus began to shift from a single page to netting
system. Google not only values a site’s content, it also depends on how many external links pointed to the content. Under the PageRank rules, each link is a “vote” to related page. So the quality of content becomes very important – the relevancy of landing page and key words becomes more and more important.

When links becomes helpful to the accuracy of the search results, what it proved relevancy is helpful. Just like Google values some specific links and content, we value our own friends’ online action rather than strangers. This is where the social media began to change something about search.

In search of 3.0 times, a page may not only depending on the content and links to the content but also depending on your personal contacts. The more frequent people communicate on social network, the more accurate results will be filtrating by social relations, and thereby our users can find more accurate and reliable information.

Some social media websites have already exceed Google in terms of searching specific information. For example, when you want to watch video, you are going to Youtube first or Google? ( Youtube has became the second searching engine in the word)

Originally Twitter just is a way of sending personal state to others, now is evolving into a real time searching for “now”- what is happening now? In the true sense of “Google and Twitter will mix”, those social media such as “Twitter” and “Facebook” finally should be index objects for searching. The existing search engines will constantly optimize rules to satisfy the requirement of “instant search” and “high precision” for people.
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The influence of cultural differences on electronic commerce

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Abstract

With an increasing number of Internet and broadband users, electronic commerce has become flourishing. As the world’s second largest Internet population and a huge potential e-commerce market, China has witnessed a remarkable growth of online shopping. The globalization of the international marketplace was facilitated by the emergence of electronic commerce. In addition, it resulted in an intensive competition. Most researches acknowledge that digital revolution making electronic commerce possible; cultural factors affecting the customer’s purchasing behavior and transactions in electronic commerce. For this reason it is has been necessary to research the influence of cultural factor toward online business. Moreover, given the growing global potential market, it is crucial to understanding the cultural factors that influence the consumer’s purchasing behavior.

This paper will provide a frame-work for exploring cultural influences on consumer’s purchasing behavior in the special case of electronic commerce. Also trying to find how these factors affect consumers in making their purchasing decisions after browsing numerous electronic shopping malls. In addition, two successful online shopping website eBay and TaoBao will be introduced as case studies.

Keywords
DIGITAL MEDIA • PUBLISHING • ELECTRONIC COMMERCE • ONLINE SHOPPING

Marcus and Gould (2000) presents that it is essential to conduct the cultural research under the current of cultural localisation and business globalisation. Loiacono and Lin also assert that having a rich understanding of cultural differences is beneficial for electronic commerce (Loiacono & Lin, 2003).

Digitisation has profound impact on publishing since the late 1980s. One area of the “publishing process that has been deeply affected by the digital revolution is marketing” (Thompson, 2005, p. 315). Digital publishing had affected marketing and service provision. Specifically, digital revolutions are changing companies’ sales model. Some imitate shopping malls by carrying many different types of products, like Amazon.com, which is more than an online bookstore. Other sites are different from traditional model, like eBay, which lets visitors bid on collectibles. Or, shoppers can buy and sell second-hand products,
like the co-op exchange on-line bookshop. Companies have had to go online to meet the needs of consumers and made more effectively to buyers.

Deuze explains that participation is “a principal component of digital culture” and “perhaps solely fueled by private interests”. He explained that “participation as a core element of the currently emerging digital culture also has its roots in “DIY” (do-it-yourself) culture” (Deuze, 2006, p. 69). To customer, the diversified demands can be satisfied. With the development of e-commerce, customers need not to wait for finite time and finite shopping center to choose their commodities. They could not only choose goods on the shelf, but are also more likely to choose or order products according to their own demand.

In contemporary consumer cultures, commerce is increasingly globalization. The corporations are tending to multinational companies; goods are more globally; the exchanges of new forms of commodities such as services and information have become more popular. The Internet offers a platform for manufacturers and customers to conduct business and on-line shopping, making the transmission in globally possible.

According to the survey of Computer Industry Almanac Inc., the worldwide number of internet users surpassed one billion in 2005. Also, there were one hundred million and seventy-six million broadband users in the second quarter of 2005. With an increasing number of internet and broadband users, online shopping has become flourishing.

Sturken and Cartwright present that sharing value (comments) is the recent trends in the emerging modern culture. And “consumption continues to be thought of as both a form of leisure and pleasure and as a form of therapy”(Sturken & Cartwright, 2001, p. 197). It is commonly understood that commodities fulfill emotional needs. On-line shopping meets the need for getting access to different design and more commodities. Customers can get the newest, the latest, and the best merchandise. With a low entrance requirement, small firms and even individual suppliers can set up an electronic shopping web in the digital era, which resulted in electrical shopping malls offer potentially millions of products globally. Therefore, on-line shopping store which follow the mainstream culture have greater success.

As cultural factors influence the development of e-comence, we will discuss what would be influenced by cultural differences.
According to Pereira (1998, p. 3), cultural differences influence consumer behavior, which include “cognitive influences, affective influences, ‘halo effect’ influences, environmental influence and mediating influences. The graph below illustrates this model.

Pereira states that “Halo Effect”, which includes source credibility, product source, communication channels and lifestyles have an increasing important impact to electronic commerce. Benefiting from electronic shopping malls, the commodities available to consumers have become more widely option. Purchasing from on-line shopping malls, consumers can compare their selections from a number of shops available and they can obtain goods with lower prices and higher quality. Regarding lifestyle, it is convenient, saves time and effort.

On the other hand, culture affects web site development. Ever and Day (1997) demonstrate that cultural differences influence the customer’s acceptance and preferences for the shopping web interface. In addition, web site satisfaction refers to the consumer “perception of a well designed web site” (Cyr, et al., 2005, p. 6-7). In terms of site interface, it includes “specific demographics organised according to region, age, culture, gender, and class”(Sturken & Cartwright, 2001, p. 197). Loiacono and Lin (2003) also presented that website quality is a measurement of the influence to revisiting users, which including
“informational, interaction, trust, response time, design (visual) appeal, innovativeness, emotional appeal, integrated communication, business processes, and substitutability.”

Moreover, culture affects Internet marketing. On-line retailing creates real shopping in the virtual world. Two websites, eBay and Taobao, will be introduced as case studies.

Case study

With the development of electronic commerce in China, Taobao became dominant in Chinese online C2C market, controlled as much as 67 percent of the market share in 2005, compared to eBay’s 29 percent (Zazaian, 2006). According to the 2008 China Online Shopping Report, in 2007, 70.4 percent of online customers choose Taobao, while only 8 percent choose eBay (China IntelliConsulting, 2008).

There are several differences between these two online trading companies. Comparing these two sites, we can easily get the reason why Taobao owns larger market share than eBay China in China.

1 Comparison between eBay and Taobao in China Online Market

Web Design

Barber and Badre (2001) presented that website cultural elements are expected to affect the way a user interacts with the site directly. Gommans, et al. (2001, p. 51) also states that “A website has to be designed for a targeted customer segment...Local adaptation should be based on a complete understanding of a customer group’s culture”.

According to Chau, et al. (2002, p. 139), “a global interface may only be achievable when the interface design reflects the cultural nuances of the target audience”; “cultural preferences and biases affect the degree of user friendliness of an interface such as background color, graphics, and spatial orientation. Culture differences may moderate the relationship between the purpose of Internet use and consumers’ attitudes”. And, “significant model differences were found in each of the listed categories and suggest distinctive design preferences across cultures.” (Cyr, et al., 2005, p. 14). Therefore, the quality and quantity of information presented in the wed preferences will affect consumer attitudes and behaviours.

Chau, et al. (2002, p. 139) presented that it is essential to “understand which audiences we are targeting and what their potential cultural responses may be”. They also presented that “localizing a global interface” would be beneficial for the marketing.
For example, western focus on time-conscious life style, as a result, “heavy graphics with long download times are perceived as a nuisance by consumers. Conversely, Asian prefers screens with animated graphics, video, and audio”. Therefore, web interfaces should be designed for different cultural audiences, and there must be some features on the front page that allow the targeted audience to feel at home.

Comparing eBay China and TaoBao websites, Taobao’s website is picture-rich. Taobao used numerous graphics to attract customers. Their front page has been organised into categories with animated graphics, such as “Men”, “Women”, etc. They designed the website according to customers’ likes and dislikes. Conversely, eBay’s website is text-rich. Even though the style makes it look professional, but for a website targeted at young people, friendliness should be considered.

**Communication**

With the development of the Internet, electronic communication has increasingly become the central medium (Thompson, 2005, p. 315). Internet provides a new opportunity for sellers and buyers to conduct the communication and creates a worldwide virtual community beyond the traditional way of communication. Various mechanisms have been proposed and implemented in online customer-to-customer (C2C) market.

Taobao used an online instant messenger called Aliwangwang, which is considered as an effective and satisfying communication system. It provides instant communication between buyers and sellers, and enables buyers to get enough product knowledge in a short time and have chance to negotiate with sellers before making a deal. According to Tongyu Sun (the CEO of TaoBao), “Chinese business men are used to building relations with partners through meeting, chatting, or having dinner before making a deal. The tradition is inherent.” (Chen, et al., 2007). Conversely, there was no instant messenger for direct communication between two parties in eBay china before 2006 (Chen, et al., 2007).

In addition, TaoBao provides online community for users, which people can use it to exchange shopping information and other emotional experiences. Although eBay also has a discussion board, it is less active than Taobao’s. Specifically, there are 27 subject channels in eBay, while Taobao has 76 big channels, which include 10-20 small channels in each of that. There are altogether 3,540 postings in “Buyers” channel of eBay, while there are 162,300 postings in “Buyers” channel of Taobao until 7 June 2008 (Taobao and eBay, 2008). Moreover, Taobao has a much stronger community with numerous loyal customers. Users on TaoBao shared their trading experiences, personal feelings, and comments on
the products they purchased. Taobao brings users “sense of welcome and belonging” and encourages them to “want to be more involved”. Some even feel that Taobao offers not only transactions, but also a culture. (Chen, et al., 2007).

2 Similarity between eBay and Taobao in China Online Market

Reputation System

There are many sites such as eBay and Taobao using reputation systems, which include “the cost of her physical facility and her understanding in the community”(Resnick, et al., 2004). It may influence the final decision of potential transaction partners. These systems collect evaluating information such as feedback comments and rating scores of the sellers from the past buyers and make that information available to the public for future buyers to review. As a result, positive ratings have a significant positive impact on the performance of sellers, while negative ratings have a negative reputation effects. Moreover, seller reputation effects on sales price, number of sales, and total revenue (Ye, et al., 2009).

By reading the seller rating, future buyers can get to know how credible that seller was in the past and determine whether they would make the deal with that seller or choose another seller.

With the development of Internet action sites, “reputation is common knowledge or at least commonly available knowledge.” (Resnick, et al., 2004). Auction sales data collected from eBay shows that “an increase of positive ratings from 0 to 15 resulted in an increase of about 5% in the final sales price”. (Houser & Wooster, 2006). Another study found that “a seller’s overall reputation has significant impact on the buyer’s willingness to purchase (Lucking-Reiley et al., 2007; Melnik, et al., 2005).

According to the study of Ye, et al. (2009), the reputation mechanism of Taobao is similar to that of eBay. Seller ratings are often grouped into three categories: positive, negative and neutral. There is a rating score “calculated for each seller based on total number of positive ratings minus total number of negative ratings”. Negative ratings include “unjustifiable delays in product delivery, inferior product quality, and failure to acknowledge warranties”. Positive ratings include prompt reply, great service (communication, packaging, and shipping), low price and high quality product. In addition, a buyer can give their feedback rating to a seller only after a transaction has been completed between the two parties (Ye, et al., 2009). Users also have the opportunity to leave an on-line text comment and rated individuals can respond to comments that they feel were unfair (Resnick, et al., 2004).
However, Nelson (1970) and Klein (1998) state that the importance of seller rating may decrease when the product specification is standardised and there is no comparison of the product brand. Only when the same sales prices have been given, the higher rating score may help to generate more sale transactions.

Based on my own experience making purchases from Taobao, sellers usually try very hard to avoid negative ratings. The sellers always reply my question about color and size as soon as possible and they offer passionate and patient service. After customers finish the payment online, they send products quickly. Some buyers even make unseasonable requests or have an impatient attitude, yet they still do their best to give a satisfactory reply because they worry about the potential negative ratings that would affect their future sales.

In auction markets, eBay has something similar. The researcher can get measurements in detail, which include positive and negative of the current reputation (Resnick, et al., 2004).

**Conclusion**

In contemporary electronic business, cultural factors have become a crucial and influential aspect in online trading performance. Cultural under the perspective of digitisation is a new issue we need to study because cultural differences influence the development of e-commerce. It also has great impact on how much market share could be possessed. Web design helps customers decide before the transaction, communication influences the customers’ attitude in the process and reputation system and guides them whether or not to have transaction again. They all influence customer’s purchasing behaviour. As a result, having comprehensive understanding of cultural difference and apply it to the practical transaction would beneficial for the development of electronic commerce and help companies make greater promotion.

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