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Automated Content Authorship: The 'Real' Death of the Author

Rochelle Deighton

In September 2007 Professor Philip M Parker obtained a US Patent for a computer-based 'method and apparatus for automated authoring and marketing'. Using this automated process he has listed over eighty-five thousand books on Amazon.com. Many companies have implemented automated publishing processes, however the notion of automated content authorship is less accepted. This article examines issues of authorship in relation to the academic essays of Barthes and Foucault. The author's existence and responsibilities are challenged and the potential outcomes of automated content authorship are addressed.

Key words: automated, author, authorship, Barthes, book creation, computer-based apparatus, content creation, Foucault, INSEAD, patent US 7266767, Philip M Parker, print-on-demand, publishing

Published in 1953, well-known author Roald Dahl wrote a short story (2001) about a man who discovered set parameters to grammatical rules and story telling which enabled him to invent a machine that could create a prize-winning novel in fifteen minutes. Although originally a fictional story, over fifty years later, Philip M Parker (professor at INSEAD, the European Institute of Business Administration) claims to have done just this.

Automated processes—including word processing, formatting and macros—are commonly used in publishing (see Murray, 1995). With an increase in menial tasks now delegated to computers, the applications for automated processes

have grown. These forms of automation have allowed us to concentrate our time and energy on higher thought and the creative process of book creation. In fact, Lonely Planet contracts an automated publishing platform company (Cclauset, 2007) to produce many of their books, allowing fast book production in a market where up-to-date information is crucial.

Despite the many traditional uses of automated processes in publishing it is only recently, with the development of Parker's computer-based apparatus, that automated content authorship has become a reality. This new technology challenges many cultural conventions replacing higher thought and perceived

creativity with mechanical processes. We are left asking; who is the author, who is legally and socially responsible for the content, and what can this process offer that a human author couldn't? Questions of authorship have been raised in many academic debates, including the works of Barthes (1984) and Foucault (1977). Although these debates refer to the author of literary works, their understanding and conclusions can still be applied to the variety of genres created through automated content authorship. This article defines automated content authorship and explores some of the issues relating to the works of Barthes and Foucault. The term automated content authorship is used in this article with particular reference to book publishing. Automated refers to those tasks that are completed without human intervention and content authorship refers to the creation of text itself. In order to gain a better understanding of automated content authorship the most prolific and current application of this process is examined in the following case study.

Case Study

In September 2007 Professor Parker obtained a patent on a method and apparatus to automatically generate books from specific databases and online sources. Certain parameters are manually entered into a genre specific application

within a specially developed computer program. His books are then sold via online bookseller Amazon.com; created, published and printed only once they have been purchased. Not only are his books print-on-demand they are also authored-on-demand. When a customer purchases one of his books the program uses the small amounts of manually entered information to automatically create content from various sources, compiling this information into a book. Book genres published and listed by Parker are 'market studies, health guides, speciality dictionaries, language learning books, reference books' (PhilipMParker, 2007). Although his books have only been quasi-reference, there is also the potential for creating literary works (Inseadofficial, 2008).

The authenticity of this process has been questioned with many people asking if this a hoax (Stbalbach, 2008). With rather vague descriptions from Parker about the process of automated content creation, conjuring imaginative images of futuristic book creation, it is no wonder that this is asked. Although an obvious question, the evidence for the validation of this process is abundant once researched. The first place to gather affirmation would be from Parker himself. Parker explains the process of his development in many articles, interviews and self-published videos (EdgeMaven Analytics; Karabell; PhilipMParker, 2007;

Parker, 2007; Slocum, 2009). Although Parker's computer-based apparatus can conduct equations to produce new information from entered data, it does not however have the ability to provide new and creative thought. The concept of an automated content authorship apparatus that can compile information from sources (rather like a search engine) and can make mathematical predictions (like the formulas one might devise in Excel) is not as far-fetched as originally thought, despite the questionable quality of the end product. Of course, there are also many thousands of Parker's books listed on Amazon.com with reviews from previous purchasers. Among this testimony there are many reviews, articles, Parker's US patent and many other automated content companies. All of this information clearly indicates that automated content authorship is not a hoax and is real with real cultural and legal issues that affect and challenge our views.

Who is the Author?

There are three different types of automated content authorship methods (see Edgemaven Analytics).

1. Compile

Compiling information from a variety of sources into one location (eg a book); working in the same way as a scribe or compiler

2. Summarise

Rewriting information in a condensed form from a variety of sources into one location (eg a book); working in the same way as a researcher or author

3. Draw conclusions

Generating new knowledge and analysing information from a variety of sources to provide new information, eg examining financial data to create a prediction based on trends or formulas.

The above three automated content authorship processes are fundamentally some of the same methods used in manual authorship. Thirteenth century Franciscan monk St Bonaventure listed four different creators of the book: the scribe; the compiler; the commentator; and the auctor, or most similarly to what we know as the modern author (see Bennett, 2005: 39). Parker's automated processes can replicate the roles of three out of four of the creators mentioned by Bonaventure. The commentator is the only method of authorship that remains unique to the human-author.

To address issues of authorship in relation to automated content authorship it is important to first consider the definition of the term author. An author is defined as 'a person who writes a novel, poem, essay, etc' (Macquarie Dictionary, 2005: 90). Parker explains that in automated content authorship a 'computer pretty much does 100% of the work required by

a typical human author' (PhilipMParker, 2007). If the computer is performing the same tasks as a human author, surely the computer must be considered the author. The computer is authoring the work and therefore in the colloquial sense the computer is the author. However there is a vast difference between authoring work and being given the title the author. This title implies great status and responsibility. The term, a person, used in the previous definition, emphasises the importance and authority of the human-author. To label the computer as is to challenge social conventions giving the computer authority to which it cannot be held accountable. Although the computer is authoring the text, the computer cannot genuinely be given the title the author.

Who is Accountable?

Who can be held accountable for the author's responsibilities if the computer cannot be labelled as the author (and in these cases there isn't an author)? The author is responsible for the material that they present and in the case of automated content authorship (where the computer cannot be held accountable) the public has held Parker morally responsible for the work.

Bennett explains that 'the author is able to influence others and is often thought of as having authority over matters of opinion, as being one to be trusted,

even obeyed' (2005: 7). As the author has a large influence on their readership they also have a responsibility to insure accuracy. Most of Parker's texts are reference and are used by students; patients and doctors (Slocum, 2009), presenting incorrect information could potential cause serious consequences.

Legal Issues Echo Target, a blogger from metafilter.com, raises the question 'can he (Parker) be held legally responsible for anything that might turn up in these books?' (2008). Although the computer-based apparatus writes and compiles the information, as they are not human they are not expected to meet the same legal standards. In this case the only party that can be held legally responsible for the content is Parker. Parker has the same responsibilities as any publisher, or editor (Parker lists himself as the editor of these books). Some bloggers say that he has failed in this regard but this still remains to be tested in a court of law.

Foucault refers to discourse as a form of intellectual property (1977: 124). Text and ideas have quite often been referred to as intellectual property, and by borrowing languages, ideas and text from other authors or creators, Parker introduces many legal complications. Although Parker's books are created using rules that technically avoid breaching copyright Parker removed several of his titles from sale after offending Aboriginal language

experts and Aboriginal communities. He was accused of ‘intellectual property violation, taking materials without attribution, and publishing books that contain “such bad scholarship, ridiculous claims, nonsense and stupid howlers that is actually funny”.’ (Gibson 2008).

Quality Issues Although Parker explains that his content authorship process uses the same ‘sources that are used by regular authors’ (Slocum, 2009), the computer cannot distinguish (to the same level as a human-author) the authenticity and usefulness of sources. Murray explains how easily a computer can be ‘trick(ed)... into identifying correct language as incorrect or vice versa’ and the importance in realising ‘that their “advice” is neither infallible nor binding’ (1995: 108). In contrast Parker explains that ‘...many manually (human) authored materials are prone to errors, especially in cases where the work involves a large number of numerical values...’ (Parker 2007: patent).

Generally speaking the quality of online text, in regards to grammar, structure and referencing, is not to the same standard as that of a published book. If large portions of the content of Parker’s books are being produced from online material with little attention paid to accuracy and fact checking, over time our perception of the quality of books may change as automated content authorship

becomes more accepted. As a blogger from metafilter.com voices their concern, ‘every time I search for a niche-topic book, I’m going to wonder ‘is this a real book, written by an expert, or just 250 pages of Google results written by a machine’ (2008). There is a real risk that if the quality of these texts is not improved automated content authorship and indeed book publishing in general may lose credibility.

Foucault and Society:

a New Perspective

Our views of authorship and intellectual property rights have changed considerably over time. Prior to the development of the printing press discourse was not seen as a possession, or product but rather, freely available information and ideas to share and build upon (see Foucault, 1997: 124). Stories were spread by word-of-mouth; authors were quite often unknown and very rarely attributed. Foucault explains the changes in our society in relation to the author. Information was circulated and shared ‘without any question of the identity of their author’. ‘Their anonymity was ignored’ (1997: 125). It wasn’t until scientific texts became more proliferate, with new ideas and explorations, that the author’s name became an authority. Suddenly acknowledgement and recognition became very important as authored content became an asset.

Foucault goes on to explain that a text's '...status and its manner of reception are regulated by the culture in which it circulated' (Foucault, 1977: 123). Society viewpoint has changed, seeing the value of ownership over text. For this reason, the methods that Parker's automated content authorship apparatus uses could be seen as theft. However this viewpoint is beginning to change with new forms of media and social movements. Free source software and shared content is proliferate on the internet. But in the traditional world of publishing using open source material (without recognition) is social taboo. The public disregards Parker's automated processes as low quality profiteering and fraud. One outraged member of the public drafted a letter, 'you should be deeply ashamed of yourself, Professor Parker. You bring shame upon yourself and your institution by making money through fraudulent means and profiting from the sick.' (Stbalbach, 1998).

Foucault explains the importance of the author's name (1977: 122-123) and how this influences the society's perception of the text. When critics discover that a computer authors Parker's books they are often outraged. They instantly disregard all text within the book purely because of the method by which the books are created. 'Beckett supplies a direction: "What does it matter who's speaking, someone said, what does it matter who's speaking?"' (Foucault, 1977: 122). Clearly

to the reader it does matter. 'If people are dissatisfied because they think the computer wrote the text in the books, then they are dissatisfied for the wrong reason, which is unfortunate' (Slocum, 2009). Regardless if it is the wrong reason to not use automated authored books, the public will still continue to stand by their preconceptions.

Barthes and the Author:

What the Computer can Offer that the Human-author Never Could

Barthes speculates on the death of the author (1984) and although he was only speaking hypothetically, it draws attention to a consequence of automated content authorship. This process could potentially cause the death of the human-author in some discourses (Edgemaven Analytics) resulting in books with no attributed author. The death of the author creates many benefits for the future of book creation. Automated content authorship introduces more options for content creation than previously available presenting a wealth of collected and created information and knowledge.

Parker's books follow Anderson's principles of the Long Tail. 'Forget squeezing millions from a few megahits at the top of the charts. The future of entertainment is in the millions of niche markets at the shallow end of the bitstream' (Anderson, 2006). Through automated content authorship Parker

is able to produce obscure titles, such as extremely rare medical conditions, providing valuable information to patients and doctors. The minimal cost that Parker can create these books means that title that otherwise would not have been viable due to small demand can now be published. 'Manually authored works are often economically viable only when there exists a sufficiently large number of buyers to recover the costs of development and marketing of the work' (Parker, 2007: patent), however by using a computer rather than a human-author books can be created at a fraction of the cost and time fulfilling the Long Tail. Parker's methods also provide a significant benefit for large companies when compiling analytical reports that would otherwise take several months or up to a year to create (Karabell). Automated content authorship can be personalised for individual or company needs providing timely, low cost and pertinent information to the end user.

Although the use of Parker's computer-based apparatus have been mainly for personal profit the potential benefits to the global community are extensive. Coupled with social programs such as the one laptop per child initiative (1999) automated content authorship has the potential to provide extremely low cost educational resources to the third world via the use of e-books. Automated content authorship also offers

a solution to the information overload that is becoming increasingly common. It offers a viable way to filter, condense and draw conclusions from freely available information online, resulting in greater proliferation of usable content. With new licensing forms such as creative commons this will result in a vast array of accessible information available in the public domain.

In Conclusion

Through automated content authorship Barthes' hypothesis (1984) becomes a reality. The proliferation of this process will result in the death of the human-author (in some genres) however this demise will elicit a new age in book creation. By removing the author from this process and replacing them with automated functions books can be produced at a fraction of the cost and time. The endless possibilities, including the availability of educational sources to the third world, are only attainable due to these benefits. Despite the many legal and moral concerns voiced it is clearly evident that these potential benefits outweigh society's worries. It is important to note that it is not the end product that is revolutionary, but the process itself. As technology and automated content authorship continues to develop the quality of the end product will improve whilst the time and cost of production will continue to drop. Although the

current limitations of automated content authorship have prevented its immediate proliferation, the potential for growth of this new technology is even beyond the imaginings of the most creative fictional author.

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Facebook 'Friends': The Validity of Online Friendships

Kate Bateman

Social networking, in particular Facebook, has changed the way in which we interact and communicate with our friends – both in establishing friendships and maintaining them over the long term. This article will look at the role of Facebook in establishing and maintaining friendships in comparison to 'real life' and assess why online friendships or 'Facebook friends' are considered to be less valid or 'real'.

In particular, the article will assess the types of friendships found on Facebook and the functionality available to users in which to communicate with friends. The article will discuss the topic from a sociological point of view using textual analysis.

Key words: Facebook, friend, social networking, validity

Introduction

In recent years, social networking site Facebook has revolutionised the way in which we establish and maintain friendships, and communicate with others. Originally targeted at college students in the United States, Facebook's popularity has increased significantly since its launch in February 2004, with over 200 million active account holders around the world (Facebook, 2009).

As defined by Ellison et al (2007, p.1143), Facebook "enables its users to present themselves in an online profile, accumulate 'friends' who can post

comments on each other's pages, and view each other's profiles. Facebook members can also join virtual groups based on common interests, see what classes they have in common, and learn each others' hobbies, interests, musical tastes, and romantic relationship status through the profiles".

This article will look at the role of Facebook in establishing and maintaining friendships in comparison to 'real life' and assess why online friendships are considered to be less valid or 'real'. The article will discuss the topic from a sociological point of view using

textual analysis including Relationship Formation on the Internet and The Benefits of Facebook Friends.

Defining ‘Friend’

The definition of what makes a ‘friend’ has been a subject debated and challenged by many theorists. Aristotle considers a genuine friend to be “someone who loves or likes another person for the sake of that other person” and friendship to be “reciprocal good will, provided that each recognises the presence of this attitude in the other” (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2001). In this sense, an ideal friendship is a selfless and equal relationship, where each person has the other’s best interests at heart.

Friedrich Nietzsche challenges this view, arguing that this definition of friendship is shallow and that a true friend is “someone who by wishing you the ‘best’ wishes you ‘the worst’ – struggle, strife, obstacles, fear and ‘many good enemies’” (Maselnik, 2007) and has a desire for the recipient to be challenged, and as a result be strengthened and successful. Despite their opposing views, both theorists present interesting definitions of ‘friendship’ that many would consider to be easily defined.

In the most simple of terms, a friend is “a person attached to another by feelings of affection or personal regard” (Macquarie Dictionary, 2006) and friendship “evolves

through voluntary interaction between two persons over time. It typically develops through intimate, face-to-face interaction.” (Chan and Cheng, 2004, p.305)

In terms of an online environment, ‘friend’ in the traditional sense has developed into a new term ‘Facebook friend’, now a widely accepted and well-known reference in our vernacular. However, many consider Facebook and other social networking sites as “more of a communication medium than a circle of friends” (Emerson, 2008) and the bulk of a person’s ‘Facebook friends’ to be acquaintances, as opposed to ‘friends’ in the sense defined by Aristotle and Nietzsche.

In a rather cynical description, some users define online friends as a person “they know and do not actively dislike” (boyd and Ellison, 2007), inferring that friendships made and maintained online are large in number and generally shallow, however this is not necessarily the case purely because it is conducted in an online environment.

Types of Facebook Friends

There are three clear subsets within the ‘Facebook friends’ category that differentiate the strength of a friendship:

- Existing friends – those that have an established ‘real life’ relationship

that use Facebook to maintain and enhance a friendship.

- Acquaintances – colleagues, travel buddies, old school friends and the ‘friends of friends’ that use Facebook to keep in contact and in some instances further develop a friendship.
- Strangers – those who may have shared interests and instigate new friendships.

In many instances, a small number of existing friends would be contacted most frequently within a user’s ‘Facebook friends’ list and use the functionality to maintain an offline connection. However in the example of acquaintances and to a further extent, strangers, Facebook has allowed users to establish new friendships in a way that hasn’t occurred previously in real life. Facebook enables users to search through their existing friends list of contacts, and at the click of a button send a ‘friend request’ or a ‘poke’. In real life terms, this instant establishment of a friendship would not normally occur, as it requires time and importantly engagement for people to become friends. It would also be fairly unusual to divulge significant amounts of personal information to a new friend in real life when you first meet, however this is done frequently online via Facebook.

Lampe, Ellison and Steinfield (2006) confirm this division of ‘Facebook friend’ type and describe these categories as ‘social searchers’ and ‘social browsers’:

“Social searchers would use the site to investigate specific people with whom they share an offline connection to learn more about them. Social browsers would use the site to find people or groups online with whom they would want to connect offline” (p.167).

Social browsers, some of whom will be strangers, are able to use the Facebook ‘group search’ function to discover new contacts with similar interests. Despite Lampe, Ellison and Steinfield’s description, it isn’t clear if this necessarily means that they want an offline connection also. The friendship may remain as an online connection only.

It is clear that Facebook enables the making and maintenance of many types of friendships, however creates issues regarding the dissemination of personal information to each group in the same way. Despite private message and privacy setting functions, Facebook does not allow the user to differentiate messages to individuals - in the case of Facebook ‘status updates’ - as you would do in real life. The same level of information is shared with all friendship subsets.

In addition to status updates, Facebook’s additional functionality provides a

voyeuristic view of acquaintances and friends. Tools such as ‘News feed’ and ‘Highlights’ provide updates and access to photos, however frequently users will observe but not actually contact or message their friend. Having this level of contact serves a purpose and is functional in one sense – keeping abreast of what is happening in each other’s lives – but unlike in real life, doesn’t require any actual engagement with each other to receive information and as such, each person only operates as an observer.

This is carried through on another Facebook tool ‘People You May Know’ that highlights ‘friends of friends’ that a user may be interested in contacting, with certain people shown depending on how many mutual friends or acquaintances you may have. Again, this doesn’t require engagement by either person; rather it is an automated feature for all users.

This open nature of disseminating information not only raises the bigger issues of privacy including identity theft and stalking, but also challenges the validity of each friendship. By disclosing the same amount of information with all contacts on Facebook, reduces the intimacy and connection that is key to maintaining a close friendship. In most relationships, over time, individuals will “reveal more important and personal information when their relationship progresses” (Chan and Cheng, 2004,

p.306). On Facebook, this crucial step in building a friendship is ‘fast-tracked’ as all contacts receive the same level of personal information resulting in the relationship becoming less meaningful.

Validity of Online Friendships

Facebook certainly has its place in making and maintaining friendships, allowing an efficient way to circulate information quickly and en masse but clearly misses the intimacy of a face-to-face connection. In person, friendships are more likely to have more intimate engagement and authenticity. As Mahoney (2009) states: “If someone really is your friend, wouldn’t you rather be physically with them? If someone is your friend and has huge news, isn’t it better to get it directly rather than from a bulletin on Facebook?” To an extent this is true, online friendships cannot replace the intimacy of a face-to-face relationship and the rhythm that ensues from individual interaction:

“I was with real friends last weekend, and we all took food to another friend’s house; and it happened that it was another friend’s birthday. We stood around and ate. Someone made margaritas. We talked. There was a rhythm to it. One moment we’d be talking about the supposed death of newspapers; the next someone would be telling me I had sour cream on my chin; the next we’d be trying to help each other patch over challenging things in our lives

- kids, work, relationships, what have you.”
(Mahoney, 2009)

If this physical connection isn't possible, perhaps due to geographical distance, Facebook enables individuals to maintain contact with existing friends which otherwise may not occur. Facebook can also assist individuals that may not have the social skills or cues to engage successfully in a real life scenario and “was found to interact with measures of psychological well being, suggesting that it might provide greater benefits for users experiencing low self-esteem and low life satisfaction.” (Ellison et al, 2007)

A main concern for those that criticise the validity of online friendships is the issue of constructed identity and what is 'real'. When a profile is constructed it often includes the 'best' photos of an individual or tailored description of interests to create a certain image, and includes as many 'Facebook friends' as possible, “Facebook has evolved into a tool to bolster people's public image: the more friends they have listed, the more popular they appear” (Corrigan, 2008). In addition, this constructed identity may be due to fears of privacy violation, where users limit the amount of information available online. While this restricts the amount of information available to friends, it has the reverse effect to 'over-sharing, by not revealing any information

about you minimises the reciprocation that friendship relies upon.

For these reasons, Facebook friendships are considered to be less valid, each person constructs a certain image of themselves, has little personal interaction with their friends and may never intend to conduct a face-to-face friendship. As a result these types of online friendships are shallow, unrealistic and add little value:

“So fearful of being perceived to be backward or out of touch, we all seem unquestioningly to embrace new technologies, regardless of whether they can actually enrich our lives. Perhaps there was a time, when Facebook first took off, that people were really using it to track down and stay in touch with friends. Now it simply facilitates vacuous relationships with people who have never met, never intend to meet and don't even [send] messages to each other” (Corrigan, 2008).

Despite the criticisms of Facebook friendships versus real life, conducting friendships in these two environments have many similarities. We all have differing types and depths of friendship with those around us in real life that is not dissimilar to the three types of Facebook friends – existing friends, acquaintances and strangers. Although there is a tendency to share more information, more quickly, in an online

environment, this doesn't change the way in which we communicate with others, and as such, Facebook is just another medium to conduct and maintain this connection.

Chan and Cheng (2004) acknowledge that after conducting their research it could be deduced that "the qualities of both online and offline friendships improved as the duration of the relationships increased, [and] the differences between the two types of friendship diminished over time" (p.305). These results challenge the view that online friendships, such as Facebook, have less validity and are in fact more similar than many acknowledge it to be.

The way in which individuals can associate and find like-minded friends by joining a group on Facebook creates inclusion and acceptance, which mirrors the process of connecting with people in a 'real life' scenario. For instance, joining networks based on geography (Australia or London networks) or by educational group (University of Sydney or high school).

Conclusion

Opportunities to make friendships are created both online via social networks, such as Facebook and in real life. In both scenarios, friendship is made and maintained as a result of disclosure by both parties, however this is not exclusive to the mode or method of

communication, more so the level of friendship that exists. However what does differ is the level of information that is disclosed, often on a wide scale and not always reciprocated online, which differs to that of a close, real life friendship.

Facebook friendships, as a result of constructed profiles and minimal one-to-one engagement, will continue to be a fairly shallow base for a friendship and cannot replace face-to-face social interaction. However in other scenarios, Facebook allows for an ongoing friendship to be maintained or, for some, initiated with new people. Although Facebook has a role in making and maintaining friendships, the preference for online versus real life friendships as to what is a 'better' interaction will ultimately be defined by each individual user.

Fundamentally, the characteristics of a 'friend' as defined by Aristotle and Nietzsche, that being a friendship that has intimacy and personal interaction, struggles to work in terms of Facebook as the en masse dissemination of information with online friends. As such, it is difficult to validate Facebook friendship as real.

Online friendships created via Facebook may be considered complimentary to that of face-to-face relationships and despite the surge in popularity and usage, will not replace the way in which friendships

are conducted in real life. As such, it is evident that 'Facebook friends', when discussed in context of the definition of what makes a friend, is therefore considered invalid.

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Misconceived End-User Expectations to Privacy on Facebook

Ailin Bezzo

As a form of technologically mediated social interaction, Facebook has penetrated existing modes of sociality in an extremely short period of time. Through this rapid dissemination, the scale of use of social networking medium, Facebook, can be seen as a defining element of digital culture.

The arrival of social networking has brought the sociality of real life into the virtual. The launch of Facebook and other social networking sites revolutionised social activity by altering the modes through which people interact. Being a relatively recent technology, users and the governing corporation, i.e. Facebook, are still developing a modal protocol for the successful management of information and a normative protocol to successfully satisfy the privacy rights of information that users publish on the website. This is important in regards to information practice in which users have steady control over the information published about their person.

The right to privacy and ownership of information is one that becomes complicated when combined with the open nature of the Internet, particularly in regards to Facebook and other mass-scale social-networking websites. It is argued by some that users should have an implied expectation of privacy, whereas others argue that the open nature of Web 2.0 leaves users private information exposed. This paper will argue that Facebook Inc. is a for-profit corporation and that the company's priority is not their end-users but rather their stakeholders and their business. This paper will also argue that it is the end-users individual responsibility to withhold personal data posted through the website and to familiarise themselves with the changing Terms of Use which govern the site and its access and right to use end-user information. The purpose of this article is to examine the extent of this implicit expectation of privacy from users of social networking websites. This will be substantively determined through a survey of end users.

Introduction

In a social networking environment, end users misunderstand their right to privacy in regards to information they voluntarily publish online. By using a social networking website to self publish personal information for the purpose

of being viewed, users agree that the content is now part of the “public domain,” and no longer “owned” solely by the poster. Users must adhere to a personal responsibility of vigilance and care as regards the Terms of Use they agree to when publishing online content.

Facebook Inc. since its inception, has included a clause in its Terms of Use stipulating that with any information published to its website, Facebook is granted irrevocable, perpetual license to use, publish, sub-license and store this data. End users must also be observant that Facebook Inc. as a marketable, profit-driven corporation which will continue to explore its ability to profit from their product: its users. This violates one of the key principles of information practices: “the idea that users should have the ability to control and correct the information about them in a particular database” (Jones & Soltren 2004, p 34).

What is Facebook?

Launched on the fourth of February, 2004, Facebook describes itself as a social utility that ‘helps people communicate more efficiently with their friends, family and co-workers’ (Facebook 2008). Facebook enables its users to present themselves in an online profile, accumulate ‘friends’ who can post comments on each other’s pages, and view each other’s profiles. The site follows its creator Mark Zuckerberg’s vision to build a site that helps people ‘understand the world around them’ (Lacey 2006). It allows for the self publication of personal information such as photos, user to user communication, social events, and acts as a forum on which users can express their opinion through the creation of “groups”

and “fan pages.” With over 200 million active users (Facebook 2009), Facebook is rapidly growing and constantly developing new functions to broaden the appeal of the site to further grow its user-base and increase its profit earning capacity. Galloway’s theory can be seen, in that “the clustering of descriptive information around a specific user becomes sufficient to explain the identity of that user” (Galloway 2004), hence the user becomes simply a commodity, sold to investors and advertisers as a market collective. Zuckerberg too sees the potential of the networking site as ‘the most powerful distribution mechanism that’s been created in a generation’ (Kirkpatrick 2007). Facebook may have started as a social networking technology, but it has capitalised on its popularity and nature as a ‘free’ website to commodify the information and details published by its users.

Importance and Cultural Theory

Analysing Facebook in the confines of technological determinist discourse, Facebook serves as an extension of the self (McLuhan 1974); it is a simple extension of the sociality that would normally occur off-line, but now transpires through the use of hardware and software. The rate, nature, and depth of penetration would suggest that Facebook is now an integral part of society, not only in mediating social

relations, but in day-to-day function of communication, interaction and relationship building. Many users confess to being Facebook “addicts,” with the website tallying over 250 million hits a day (Bugeja 2006). Facebook spokesman Chris Hughes says ‘it’s embedded itself to an extent where it’s hard to get rid of’ (Hodgkinson 2008). Following Ralph Schroeder’s technological determinist theory, Facebook has both diversified and homogenised leisure and sociable activities (Schroeder 2007), in that it has changed the way in which people interact, but at the same time, has simply become an extension of socialisation – the same action before, but through a different medium. This embedding of Facebook into everyday socialisation means that the website is essential to the practice of communication and interaction - ‘participation must be seen as a defining principle of digital culture...’ (Deuze, 2006, p. 67).

Expectations and User Passivity

Privacy within social networking sites is often undefined (Dwyer, 2007). Social networking sites record all interactions, and retain them for potential use in social data mining. Offline, most social transactions leave behind no trace (Solove, 2007). This lack of a record is a passive enabler of social privacy (Lessig, 1998). Similarly, social interaction online is viewed with the same passivity by

end-users, with the expectation to privacy from employers, government bodies and authoritative groups, which has the potential to be personally damaging to end-users in terms of identity theft, legal action, dismissal from employment or educational institutions and leaves users vulnerable to defamation, humiliation and lack of control as regards their public image. Their information is expected to remain their own property and showcased only to their chosen peers. This is examined through the use of an empirical survey.

Facebook users were surveyed to determine two core research aims:

RA1: Although trust has been shown as an important factor between establishing usership of Facebook, to what level is this upheld by Facebook Inc. and to what level does this affect what end-users publish about themselves and/or their peers?

RA2: Do the Terms of Use which stipulate that Facebook owns rights to user content affect a user’s willingness to post or to be a member of Facebook?

Survey questions were created in order to capture the perceptions of trust, Internet privacy concern, information sharing, general use of the Facebook, and familiarity with Facebook’s Terms of Use. The survey asked subjects to indicate what personal information they include in their profile, what information

contained in their friends profile the users enjoyed viewing, questioning their expectation to data privacy and ownership and Facebook's right to sub-license their information to a third party and user's passivity is questioned as regards their expectation of privacy on Facebook.

The results of the survey reported that most subjects use Facebook regularly, with 70 percent accessing the site everyday and 80 percent report updating their profile monthly. 100 percent of subjects reported that it is highly important to them that any information they publish on Facebook remains in their ownership and that they have full access to delete and control this information. All participants also strongly refuted Facebook sub-licensing their data to a third party and expressed opinion that Facebook acts as a mere context for publishing their information, that control should remain completely in the hands of the original poster. Despite the results of fields deemed "Privacy Concern Measures", 100 percent of subjects admitted they had never looked at the Facebook Terms of Use and that they had not thought to limit the breadth of information they publish on Facebook as they did not realise there existed privacy concerns to be mindful of. 50 percent of subjects had strict, customised privacy settings which limited access to any of their information

to their chosen friends only. The other half had no privacy settings attached to their Facebook account, despite that 100 percent of subjects expressed concern over Facebook owning rights to their information.

User passivity is strong in regards to the expectation to privacy end-users have when publishing their information on Facebook, as shown through the above survey. Users have failed to differentiate private face-to-face communication and the public communication through an external medium. Users have a seemingly unreasonable expectation of privacy, having never read the Terms of Use they opted in to when signing up for an account on Facebook, however all survey participants indicated the importance of privacy and information ownership. Despite privacy rating highly as an important function of the relationship between the site and the user, Facebook's Terms of Use have always contained a clause which allows Facebook rights to own, store and sub-license user information and the ingrained function of Facebook in society means that users will continue to use the medium. Facebook Inc., as an extremely popular and marketable medium, will continue to expand their earning potential. Until law can be established regarding user privacy in this context, users have to exercise control in regards to the information they

post online and the privacy settings they have set to their account.

Why Do Users Have An Expectation of Privacy Regarding Their Information?

Trust is important for successful online interactions, (Coppola et. al. 2004). Trust is defined as ‘the willingness of a party to be vulnerable to the actions of another party, based on the expectation that the other will perform a particular action important to the trustor, irrespective of the ability to monitor or control that other party’ (Mayer et. al. 1995, p 712). Electronic commerce research has found trust to be strongly related to information disclosure (Metzger, 2004). Trust is also a central component of social exchange theory (Roloff, 1981). Social exchange theory presents a cost benefit analysis with respect to social interaction. If the exchange is perceived to be beneficial, then the individual is likely to enter into an exchange relationship (Dwyer et. al. 2007). The service that Facebook provides, as a forum to self-publish personal information so as to connect and communicate on the scale of a global village, is seen by users as important enough to agree to Terms of Use which stipulate that Facebook has rights of permission over their information.

Private and Public Sphere Merge

New media, in particular social networking sites, challenge the previously

held inviolable distinction between the public and private sphere. The use of Facebook in the creation and fostering of personal identity has created a ‘fragmentation of contemporary society into private public spheres’ (Deuze, 2006, p. 68). Social networking websites have created a schism in the distinction between private and public, and it is this fragmentation that must be considered when analysing a users expectation to privacy. Their information is posted publicly, their agreement to the Terms of Use has seen them agree to joining the public domain, and conceding that their information will inevitably be viewed, copied, stored, published and sub-licensed.

Prior to the emergence and growth of social networking websites and Web 2.0, the nature of information was such that there was a wide separation between a person’s private and public life. With up-to-the minute update feeds and the ability to post large amounts of personal data available on Facebook, users become commodities; their sole function is to create, manipulate and view information, and consume that of other users. The effect of Facebook’s explosive growth and impact means that a users profile becomes their own beacon in the vast terrain of human representation, standing as their only validating feature of self. Bugeja states that many who claim to not want to own an active Facebook account

feel they need to, in order to keep ‘in the loop’ (Bugeja 2008).

End-users share a wide variety of personal information on Facebook. A minimal Facebook profile will only tell a user’s name, date of joining, school, status, and e-mail address and any information posted beyond these basic fields is posted by the will of the end user. However, most users utilise the total amount of information they are invited to input and post. User-configurable settings on Facebook can be divided into eight basic categories: profile, friends, photos, groups, events, messages, account settings, and privacy settings. A discussion of the privacy implications of posting a wide range of personal information on the website has yet to emerge. Privacy on Facebook is undermined by three principal factors: users disclose too much with an expectation to privacy and ownership of their published material, Facebook does not take adequate steps to protect user privacy, and third parties are actively seeking out end-user information using the site which would result in significant monetary gain for Facebook Inc (Jones & Soltren 2005).

Studies have indicated that users will express very strong concerns about privacy of their personal information, but be less than vigilant about safeguarding it (Awad & Krishnan, 2006). David Vaile,

executive director of University of New South Wales Cyberspace Law and Policy Centre said people, especially younger age groups, ‘did not yet appreciate the legal, professional and commercial consequences of publishing material on the web.’ Rather than recommend caution in publishing personal information online, he has called on social networking sites to modify their terms of use to say that ‘comments are not intended for industrial reporting or extraction for republication elsewhere’ (Moses 2009, p 1).

Facebook Terms of Use

The argument put forward is that Facebook Inc. has never claimed to uphold to complete user privacy. Their press releases and blog posts deftly avoid the issue of complete privacy and the rights of the end-users in regards to their intellectual property (Facebook 2009). Currently, the law recognises as private only information that remains completely secret. (Solove, 2007). Information which is performed or published publicly is not considered to hold any rights to privacy. Legally, ‘there can be no privacy in that which is already public,’ (Ibid, p 162). There is no reasonable expectation of privacy when it comes to information an individual voluntarily posts online. ‘The simple act of viewing something that was published for the purpose of being viewed, does not seem like a privacy

violation,' by posting content online, users agree that that content is now part of the public domain and is no longer "owned" just by the poster. (DiBianca 2009). The central concern is that there are virtually no controls on what Facebook can expose to advertisers. Laws pertaining to privacy on public social networking sites are still to be developed. Without this 'proposed (re-)foundation of "intellectual property" there is a risk of losing... benefits resulting from a greater plurality of creators and information sources,' (Aigran 2005, p 287).

The statement in the Facebook Terms of Use regarding disclosure allows Facebook to disclose any personal data to advertisers and allows advertisers to set "cookies" that are not governed by the privacy policy. There is way to request that Facebook not share your information with others, but it is not 'transparent and there is no evidence that one's request is actually honoured' (Jones & Soltren 2005, p 24). Similarly, it is now unclear, in line with the proposed new Terms of Use, which stipulate that users will also have no control over the existence of their data – member content may be deleted, or accounts may be deactivated, however Facebook still remains in custody of a stored copy of the data in question (Facebook 2009).

Conclusions and Recommendations

To conclude, as a social utility, Facebook has completely altered the nature of social relations amongst a large and growing group of individuals, particularly constituted by the generation reflected in the age of survey participants, and positioned itself as a fundamental technology in the twenty first century. Despite the company goal of allowing users to understand the world around them, the site is, without fault, a capitalist venture, taking advantage of its social capital in order to market its product – ie. user data - to advertisers. Facebook has changed the perception of privacy and consumerism in the digital era, and will continue to evolve further in the future. Ultimately, lasting change in online privacy will only come from a gradual development of common law and understanding regarding what is appropriate to post in social networking forums. Unfortunately this will not occur until users begin understanding the implications of publishing their information into the public domain with the misconceived expectation to privacy. Mistakes regarding privacy will continue to occur. Revealing this sort of personal information needs to be viewed as risky and completely open to the scope of the public sphere. It is vital that Facebook users everywhere appreciate the potential for use of the system by administrators. It is the recommendation of this researcher that all Facebook users restrict access to

their profiles, do not post information of illegal or policy-violating actions to their profiles, and to be cautious with the information they make available.

Lasting change will only come with time and understanding. Facebook cannot be faulted for users making questionable decisions, neither can it be faulted for not revealing its privacy terms to users, as they are openly available, and Facebook is a marketable company looking to profit from their extremely popular website. While it is the opinion of this researcher that the environment of digital publishing is yet to create normative protocol and

law to govern the rights of the user and that ultimately the environment that Facebook creates should be one that fosters good decision-making, privacy should be the default, encryption should be the norm, and Facebook should take strides to inform users of their rights and responsibilities. It is ultimately the user who places themselves in a position of risk as regards their own privacy. The user should be able to take personal responsibility for their privacy. This can only take place when the user takes appropriate measures to inform themselves as much as is possible within a space where information regarding

Appendix A: Questionnaire

1. What is your age?
2. Are you male or female?
3. Do you attend a tertiary institution?
 - 3.1 If no, what is your occupation?
4. How often do you use Facebook?
5. What information do you most commonly publish on Facebook? eg. Photos, wallposts, notes, comments.
6. What personal information you include in your profile? (Type Y or N after relevant)
 - Photograph
 - real name,
 - hometown
 - e-mail address
 - phone number
 - relationship status (i.e. in a relationship or single)
 - sexual orientation
 - instant messenger screen name.
7. What information do you enjoy viewing on friend's profiles?
8. Do you expect information you publish to Facebook to remain yours in ownership?
9. Is it important to you whether Facebook sells your information to a third party?
10. Have you viewed Facebook's proposed Terms of Use?
11. If yes, what is your reaction to it?
12. If no, why not?
13. Is the information you publish online limited by your concern for your personal privacy?
14. Is the information you publish online limited by your concern for the privacy of your friends (as in information published regarding your friends).
15. Do you actively monitor your privacy and application settings to ensure your utmost privacy at all times? Eg. Applications you add to your profile need to be constantly monitored in order to ensure their settings have not changed, allowing the application more access to your personal data and Internet browsing habits.

Appendix B: Results

Participants

The participants were recruited through ad-hoc methods. Private messages were sent out through the Facebook system to friends on the researcher's personal Facebook account. The ten participants, six male and four female, have an average age of 20.3 and 80 percent had a current association with a tertiary association.

Frequency of Use

Most subjects use Facebook regularly, with 70 percent accessing the site everyday and 80 percent report updating their profile monthly. 70 percent of subjects publish a public comment to a friend's profile on a daily basis and 50 percent publish photographs on to Facebook weekly.

Privacy Concern Results

100 percent of subjects reported that it is highly important to them that any information they publish on Facebook remains in their ownership and that they have full access to delete and control this information. All participants also strongly refuted Facebook sub-licensing their data to a third party and expressed opinion that Facebook acts as a mere context for publishing their information, that control should remain completely in the hands of the original poster.

User Responsibility Results

Despite the results of Privacy Concern Measures, 100 percent of subjects admitted they had never looked at the Facebook Terms of Use and that they had not thought to limit the breadth of information they publish on Facebook as they did not realise there existed privacy concerns to be mindful of. 50 percent of subjects had strict, customised privacy settings which limited access to any of their information to their chosen friends only. The other half had no privacy settings attached to their Facebook account, despite that 100 percent of subjects expressed concern over Facebook owning rights to their information.

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To tweet or not to tweet Grunig's model to brand engagement

Louise Veyret

There is debate as to how organisations can use Twitter as a communication and relationship platform to engage individuals. This paper investigates Twitter through the use of Grunig's two way symmetric model. This will include looking at the core elements of Grunig's model including its function as a two way communication channel, the formation of long term relationships, its ability to act as an neutral environment and the aligning of organizational values.

Keywords: *Twitter, microblogging, Grunig, organisational communication*

Introduction to Twitter and Grunig

Since the early days of the Internet, technology has developed in one of two areas: enabling communication, collaboration and providing information resources (Notess, 2008). Twitter embodies these ideals of the Internet; it is both a one-to-one communication channel and information disseminator, concurrently acting as a source of information for current affairs, ideas, thoughts, opinions and status (Java et al, 2009).

A Internet monitoring firm, Comscore released global Twitter usage statistics for March 2009, showing a 95% growth in the month to 19.1 million visitors (Dawson, 2009). The increase in active users on Twitter could be attributed to the recent publicity and media attention drawn from celebrities such as

Stephen Fry, Ellen, John Mayer, Ashton Kutcher and Oprah. Twitter is also establishing a reputation in traditional media in breaking news, community opinion and thought, including crisis communications.

This growing form of media is attractive to younger generations who are Internet savvy. The declining reach of many traditional media – the democratization of information and channels – have prompted marketers to better understand this complex communications ecosystems in order to manage, or at least better influence, the outcome (Niederhoffer, 2007).

Twitter is known as a 'microblogging system' which allows users to broadcast and share 'tweets', 140 characters at a time, published in real time. Microblogging fulfills a need for a

faster and more immediate form of communication (Java et al, 2009). A person you ‘follow’ is someone the individual has opted in to read their tweets and interact with. An individual can have both ‘followers’ and be ‘following’ other Twitter users.

Information now spreads rapidly online, especially in websites such as Twitter and can act as a consumer expression and sharing venue. Tweets do not simply exist on their own; they can be responded to, ‘retweeted’, where they are redistributed to another set of followers, in analogous to viral marketing.

The relevancy, popularity and usefulness of Twitter fit well within the realm of organisational communication. Professor James Grunig, a Public Relations and Organisational Communications Theorist, developed a model for four different types of communication between organisations and their stakeholders:

- One Way Asymmetric Communication
- One Way Symmetric Communication
- Two Way Asymmetric Communication
- Two Way Symmetric Communication

Grunig’s two way symmetrical model is seen as the best practice in communicating between stakeholder and organisation. Grunig defines his two-way symmetric model as, “an intention to develop a relationship between an organization and its publics, not merely to further an organization’s goal. A two-way symmetric public relationship relies on negotiating and conflict resolution strategies to further relationships” (Grunig, 1992 in Johnson, 1997). This model has been criticized because of its simplistic conceptualization (Lane, 2007), and the practicality surrounding its implementation, including that it assumes that the stakeholder and individual can interact in dialogue in a neutral environment.

However, with the development of Web 2.0 technologies and tools, Twitter could potentially make this two way symmetric communication model achievable.

The use of Twitter as part of Grunig’s two way symmetric model will be analysed in terms of:

- A Two way Communication channel
- Long Term Relationships
- Neutral Environment
- Aligning Values and Messages

A Two way Communication Channel

Twitter acts a two way communication channel, allowing individuals and organisations to connect in dialogue in an open space.

This two way communication is vital because consumers are wielding greater control over their media habits and their role in the commercial marketplace. Moreover, with the growth of online participation, consumers exert greater influence over the products and brands considered for purchase (Riegner, 2007). Hence, corporate branding is an intangible asset of a company (Da Sihra 2008) and engagement with social media sites through communication.

Organisations have the ability to respond to individuals on Twitter, through the use of reply (@) or direct message. This becomes particularly relevant in terms of customer service, where the establishment on two way communication on Twitter can ultimately add value if used effectively.

A study done by James Duthie, who publishes an Australian marketing blog, Online Marketing Banter, analysed 29 Australian brands on Twitter in terms of traction, participation style and audience engagement rate. The study proved that the less than 37% of the organisations are actively connecting with people, using the site more for promotion and information

disseminator. It is evident that Australian organizations need to be more proactive in connecting with individuals. A good example of the 2 way symmetric model in practice in Telstra Bigpond.

Telstra BigPond (@BigPondTeam) registered in September 2008 with the intention of adding another element of value for customers for providing another communication channel. However, BigPond was heavily criticized about their botnet-generated responses and for not researching to find out how to engage with the community (Crozier, 2008). The transformation of @BigPondTeam as a robotic one way asymmetric communication channel to a two way communication channel evolved over several months of talking with individuals. The team is now regarded as a token example of how connecting with users creates value, and their account is now not only used to answer questions, but for crisis communications, marketing through quizzes and relevant updates.

Twitter is an ideal tool for organisations and individuals for two way communication, if used effectively through careful monitoring, research and planned engagement.

Long Term Relationships

One of the aims of Grunig's model in using two way communication channels is that it should foster and develop longer

relationships with individuals. These relationships on Twitter are founded upon trust and mutual understanding.

This trust can be founded upon top line features on Twitter, including the design and branding. A brand is a network of associations with a (brand) name in the brain of a person and it is centred on perception. Brands according to this view, are précis of information, meanings, experiences, emotions, images, intentions, etc, interconnected by neural links of varying strength (Walvis, 2007). Brand associations are long known to influence consumer preference and behaviour, hence the importance for the interaction on Twitter. (Walvis, 2007). In Twitter, not only does the name of the user matter, but the background design and avatar decisions, as well as biography for the organisation play a significant part of determining and marketing authenticity for the brand. This also includes the phrasing and dialogue used in ‘tweets’.

The consequence for branding is that brands seeking to be chosen must constantly strengthen their links with customers or stakeholders choice criteria by reactivating them (Walvis, 2007). This is particularly relevant for brands engaging with individuals on Twitter, both in determining their motivation in doing so and the method of approach.

Twitter allows users to ‘tweet’ what they are doing, including their current thoughts, links and respond to other users. Initially, the regular users on Twitter were technologically savvy, active social media users (Notess, 2008) who posted material relative to their online communities, but now Twitter has become a fascinating database to mine for opinions and reports (Notess, 2008) among a variety of users that are not limited by geography or demographic. This can be used in understanding customer needs, identifying market trends and in helping shape product development.

This establishing of organisations on Twitter has in effect, changed the relationship between individual and brand. The immediacy between users and brand via tweets and the real time nature of Twitter allows brands to respond in realistic times to questions, criticisms and compliments. The engagement fosters and develops long term relationships by actively listening and responding to consumers.

The intersection of microblogging and social networking has changed the relationship between organisation and individual. Reichelt has coined the term, “ambient intimacy” which defines the relationships that exist in new communication modes. Ambient intimacy is about being able to keep

in touch with people with a level of regularity and intimacy that you wouldn't usually have access to, because time and space conspire to make it impossible (Reichelt in Java et al, 2009). The 'ambient intimacy' between users on Twitter demonstrates the potential for individuals to form lasting relationships with brands, if etiquette models and the correct engagements are put in place.

The use of Twitter to develop and maintain long term relationships depends upon branding and design decisions, connecting with users, ambient intimacy between organisation and individual.

Neutral Environment

Grunig's two-way symmetric model strives to engage organisations with individuals in a neutral environment; fostering dialogue, forming relationships and communicating the beliefs and values of organisations to the individuals. The neutral environment on Twitter as an open space highlights the effective use of Twitter as a two-way symmetric communication channel.

Twitter is a public site that requires users to register and adhere to a set of terms and conditions. Hence, the user and organisation must register and follow the same set of regulations the environment is neutral. There is no bias or rules of engagement as specified on a corporate

blog, nor rules regarding private emailing.

The environment is not only neutral, but is in 'real time', allowing users to publish and respond to tweets within seconds of one another. The use of twitter as a tool for word of mouth marketing (WOM) can be seen as one of the most important and effective communications channel (Kweller, 2007). If Twitter can be examined in terms of its conversations, WOM is one of the key features that can be monitored to in terms of two-way symmetric communication in engaging with individuals in a neutral environment.

Brands increasingly recognize the important linkage between WOM advocacy and the growth and vibrancy of their brands. (Kweller, 2007) Integration's Market Contact Audit (MCA) Laborie's pronounced "word of mouth" to be the form of consumer contact with the highest capacity to create consumer engagement (Laborie, 2006). As part of Grunig's model, organisations need to monitor WOM as part of their research on their stakeholders.

Brands can engage proactively with users that reference their names in tweets, through the use of search applications, such as TweetScan. Grunig's model emphasizes the need for brands to have researched their publics so they can communicate with the same level

of knowledge and understand their background and context. Hence, with monitoring and research, the individual and use of Twitter as a neutral platform, Grunig's model of two way symmetric communication can be successfully employed.

Aligning Values and Messages

Brands are defined as, "Précis of information, meanings, experiences, emotions, images, intentions, etc, interconnected by neural links of varying strength" (Walvis, 2007). Using this definition, brands can be identified on Twitter via their user name, biography, links and their background – ultimately their design and language help to authenticate and define the user as previously outlined.

Brands that induce motivated attention by making us curious or by better tempting their customers to try, play, practice, learn, exercise, adapt, interact or socialize with them are more likely to win the battle for awareness and be chosen (Walvis, 2007). This is difficult for users on Twitter as the engagement strategy needs to be clearly outlined, as the effects of engagement not only suggest value, they play a vital part in creating customer satisfaction and loyalty (Da Silva, 2008).

This loyalty and customer satisfaction can be derived from effective two way communication, as well as organisations

intention for long term relationships. However, as part of Grunig's two way symmetric model, organisations to outline their key messages and voice through dialogue on Twitter, especially in terms of negotiation and conflict resolution.

Twitter can be used as an effective gauge to determine perceptions of brands, and this forms an important part of determining methods of conflict resolution between users. Ambient intimacy between organisation and stakeholder provides an excellent early warning system to flag possible brand implosions (Arrington in Klaassen, 2009). When Twitter users reference a brand negatively, the information becomes evident among its users. With the internet, consumer liberation from and transformation of symbolic meanings in the markets – which are much easier and the consumer is now able to make his/her disdain for these corporate-created meanings known (Kucuk, 2008).

The monitoring of these consumer opinions on Twitter provides organisations an opportunity to reply to claims, opinions, suggestions and criticisms. It is important for organisations develop their core messages and culture so they can effectively represented online.

The other issue regarding brands and Twitter is that because it is so

specialized and unique in one-to-one communication, it becomes solely reliant on individual communication. The emergence of “brandividuals” where molding of personalities with companies and brands individuals are employed at (Klaassen, 2009), result in the importance in the blurring of the individual and company.

It is important that in aligning organisations messages and cultures on Twitter, individuals are engaged with effectively by monitoring their tweets and researching appropriate methods of engagement.

An Australian example of the ‘brandividual’ is that of the launch of Marketing Mag. When the magazine was undergoing an upgrade to the new website, the current online editor Scott Drummond, registered an account for Marketing Mag on Twitter (@MarketingMag) as well as maintaining his own personal account. After some time, his name became synonymous with Marketing Mag until he changed roles later in the year and he clearly distanced himself from the publication.

The importance for organisations to remain in line with other marketing and publishing practices, assists with alignment of corporate values and messages. Brandividuals and ambient intimacy on Twitter can positively promote organisations with their

stakeholders following Grunig’s two way symmetric model.

Conclusion

Grunig’s two way symmetric model can be used effectively with Twitter, if certain considerations are taken into account. Organisations need to have a vested interest in developing and maintaining long term relationships with individuals, with the use of two way communication and engaging in the neutral environment.

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Gmail:

Friend or Foe?

Angela Wade

Since Google, the largest search engine on the internet, launched its email service 'Gmail' in 2004, it has become one of the most talked about webmail services in the world, luring 'followers' with the offer of constantly increasing storage capabilities and broad search functions at no cost. Or is there? This free service does come with 'a catch'. In order for Google to raise revenue from Gmail, it uses an automated search program which scans the text for key words and melds 'relevant text advertisements' onto the page. The program used to do this is called AdSense.

Gmail has been praised for its ease of use and storage limits (currently at six gigabytes, the largest on offer) and criticised because of AdSense and privacy concerns. These computer-generated, direct-marketing advertising scans have been branded by some as a gross invasion of privacy while others believe the results are a useful resource.

In the growing cyberspace environment, what exactly does privacy mean now? Is Google breaking any privacy laws by automatically scanning Gmail emails? Are we still living in a world where we think our personal information belongs only to us? This journal article will briefly discuss Gmail and the technology behind AdSense, try to determine patterns in its algorithm, discuss the objections of some users to a perceived invasion of privacy and analyse public debate about this form of advertising to conclude that personal information is no longer the property of the owner, but in regards to Gmail, our privacy is not being violated because we have willingly agreed to their terms-of-use contract.

Keywords: Gmail, Google, AdSense, privacy.

Gmail Explained

By offering Gmail users relevant ads and information related to the content of their message, we aim to offer users a better webmail experience.

About Gmail, mail.google.com/mail/help/about_privacy.

'Gmail is a free, search-based webmail service that provides ... webmail storage in exchange for content-sensitive advertising that appears on the right side of the user's computer screen when the user accesses e-mail.' (Miller, 2005) It draws on the power of Google's extensive search functions, and only places ads in incoming emails. It can be described as an innovative

direct-marketing technique. Or cause for alarm.

In comparison to other webmail servers, ‘Yahoo and Microsoft have more than 250 m[illion] users each worldwide ... compared to close to 100 m[illion] for Gmail. But Google’s younger service has been gaining ground in the US over the past year, with users growing by more than 40 per cent, compared to 2 per cent for Yahoo and a 7 per cent fall [for] Microsoft’s webmail.’ (Nuttall, 2009)

It is unknown how many of these Gmail accounts are for business, as using Gmail in a business environment does alter the theory that the automatically-generated advertisements are for the reader’s benefit, because they can be to the sender’s detriment. Competitors’ advertisements can be placed on the sender’s email without their knowledge. Attorney Jason Miller explains in his 2005 Hofstra Law Review article a problem which has outraged many businesses. ‘An attorney presses “send” on an e-mail message to a prospective client [who has a Gmail account] ... Google will have scanned the contents ... found within it words and phrases such as “new client”, “attorneys at law”, “construction litigation” and even the name of the city in which the attorney practices ... and placed along side ... advertisements for legal services offered by the attorney’s competitors.’ Google declares this a service for the

user, offering up alternatives to keep a competitive marketplace, but companies do not agree.

Even Gmail knows what its parent company, Google, does with ads can be looked on in a negative light. ‘Many people have found that the search-related ads on Google.com can be valuable – not merely a necessary evil, but a welcome feature.’ (Google.com, About Gmail)

Affiliates of the Electronic Privacy Information Centre wrote to Californian Attorney General Lockyer one month after Gmail launched, urging an investigation into beliefs Gmail violated California’s wiretapping laws (by scanning the emails), ‘subjecting both Google and Gmail users to criminal and civil penalties.’ (Hoofnagle et al., 2004) Lockyer advised his office would continue to monitor Gmail and that ‘I understand your position and share many of your concerns.’ (EPIC Previous News, 2004) A bill was approved (Hansen, 2004), however nothing came of the commission, championed by Democratic Senator Liz Figueroa. Some considered it a waste of tax-payers time, trying to stop a system already in use for other services.

AdSense Explained

When I received a message from a software company, the page ... had text advertisements on software. A welcome



Figure 1, above: Gmail advertisements placed on the right side of an incoming email advertise competitors' products.

change from Yahoo! ... thrusting Personal and Dating advertisements on almost every page.

Nibish Dubey, expresscomputeronline.com, 2004

All service providers scan emails – for spam, virus detection, spell-checking, automatic saving and sorting into folders, and for reading messages to the blind, to name a few (Google.com, About Gmail). These are considered valuable services and people do not complain about them. It's not until 'advertising' and 'unsolicited' come into play that concerns are raised. Google uses the same

scanning technology to deliver these targeted ads, an automated service with no human intervention. 'In a completely automated process, computers process the entire content of the e-mail message, including the header and address information, perform a mathematical analysis on it, and finally match the message to advertisements or other related information on Google's extensive database' (Miller, 2005). Google has not released technical information as to how the analysis works.

A weekly email from writestreet.com, a company which offers advice on how to make money from writing, has many

competitors' websites advertised on the right-hand side of the screen.

They include those not only advertising how to make money from writing, but how to sell your book, but creative writing software and enrol in workshops (see Figure 1). This highlighting of competitors could be considered detrimental to the sender. Gmail believes this service promotes healthy competition and variety for the Gmail account holder. These advertisements are not paid for by the advertiser to be on your site, but they do receive money when an advertisement is clicked.

For all the complaints you hear about the ads, they are actually very small. Nathan Alderman, in an article for macworld.com in April 2008, sums it up succinctly. 'Thankfully the ads are unobtrusive and easily ignored; they appear on the right of the screen, and aren't easily confused with your actual mail.'

The ads, visually, have very minimal impact – they are in muted colours of blue (the subject line which you can double click on to open the advertisement), black (two lines of text which explains the content of the ad) and green (the website address). They are nowhere near as offensive as ads that pop-up over what you were originally working on or reading, sometimes with invasive audio and requiring action to close them.

The Gmail ads only operate if you click the blue link yourself.

Gmail prides itself on making these links relevant to you. 'All major free webmail services carry advertising, and most of it is irrelevant to the people who see it.' (Google.com, About Gmail) Google believes showing relevant advertising offers more value to users than displaying random pop-ups or untargeted banner ads.

On 25 August 2008, an email exchange between two Gmail users, testing the AdSense technology, resulted in the following: The subject line was 'flying rental car tv soft drink hardware', with the text saying 'Do you think my subject line should trigger some ads?' resulting in ad placements for 'Cheaper TV Adverts', 'Design the World a Coke', 'Creative Communication' and 'TV Ads Online' with the option to search for more 'Funny Television Commercials', 'ADS Advertisement Commercial TV', 'UK Television' and 'Television Adverts'. This proves AdSense searches both the subject line and the body text.

The Perception of Invasion

Gmail's search-centric style is off, and its habit of trolling your messages for ad fodder can be unnerving.

Nathan Alderman, macworld.com, 2008

Ari Schwartz, associate director of the Center for Democracy and Technology in the US, has said ‘Gmail has a definite creepiness factor’ (webmasterworld.com, 2004). This unnerving feeling has been described by psychologist Sigmund Freud as ‘the uncanny’. Royle, in his 2003 work analysing Freud’s writing, describes the uncanny as a ghostly feeling or understanding. ‘It is concerned with the strange, weird and mysterious, with a flickering sense (but not conviction) of something supernatural. The uncanny involves feelings of uncertainty, particularly regarding the reality of who one is and what is being experienced ... a disturbance of the very idea of personal or private property ... [m]ore specifically it is a peculiar commingling of the familiar and unfamiliar.’ (Royle, 2003: 1)

It’s the feeling that we’ve been violated that has people riled. “It’s OK to read people’s e-mail, if you’re trying to fight spam, but it’s not OK if you want to show them ads,” said Sonia Arrison, director of technology policy at the free-market Pacific Research Institute in San Francisco. “It’s not about privacy. It’s about hating corporate America.” (McCullagh, 2004) Beth Givens, director of Privacy Rights Clearinghouse, said of Gmail, ‘Consumers really need to look this gift horse in the mouth because it has rotten teeth and bad breath.’ (webmasterworld.com, 2004) It ‘traps’ you into accepting the ads if you want the full

strength of its service. ‘Gmail users can’t opt out of receiving ads because these sponsored links help Google support the cost of providing Gmail for free.’ (Google.com, About Gmail) You can change settings on the site that limit the amount of personal information you disseminate, but this results in less accessibility on the site. Some important characteristics of the site become unavailable if you opt out. ‘You may decline to provide personal information to us and/or refuse cookies in your browser, although some of our features or services may not function properly as a result.’ (Google.com, Gmail Privacy Policy) What people need to remember is they have signed up for this service and agreed to the terms and conditions.

Google co-founder Sergey Brin, speaking with Edward Baig from USA Today.com in 2004, tried to alleviate public fears. ‘A lot of people out there don’t realise that there’s no personal information going out. Advertisers don’t have impression counts. Even when you click (on their link), they don’t know it is coming from Gmail.’ Google’s vice president of engineering, Wayne Rosing, adds Google does not keep a log of which ads go to which users, nor do they keep a record of keywords that appear often in an individual’s email. (Zetter, 2004)

Confidentiality v Privacy

Most of us think our emails are private.

But, in fact, email is about as 'private' as a postcard.

Office of the Privacy Commissioner, Issues No.71

Everyone's definition of privacy differs and the levels expected or needed are also relative to the individual. Personal information such as names, addresses, employment details, and bank, medical and phone records are all imperative to our identity. Since we've been born we've been told to keep this information private as our footprint gives away information about us that can be stolen and possibly used in criminal activity. But in the age we now live in, we're leaving a new and different kind of footprint behind - on the internet.

With so many companies having access to all this data, is our desire to cling onto our privacy a throwback to our generational upbringing; an out-of-date idealism? Organisations now store so much information about us, thanks to the digital trail our electronic transactions create, but the National Privacy Commissioner believes 'loss of anonymity is not inevitable. It is technologically possible to conduct anonymous or near anonymous electronic transactions, and much work is going into developing these

alternatives' (Issues No.71: 6). Biometrics – the study of biological data, such as face scans, voice recognition and eye-reading lasers, as a form of identification – are being developed. More easily-accessible help is at hand for internet users to obtain more fail-safe levels of privacy in the book, by Peter Wayner, called *Translucent Databases*.

Glazier (2000) describes the pitfalls for people who use email naively. 'In some cases access controls and security features of a network (passwords etc) give the user an illusion of privacy and they may not be aware that their browsing activities and e-mail content can be scrutinised. It may not be understood that the purpose of access controls is to prevent unauthorised access.' When we sign up for Gmail we give Google the authority to access our account as the administrator of the account. Although we think we own our information, we have just made it theirs as well by handing it over willingly. And this is a trap easily fallen into. Registration for Gmail is so easy – the website highlights this. On the very sparse, clean Gmail home page there is a box in the bottom right corner which reads, 'New to Gmail? It's free and easy' with a large box to click which reads, 'Create an account'. Underneath there are two links to 'About Gmail' and 'New features!' When clicking on 'About Gmail' you are presented with a list of 10 reasons why Gmail is

the account for you. Number one on the list is ‘You don’t like spam. Either do we’, followed by such happy and trust-building phrases like ‘Search your mail instantly’, ‘Built-in chat: text, voice or video’, ‘Labels, filters and stars ... oh my!’ and ‘Lots of space (and counting)’. It’s not until point number eight do we find the not-necessarily-instantly-recognisable ‘catch’. ‘We have ads, but only the good kind.’ It’s short, effective and written in a positive way. For young users, who have less to lose when it comes to personal information (because they haven’t accumulated years worth of information and data relating to their lives), the language is friendly and encouraging. The more cynical adult user may be more wary.

These perceived breaches of confidence relate to confidentiality and as mentioned before, the feeling of having our personal ‘space’ invaded; the uncanny.

Watts (1996) explains, ‘Privacy issues arise where information is misused by a data controller ... in circumstances where a breach of confidence is not involved. This situation most commonly arises where the information is used for a purpose other than that for which it was originally supplied.’ Google and Gmail clearly explain on their website that they do not do this. ‘Gmail does not share or reveal email content or personal information with third parties’ unless

required by law, which is an industry standard. (Google.com, About Gmail)

So it is clear Gmail does not break any privacy laws. Users have agreed to the company’s terms and conditions. The texts are scanned automatically, by a computer program, and no one other than the recipient has access to read the entire email. And no email content or other personally identifiable information is passed onto advertisers. ‘When email messages are fully protected from unwanted disclosure, the automatic scanning of email does not amount to a violation of privacy’ (Google.com, About Gmail). But there is the concern about how long the messages are stored for, even when deleted from the inbox of a user.

Long-term Storage

Personally, I think the privacy folks are missing the point a bit. Auto-spidering doesn’t seem to be that big of an issue to me. Keeping deleted mail on their systems, on the other hand, is a huge deal.

Figment88, webmasterworld.com, 2004

Gmail’s privacy policy says, ‘Residual copies of email may remain on our systems, even after you have deleted them from your mailbox or after the termination of your account.’ (Privacy Rights, 2004). There are multiple copies

of the email saved ‘in case or error or system failure’ which ‘may remain on our backup systems for some limited period of time.’ (Google.com, About Gmail) That period of time is about 60 days for deleted messages and they may remain in the offline backup systems. ‘We will make reasonable efforts to remove deleted information from our systems as quickly as is practical.’ Some see this long-term storage capability, and not the direct-marketing ads, as the only privacy issue worth talking about. Ari Schwartz, talking to Kim Zetter at wired.com, said ‘Google can store the messages for longer. You do lose protection over mail after a certain point in time if you keep it on a third-party server.’ (Zetter, 2004) He also said the law has a lower threshold for allowing law enforcement to obtain e-mails that have been stored for more than 180 days. And some bloggers picked up on this quickly, lambasting the privacy concerns over AdSense as missing the bigger picture over extended storage.

Conclusion

‘There will be no more real privacy ... ever. Our records, all of them, are permanent now. Your purchases, your phone calls, the names of people to whom you send emails, the websites you visit, search terms ... they all belong to ... anybody who really wants them. Big companies and the occasional government agency, they own a chunk of

your life now and they’re not about to let that chunk go.’

Harpers magazine computer programmer and commentator Paul Ford, National Public Radio, 2006

Our internet use is being monitored and information is stored about our habits, whether we like it or not. Tuning out or turning off is an extreme option to protect that information, which few find viable in this technological era. Biometric options may become more mainstream.

AdSense, as a marketing tool designed to target advertisements to an interested audience, is the least intrusive on-line advertising option currently available. The user can decide whether they click through or not, so despite the perceived invasion of privacy, the user is still in control.

There’s no denying the internet and Gmail are incredibly useful resources, provided the user understands they have agreed to the terms and conditions. No privacy acts have been breached, but it can be off-putting knowing that what was once personal information is now being stored. It’s time for users to have a second thought, or at least a conscious first thought, before information is given out for free. Or just accept we now live in an age where nothing is sacred and what we once perceived as personal is now open for scrutiny.

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The Construct of Digital Identity: A Case Study of Self Portraits and Profile Pictures as Simulacra on Web Platforms

Tom Okagami

Recent technological advances associated with the information age and typically identified as Information Communication Technologies (ICTs) have provided a platform for development of social personas and alongside societal effects such as globalisation, have led to significant use and social impact.

This paper will analyse the phenomenon of ICTs as an encompassing platform for the development of social personas by using a case study of deviantAr,; an art community website.

A brief introduction from a media theory perspective outlines the general background within which the paper is set and forms an introduction to the technologies and concepts. In the case study that follows, this paper will examine the relationship between online self portraiture in terms of self portraits and profile photos. Each self portrait and profile photo set are analysed in likeness to each other. This sets a notion of expression beyond the defined technological definition by the user. In this case demonstrated on the case study website as the label of the “profile photo”.

*This case study is used to show a wider possibility of blurring of technological parameters in the expression of self and the implications of ICTs as identity platforms are discussed as a set of linkages to Baudrillard’s concepts from the book *Simulacra and Simulation*. This was chosen as many dynamics such as copying, implicatory distribution (Parikka, 2008, p. 70), individualism (Deuze, 2006, p 65) and ease of access feature heavily as associated hallmarks of the mediums provided by ICTs. These features lend themselves for analysis between the backdrop of authenticity, hyper-reality and simulatory experiences in sociality.*

The specific popularity in socially networked websites which provide the ability to almost entirely abstract aspects of social interaction make the case study site of particular interest as it is socially enabled but not (specifically) socially focused. The construct of digital identity is again discussed with reference to the self portrait and profile photo and the concept of the participant as audience is introduced and discussed in relation to hyper-reality.

Background

Associated with digital culture, individualism and post-nationalism (Deuze, 2006, p. 65) the World Wide Web has seen a take up of first-world society for technologically mediated social interactions in the forms of social networking web sites. Coupled with continued consumer penetration of networked devices such as smart phones, these provide mechanisms for instant and distributed communication. Their penetration and low adoption barrier has created a scale of use for participative media, so much so, that “participation must be seen as a defining principle of digital culture...” (Deuze, 2006, p. 67). As part of this culture of participation is the use of online mediated web sites to enable online identity production which is affective of real world interactions and definitions of identity less bounded specifically in cyberspace (Gibson, 2004).

For participants of these technologically mediated social interactions this takes the form of producing and distributing virtual cultural media. Both in a distribution sense and a cultural production sense creating artifacts amongst peer groups and to the public. The position of this paper is that the conceptual mosaic presented in a series of ICT born platforms, made up of mediums such as web sites, can be viewed as having elements articulated in Baudrillard’s concept of a simulacrum.

Specifically these include things that commonly reside in entirety on the World Wide Web (WWW) such as blog posts, social chatter/exchange, images, audio, video and other multimedia files which may be described as signs of the “real” reality. It also includes things only possible on technological mediums such as mash ups or explicit technologically manipulated bricolage (Deuze, 2006, p. 70) which is seen as hyper-real in the sense they are not directly

linked to Baudrillard’s notions of the real as they are a simulacra of a simulation. Technically non-WWW Internet connectivity is available for many of these “web” sites and for the purpose of this argument these access methods are applicable, though not mentioned.

Websites that by design encourage user participation and creation of content through interaction are typically associated with the phenomena of Web 2.0. One of the most well known types would be social networking sites such as Facebook and Myspace which are primarily designed to form social interactions and in the case of Facebook are titled a “social utility”. Other less specifically social Web 2.0 web sites such as Flickr, YouTube, Diigo, Delicio.us focus on the exchange and participation of what can loosely be termed media rather than strictly a textual social interaction such as chat, and have social networking features integrated.

These websites act as channels for the exchange of self-expression and both types of sites can be considered in terms of a “...fragmentation of contemporary society into private public spheres (or personal information spaces)” (Deuze, 2006, p. 68). In this analysis they form part of the simulacrum as platforms where signs are manipulated by users. The manipulation of specific identity-identifiers make up the profile page as a cultural medium to communicate social identity, and this can be considered as a form simulacra alter-ego.

This is done through the creation and manipulation of elements on the profile page and associated avatar, or profile photo that allowed user groups can access. These are usually made up of relevant informational identifiers about the user who owns and uses that profile. Typically participation fits into a structure which relies on user groups and the generation of content is typically structured in some form around these

participant groups. These groups form based on user choice and perception of the group and participating profiles. The choice to join can be seen as an extension of the basic social right of association, and the resulting characteristics of sociality that follow.

In the case of social networking web sites such as Facebook there is the ability not only to add photos generally, but to elect to select one for a prominent place on the profile page as a profile photo. Typically along with the rest of the profile this is an active embodiment of the profile and, presumptively, the user behind. This is viewable by the user at all times and the ability to modify it is restricted to the owner, allowing for full control of their personal information space. In most sites this profile picture is used as a thumbnail image and used in place of a person's name to denote ownership of a certain event or media item.

As users control their personal information space (or profile) they are actively acting out the part of the audience onto their own profiles. Once any modification is made the page is refreshed and visible to the user in most times in the same or similar manner as any other person viewing it. This implicated involvement in the creation of the simulacrum can be seen as a feedback loop, where user participation in creating, maintaining and distributing their profile is, in a sense, a procession of simulacra of their own self-identity.

The case study of deviantArt is used to show how the specific mechanisms on the personal information space are being used to produce online identity and how this may have implications for simulatory aspects of sociality. By visually identifying common elements between what a user has elected to upload and share as a self portrait, and elements within the profile picture they have elected to publicly share as artwork, the paper shows the possibility that ICTs and technologies are being used in a wider

sense to produce identity rather than within lesser medium specific defined parameters (such as the construct of a profile page).

With respect to the simulacrum this constructs the idea that identity production exceeds the strict (though unenforced) definitions of a profile photo and can be enacted over any subsequent available technological layer is significant, though beyond the scope of this introductory paper.

Specific web site: deviantArt

In identifying a publicly accessible specific example, the art community website deviantArt was chosen. This has specific elements already outlined that are typically found in socially enabled web sites such as a profile page, a profile picture (referred to as a "devID"), and an area to upload artworks as images.

This site was selected for analysis largely as its primary operations revolve around providing a socially enabled portfolio type environment for artists to showcase their artwork.

Unlike Facebook it features a robust categorisation system which is designed for artwork dissemination by self-described artists. By designing the interface in such a manner that places emphasis on proper artistic categorisation the upload process forces the user to choose between designating an image as a profile picture (devID) or into one of hierarchical artistic categories as artwork.

The concept of users uploading artworks and "self portraits", rather than photos from social occasions make it less likely that a user will have the same image as both. In terms of our simulacra reference we can initially try to describe the self

portrait as a direct representation of self and thus a “sign” of the real, if we assume the user themselves is the real. The “order” (Baudrillard, 1995, p. 121) of simulacrum however is not specifically set as the matter of identity production may belong to any order of simulacra.

On the website artworks which contain the artist as a subject of the artwork can be categorised as self portraits by the user. These will be compared to the profile photo which the user has elected to display on their profile page. As an art focused site the interface forces the community to be familiar with categorising work and less emphasis is placed on social connectivity with the subsequent result being an almost entire lack of photos of social occasions.

Significance of self portraits or profile photos

While it may not seem significant to compare differences or similarities between images marked by users as “self portraits” or “devID” (which in a sense are likely to be self portraits by definition) it is instructive to differentiate the concept of self portrait with the idea of the profile picture. It is also necessary to see this as a smaller example of a concept that is more universal in application than a mere single medium.

The self portrait artwork on the website deviantArt (dA) is a self portrait that happens to be distributed on the website, in a sense it is almost incidental it is being distributed on the website and not in print – it is an example of an artwork. In contrast the devID is a profile picture that inherently can only exist on the profile page of dA viewed on the Internet and on the dA website. It carries with it the contextual understanding amongst the peer group of dA users that it is representative of the profile owner

and is in fact dedicated a specific prominent place on the profile page. It can no less be distributed in print as the deviantArt website can be carried on paper.

Digital culture’s component of online profiles is a significant component where “we reflexively assemble our own particular versions of such reality...” (Deuze, 2006, p. 66). While this definition is wider than simply profile pages and photos it is exactly this wide definition that will be supported by a high correlation in likeness displayed between self portrait and profile photos. That is, users see their expression tied into much more than simply the confines of a profile photo or page as the concept of reality in this case is extended to all that is malleable or open for modification.

As a result of sorting all user submitted pictures using the technical distinctions created on the dA website (and most sites with a profile page) it may be possible to show anecdotally if users are likely to privilege the designated profile picture in creation of identity, or if visual portraiture representation is spread more evenly amongst all self portraits even when considered as separate artworks.

The universal implication of this is that there is no definition of the end of the technological barrier for identity creation. At least no containment exists for the creation of self identity into a single parameter on a web page (though this is representational of the cultural context giving privilege to the profile page and photo). This is instructive to the view that if any technological platform available is going to be used to produce identity then it’s important to understand the specifics of these encounters and likely outcomes which result. It is with this in mind we examine the specific case study

before moving onto a more in depth implication analysis.

Case Study

A specific case study example of the deviantART website was chosen. The results of which are listed in Appendix I - Self Portrait and Profile Picture. This serves as a small but specific example of participation in online identity production and subjectively compares the self portrait to the profile picture of a given user.

Through the comparison of self portraits and profile photos we are able to gain insight as to their commonalities. The example itself however is a minor argument – it is indicative of a wider scope of this analysis that identity is not created simply within a technological set of confines.

In the examples viewed on deviantART it would seem in most profiles the profile photo and self portraits were, in fact, similar. They were similar in specific and often obviously deliberate ways and this would suggest that the self-portrait and profile photo are treated as similar avenues for identity expression. The hyper-real expression of self is both produced and viewed by the user, for which the simulacrum and the real are distinctly split by virtue of the user being the subject.

In relation to the case study, a fully random sampling was not possible; the samples are simply those which were most recently added at the time of the sampling within the following impartial methodology.

The deviantART web site was accessed at <http://www.deviantart.com> and the “self portrait” photography category was selected. This displays the latest additions to the category. This sample was taken by simply accessing the first 25 self-portraits displayed, hence representing the

most recently added. Six were skipped due to no photographic “devID” being included in the profile and the next recent entry was selected until a total of 25 valid entries were reached.

The primary assessment method used to rate these images was a visual comparison. Aspects of the images were noted in a photographic sense. Where specific identifying features were observed, they were noted.

Where a user had submitted more than one recent self-portrait which appears in the latest additions, their most recent self-portrait was analysed and the next valid profile was selected.

While this analysis does not lend itself to quantitative measures it was unexpected to only have seven out of a possible 25 not posing any significant similarity of identity expression. This would seem to support the argument that the production of identity carries on much further than the profile alone and in at least deeper than the parameter of the web page “profile photo” and most likely surpassing the observable medium of the website deviantART.

Implications

A media rich consumer society where its members are already versed in the roles of consumption and production continues the repetitive dynamic as the user shifts roles. That is to say the aforementioned mediums (i.e. websites etc) delivered by ICTs produce an effect whereby the participant is automatically part of the audience. The subconscious methods of making meaning from signs that we are actively engaged in processing as discerning entities is now turned to the user’s own personal information space by the action of refreshing the page. It is

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this act of participating as an audience member that is critical to note, and confirm the site at which it's happening as it can be inferred to be fundamentally common to all technological platforms.

This implicates in all use of ICTs in identity creation terms that not only are we audience, user, participant but we are also the audience to our own participation of self online. It is the form of this website profile that contributes, as media, to the "triumph of superficial form, of the smallest common denominator of all signification, degree zero of meaning, triumph of entropy over all possible tropes." (Baudrillard, 1995, p. 87) as the self portrait and profile photo is "normalised" by the user for their immediate participatory group.

As a platform of media, this participative use of ICTs for identity production is in line with Baudrillard's "ground-zero advertising" concept where what "we are experiencing is an absorption of all virtual modes of expression into that of advertising" (Baudrillard, 1995, p. 87). The characteristics of which he describes as having "no depth... instantaneous and instantaneously forgotten." (Baudrillard, 1995, p. 87). It is these observations that may offer a clue as to the reasons behind specific self-portraits and profile photos being high in likeness – simply that the technology allows for such a fast update that the action of advertising self-identity material may make the content secondary to participating. It is also in line with the ground-zero advertising concept that the user would use every ICT at their disposal to advertise their identity. This view would be supported by the assertion that "everywhere socialisation is measured by the exposure to media messages" (Baudrillard, 1995, p. 80) and "whoever is underexposed to the media is desocialised or virtually asocial" (Baudrillard, 1995, p. 80), making those who do not 'advertise' in this manner asocial.

With continued use of technologically mediated senses of identity it can be said that a new "site" of identity perception has been defined. This layer abstracted by technology is instructive to both the subject, as the author, but also the subject as an audience member. The projection of self into a sort of ongoing personal media discourse can be seen as an exercise in control of that simulacrum. While beyond the scope of this paper, this raises the existential proposition behind the authenticity and reality of the third order of simulacra of simulation, where the subject has full control over the simulacra to the same dimension as they do the real.

This occurs because there is an implicatory onus to distribute that which is created (Parikka, 2008, p. 70). It is not necessarily conscious however the distributory aspects of participation are formative of the picture by the subject. In this manner the subject of the self-portrait is acting as an audience member and it can be said the likelihood of self portraits matching profile pictures is higher because of the technology being used by the subject is in fact likely to be used for distribution. In effect this conception forms a hyper-reality in isolation as the subject is the user as audience member.

This in itself may be a by-product of achieving the web equivalent of social inclusion: traffic. "In order to gain and keep an audience, individuals have to... orientate to marketing strategies... identity is a core principle of this." (Cavanagh, 2007, p. 122). This would however reduce it to a simple tactic for online social inclusion and presupposes the subject is aware of their standings. While a worthy mention, the idea of performative standing is not considered in this analysis as this would be included in an analysis of specific social interactions rather than the dynamic of the platforms involved with which this paper serves as an introduction.

As identity production activities are developed onto the identity site, in this case the profile page, due to the medium itself, a linguistic self-regulating effect of the subject occurs in order to affect perceptual change. While not a new addition to the negotiation of social interaction, it is important to examine the impact of the structure imposed by the technology in that interaction. With the use of social websites for the production of constitutive identity in more ways than just through a profile it has been observed that there is “[no] radical difference between self-identity online and offline.” (Cavanagh, 2007, p. 127) And further to this the act of online identity production should neither be thought of as subsequently affecting or resulting from off-line behaviours of individuals, but rather being entirely and totally inseparable, yet entirely distant and foreign.

Perhaps this multiplicitious approach is not altogether unexpected as “ultimately there is no one, absolute identity because identity is bound up in cultural discourse or dominant notions of what it is to exist and behave in the context of society and culture” (Foucault cited in Mazzarella, 2005, p. 181) however it is not the changing of identity that is occurring, it is rather a person’s shifting of modes in order to cope with the “precession of simulacra” (Baudrillard, 1995, p. 1) bound up in social and cultural practices such as social maintenance and social norming behaviour.

In a sense the abstract technological mediation of self is a separate simulacrum, yet entirely constituted of, and constituting, self-identity for those engaged in this form of online identity production. The signs that represent objective truth are in a sense legitimised as authentic by its perceptual passing through the abstraction layer of technology and back onto the subject in the process of creation. Baudrillard refers to this

in passing as “a circular arrangement through which one stages the desire of the audience...” (Baudrillard, 1995, p. 80). It is at this analytical point we reach some semblance of hyper-reality as that which is re-iterated is distributed.

Baudrillard asserts that in producing this media “the pressure of information pursues an irresistible destructuration of the social.” (Baudrillard, 1995, p. 81). As we see in the case study this can be surmised to be occurring on all technological levels, not just within confining parameters within the technology (i.e. the profile photo, the web page, the website, the Internet, a computer, ad infinitum).

Any checks the user performs on their own identity production as an audience member is likely to hold the peer values of that group into account – either formatively or retrospectively. With a significantly engaged first world making use of ICTs as platforms for identity creation, questions about where the platform stops and the entity begins become more relevant.

The case study articulated in this paper shows that a simple parameter designed to contain a graphic representation of identity, the “profile photo”, does not in fact restrict expressions of identity by containment even when there is no social expectation for superfluous explicit identity production. This basic case study serves as an indication of the level of mediation experienced in modern society of identity through technological platforms. Having defined the platforms and set out the case study to make apparent links to the concept of simulacra it can be inferred that ICTs can be considered an entire platform for identity creation.

It is for this argument that it is important to determine whether a portrait picture really is the same as a profile photo- as it is a basic indicator of the obfuscation of identity in sociality, which

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Self Portrait	Profile Picture (devID)	Comments	Considered Similar
<p>http://yagizylimaz.deviantart.com/art/Polaro-ID-120613951</p>	<p>http://yagizylimaz.deviantart.com/art/Bazen-119825419</p>	<p>Both contain the subject's sunglasses, and in both pictures a cigarette is being smoked or in the process of being smoked. Hair is fashioned the same in both pictures and both have the subject angling his head where each earring in the set is visible.</p> <p>Both photos are taken in a different style however both are stylised.</p>	<p>Yes, contains a number of personal artifacts.</p>
<p>http://motato.deviantart.com/art/watch-the-sky-120607480</p>	<p>http://motato.deviantart.com/art/1-spy-snow-114590482</p>	<p>Both pictures appear have elements of nature, both have had these added in post processing. Both have accentuated eye colour.</p>	<p>Yes, post processing to add meaning common.</p>
<p>http://darkmotherdivine.deviantart.com/art/Green-120631793</p>	<p>http://darkmotherdivine.deviantart.com/art/ID3-119942094</p>	<p>Both photos are taken differently with one being a full body shot the other a face shot. Both shots however have commonalities of the sub culture of the subject; an upside down crucifix, a wood forest gothic scene and visible make-up in similar fashion.</p>	<p>The "site" of identity perception is thus shifted from the inherent classical non-materially-mediated social identity, to an abstraction layer mediated by technology. This identity site, where identity expression is created, for example a Facebook profile, is instructive to both the subject as the author but the subject as an audience member and even representative of a peer group (which is pre-defined in Facebook). As identity production activities are developed onto the identity site, due to the medium itself a linguistic self-regulating effect of the subject author/peer occurs.</p>
<p>http://psychartic.deviantart.com/art/The-stupid-never-shut-up-120630992</p>	<p>http://psychartic.deviantart.com/art/Shut-Your-Face-118437212</p>	<p>Both photos are taken as extreme close ups with primary emphasis given to the eyes. Both are rather abstract as a similar section of the face is cut off on both photos.</p>	<p>Yes, sub cultural artifacts and style.</p> <p>Yes, primary body feature, and cropping of the face.</p>

http://dawnaa.deviantart.com/art/Breathe-Me-120624142	http://i130.photobucket.com/albums/p244/jiueycouturelovee/3015_84176125615_667925615_2812482_.jpg	Both radically different in composition but highly stylised. Both accentuating both nose/lips/eye areas.	Yes, same facial features primary.
http://devilicious.deviantart.com/art/daydreamer-120621892	http://devilicious.deviantart.com/art/3-grandmothers-ID-110908576	No similarity, the devID is from the subject's childhood and not self-taken. The self-portrait is recent.	No.
http://gothicjade.deviantart.com/art/Upside-Down-120619198	http://gothicjade.deviantart.com/art/Demise-2-ID-95999176	No photographic similarity, however both pictures show similar sub cultural styles.	Yes, sub-cultural styles.
http://agonyangel.deviantart.com/art/i-am-getting-rid-of-word-agony-120637463	http://agonyangel.deviantart.com/art/turn-around-120082337	Both show a similar expression wistfully looking off camera. Also both expose the same neck/shoulder features.	Yes, expression and body features.
http://hypocrisis.deviantart.com/art/straight-no-chaser-120640984	http://hypocrisis.deviantart.com/art/rock-classics-120640711	Both show the same body figure cropped at the same points. Both are shot with slower exposure with similar movements captured.	Yes, same style, same body cropping.
http://djati.deviantart.com/art/When-I-was-a-kid-120628457	http://djati.deviantart.com/art/the-collector-57591322	Not similar, self portrait is from the subject's childhood and taken by someone else.	No.
http://loverbutt.deviantart.com/art/the-thought-120638334	http://loverbutt.deviantart.com/art/id-117851586	Not similar.	No.
http://marinsh.deviantart.com/art/Wake-Up-Snow-White-119322724	http://marinsh.deviantart.com/art/Suncokret-a-90909560	Both are physically close to flowers, one lying down the other in an abstract embrace.	Yes, thematically.

http://peaceloveandkerrri.deviantart.com/art/lets-fly-away-120629715	http://peaceloveandkerrri.deviantart.com/art/Thats-Me-119623259	No similarity, though self portrait taken by someone else.	No.
http://insomniaticvampire93.deviantart.com/art/fifteen-120626904	http://insomniaticvampire93.deviantart.com/art/smile-pretty-116569913	Both are in the very dark in an isolating sense and stylistically gothic.	Yes, stylistically.
http://augustiskies.deviantart.com/art/space-invaders-invade-space-120625698	http://augustiskies.deviantart.com/art/i-chooz-u-pikachu-120576486	In both the subject has heavy stylised make up with emphasis on eyes, lips, cheek area. Hair is arranged in the same manner.	Yes, appearance.
http://theluckynine.deviantart.com/art/and-then-it-starts-rewinding-120647907	http://theluckynine.deviantart.com/art/unschaeztbar-105473930	Both contain similar styles of femininity.	Yes, gender themes.
http://kellyjane.deviantart.com/art/Femtrooper-XD-120650025	http://kellyjane.deviantart.com/art/deviantID-Cosplay-Collection-102866651	In both the subject is dressed up in fantasy/sci-fi costumes.	Yes, sub cultural.
http://violator3.deviantart.com/art/AnotherOneNever-playedSymphony-120649760	http://violator3.deviantart.com/art/Gentlewomen-Take-Polaroids-34510913	No, both are highly stylised.	No.
http://cutiejane.deviantart.com/art/Pop-Attitude-II-120636664	http://cutiejane.deviantart.com/art/Pop-Attitude-III-120636806	Both are shot in the same style, same costume and same props.	Yes, costume and props.
http://margotinedeviantart.com/art/I-am-120648885	http://margotinedeviantart.com/art/Douceur-120649717	Both highly stylised in similar grain and stylistic pathos.	Yes, style.

http://audrauzumaki.deviantart.com/art/Of-r-a-i-n-b-o-w-s-and-you-120646918	http://audrauzumaki.deviantart.com/art/C-a-n-o-n-120176835	Not similar.	No.
http://princeoshare.deviantart.com/art/Pokemon-Trainer-002-120643757	http://princeoshare.deviantart.com/art/Bette-r-Tham-A-Str8-Guy-104079872	Both have clothing and props of sub culture.	Yes, sub cultural styles.
http://eekphotos.deviantart.com/art/Its-time-to-show-the-real-me-120636251	http://eekphotos.deviantart.com/art/me-myself-and-I-120635584	Both show the same position of the subject and in both there is a camera in use.	Yes, expression and props.
http://sedrati.deviantart.com/art/Farrest-120635377	http://sedrati.deviantart.com/art/Grab-it-120635541	Both are shot in black and white and have stylised contrast as well as focusing on the lips, eyes while minimising nose profile.	Yes, style.
http://velokoza.deviantart.com/art/lalalaa-C-120637809	http://velokoza.deviantart.com/art/yay-iD-118062977	Not similar.	No.

Ease of Access: Suicide and Prevention

Kerilynn Petersen

The world becomes increasingly digital every day. The internet offers a wealth of knowledge, some of which is arguably harmful. This article will seek to explore how the ease of access to information regarding suicide, including but not limited to information about how to commit suicide and how to get help to prevent suicide, is either an aid or a hinderance in the fight against suicide.

Keywords: *suicide, psychology, online communities, online forums, mental health, internet*

Introduction

6:30 pm. Dinner is just being served. The doorbell rings. Two officers in uniform are waiting outside with solemn faces. The visit is completely unexpected. The door is answered by a mother and father. The officers come bearing bad news. They take off their hats. The mother collapses to the floor in hysterics. The father is speechless. It can't be true. Questions ensue. Dinner is forgotten.

Suicide.

According to the World Health Organization, every year around one million people across the globe die by suicide. To put this in perspective, approximately every 40 seconds a family is devastated by the news that a loved has taken his or her own life. It is suggested that in addition to the one million successful attempts, upwards of 20 million additional people attempt suicide (Fleishmann, 2009.) With numbers as

such, by the time you finish reading this article, 200 people will have tried to kill themselves, 10 of which will find success and be dead.

Suicide is a major cause of premature and preventable deaths and is influenced by a multitude of risk factors including those of a psycho-social, cultural and environmental nature.

“The suffering of the suicidal is private and inexpressible, leaving family members, friends and colleagues to deal with an almost unfathomable kind of loss, as well as guilt. Suicide carries in its aftermath a level of confusion and devastation that is, for the most part, beyond description.” (Jamison 1997.)

Few will escape having the tragedy of suicide touch them at some point in their lifetime. Suicide is widespread and a public health problem; it is necessary to develop methods and strategies to combat it. Fortunately for those with loved ones

contemplating the termination of their life, research has shown compelling evidence that appropriate and adequate preventative measures at local, national and international levels can aid in the reduction of suicide. (Fleishmann, 2009.) The National Strategy for Suicide Prevention: Goals and Objectives for Action (NSPP) has developed an 11 step action plan which includes promoting awareness, reducing stigmas attached to seeking mental health, definitions for at-risk behavior, and improving access to community services. Any approach to suicide prevention must be multi-faceted and multi-directional. (NSPP Online.)

Everyday more and more people utilize and integrate digital communication via the internet into their daily lives, as such, it is important to look at the Internet and how it can be an aid or a hindrance in the fight against suicide. This article will attempt to address whether the digital world and its ease of access to publishing information impedes or helps in the fight against suicidal ideations.

Suicide: Online Tragedy

Although the internet provides readily available information on the prevention and discouragement of suicide, it also provides support and encouragement for suicide. In addition, the anonymity of the internet allows individuals the ability to self-destruct under the radar.

In April 2008, the JapanProbe reported that a new suicide trend was being cultivated and encouraged online. One man, after searching for effective suicide methods, mixed some detergent with bath powder and created a noxious gas that permeated into his neighbor's home. Though this attempt at suicide did not find success, this indicates that online information can be harmful to those seeking this type of methodology and even to innocent bystanders, (James, JapanProbe Online, 2008.)

Another example of online tragedy, in November 2008, Abraham Biggs turned to the digital world when he decided to commit suicide. Streaming live at justin.tv, he announced his decision to end his life and proceeded to webstream his subsequent overdose of sleeping pills. A resulting investigation showed that Abraham had been taunted and encouraged to end his life through online forums with messages. One message read: "You want to commit suicide? Do it, do the world a favour and stop wasting our time with your mindless self-pity." (Harvey, Times Online, 2008.) Clearly, this type of forum was not effective in the prevention of suicide.

One of the concerns with regard to online forums is that there is no regulation or guarantee that those seeking help will connect with a third party who is interested in the help seeker's best

interests, in stark contrast to a suicide hotline which has volunteers waiting to help the suicidal person. It is possible to find help and support online just as it is possible to find forums filled with those who are apathetic to cries for help. Abraham Biggs cried for help and wasn't taken seriously. In this particular instance, his turning to the digital world proved fatal. Had Abraham called a hotline or sought help from a professional he would not have been encouraged to take his life.

It should be noted that it is difficult to measure and gauge the effectiveness of online forums; however with regard to successful suicide attempts it is possible to check the victim's internet browsing history to see if they searched for information on committing suicide. This information does not make it possible to gauge how much influence the internet or forums had in encouraging the victim but does indicate possible connections between suicide success and the victim's online research.

Online Support - Aid

During the last several years, the internet has become a tool to research information on mental health issues and mental health interventions. In 2004 it was estimated that eight out of ten internet users (approximately 95 million people) utilized search engines to locate

information about health, and it showed that 23% of those searching were looking for information about mental health. (Fox, 2005) This means approximately 21 million people had easy access to information regarding mental health.

For those specifically looking for information on suicide, as of the writing of this article, finding information on suicide was as easy as typing "suicide" into a google.com search box and hitting "enter." The results populated quickly and google.com gave close to 69 million websites/pages with suicide relevant information within seconds. The first page of results included "Read this first" and other anti-suicide and pro-life sites.

It is not possible to determine how many lives have been saved by these anti-suicide websites, but it is important to look at what this information represents: non-discriminatory access to anyone anonymously looking for information or help regarding suicide.

Key points to address when looking at suicide interventions online are the ability for a depressed person to remain anonymous and the relatively low cost to obtain help (price for connection to the internet.) In most instances, suicide is not a culturally-accepted practice and therefore those with suicidal ideations benefit from the cloak of anonymity that the internet provides. Readers and searchers can find help, feel supported

and understood without having to attach their name to confessionals of their darkest thoughts. In addition, groups who may not be able to afford the \$200+ per hour psychological visit bill are able to find support for free. Studies show that those of lower socio-economic status are more likely to seek suicide as a means for ending their life than those who earn more money (Ramsey, 2004.) The internet provides mental health help and suicide intervention to those who may not be able to access it otherwise.

Some of the valuable support tools on the internet currently include online suicide screening tools, online support groups, online individual therapy, online group therapy and self-directed therapy. A study of individuals who were using these types of support groups indicates that these people may have a lower social support and that online tools did help alleviate symptoms of depression. (Houston, Cooper, & Ford, 2002). However, even though this study showed that people who used support groups frequently showed more improvement over those who did not, it was not concluded that online forums decreased the need for a more traditional approach of face-to-face therapy.

High-risk Individuals

Studies regarding the use and effectiveness of online support options are problematic by nature. There is no sure

way to gauge the level of risk for suicide in internet users searching for information on suicide nor is it possible to determine the level of decreased or increased risk as result of online information found. However, based on leading studies in the field of suicide psychology, a few things are known. Those with high-risk suicidal ideations need to be heard and need to feel understood. In addition, the way in which you handle a suicidal person depends on the level of risk the person presents (Wesley Mission Handbook, 2004.)

Online or over the phone, those who hear the cries of suicidal persons need to determine the level of risk. Academic sources show several factors in measuring risk but three specific factors show up repeatedly: plan, history, and support. Does the individual have a plan to commit suicide? Does the person have a history of attempting suicide? Does the individual have life skill resources or emotional support? Individuals without a plan, with no history, and adequate support are deemed low risk. Conversely, those with a plan, with a history and no support are deemed high risk.

Wesley Mission, a leading Australian lifeline service, teaches their volunteers that low-risk persons need to be heard and are allowed a certain degree of control over the conversation. High-risk individuals are considered

lacking capacity to make appropriate decisions and the counselor is trained and encouraged to take control of the conversation. High risk individuals should speak with trained professionals. (Wesley Mission Handbook, 2004.)

The degree of risk is important to consider when evaluating the effectiveness and or benefits of online resources. Since there is no way for search engines to control the content available to suicidal persons according to risk, it must be acknowledged that the resources available could have varying impacts depending on risk factors.

Real-life Example

At the end of a long day at an Australian Volunteer Suicide Prevention Hotline call center, volunteer Justin Braitling decided to take one last call. He was greeted by a suicidal person, "I'm holding a loaded gun and I'm about to blow my brains out. I'm on speed and I don't want to live." The caller continued, "I just got out of jail. I'm a murderer. I don't regret it. I don't want to live" (Braitling, 2009.)

This man was deemed high-risk and Justin took control of the conversation. After asking the man to put the gun on the table and establishing that the man was calling from a mobile phone, Justin convinced the man to take the phone for a walk and they talked (the walk got the man away from the guy and out

and about to walk off the drugs.) How would online resources have worked in this situation? No one can say for sure. Would the drug-induced man have had the ability to research information on help? Would a webcam have inspired him to webstream his suicide attempt instead of calling a hotline? Would someone have been able to online chat with him while he was walking around outside?

Conclusion:

The internet is becoming a part of daily life. Users constantly turn to google.com and other search engines for more and more information regarding mental health. Online forums and support groups offer new environments for people to interact, engage and experience the world with other people. Online forums also offer new environments for suicidal persons to feel pressure and more depressed. Online resources offer advice on seeking help as well as suggestions to make suicide attempts more successful. The internet can be shown to be an aid to the prevention of suicide as well as to be an aid in the number of attempts at suicide.

Because information on the internet cannot be controlled, it is more important that mental health professionals look at ways to make their information more accessible and attractive to persons with suicidal ideations than focusing on

censoring the websites with potentially harmful information. A mental health website may not prevent a suicidal person from accessing information on suicide but if created successfully, the website may appear more attractive.

Some worry that access to information online may encourage complacency and delayed traditional care (Robinson, Patrick, Eng, & Gustafson, 1998), however as mentioned above, there is no way to control or censor the internet. In addition, studies indicate that people more often use internet resources in addition to and not in replacement of other more traditional services. High risk individuals are best served by a trained professionals over the phone or in person, but this should not be a deterrent for health professionals to make online resources as helpful as possible.

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Amazon's Impending Monopoly of E-book Markets

Ouchen Wei

Abstract

This paper is a case study focusing on one particular e-reader – the Amazon Kindle. The Kindle is an electronic reader created by Amazon.com. The current Kindle family has three generations: Kindle, Kindle 2, and Kindle DX. All Kindles are designed to be similar to printed books in shape and size with advanced functions. This paper identifies the adjustable functional improvements through the evolution of the Kindle family. Also, it discusses the economic capacities of the devices as the monopoly of e-book market.

Keywords:

Kindle, Amazon, functional justification, economic transaction, e-book market

Introduction

There is no doubt that digitalisation becomes the mainstream in the digital era. It has already penetrated into every aspect of the daily life. For the traditional publishing industry, e-books become a challenge due to its gradual spread and significant influences since it emerged 20 years ago. E-books can deliver a wide range of contents: fiction, nonfiction, advice and how-to, art entertainment, literature, newspapers, magazines, academic papers, and even textbooks. All kinds, no matter what sort of traditional publications, can be transferred into

digital format. The topic around e-books and e-readers has become constant controversy since e-book reader came into existence as the market required. The evolution of e-book readers in some extent has become a hot issue, as many users today still are suspicious of e-readers' viability in the future. This paper is a case study focusing on the particular e-reader – Amazon wireless device (including Kindle, Kindle 2 and Kindle DX), through analysing what Kindles are. Also, it relies on interpreting reviews and texts, along with academic sources to explain the functional and economic transactional justifications why

Kindle has a potential to be the monopoly the e-book market.

Functional Justifications

The Kindle is an electronic reader created by Amazon.com. All of its features and functions are focused on the reading experience. It is a device which allows users to download e-books, newspapers, blogs and magazines. Its internal cellular wireless modem executes the downloading processes within one minute, directly through the device without a PC. The current Kindle family has three models: Kindle, Kindle 2, and Kindle DX. All Kindles are designed to be similar to printed books in shape and size. However, the evolution of their multi-functions goes far beyond a paperback. The following section will compare the series of Kindles to explore their functional capacities (size, supportive formats, and the build-in memory).

First of all, Amazon has increasingly optimised the Kindle's size both in physical measurement and the display screen. As mentioned in the previous paragraph, all Kindles offer the same appearance as paper books; however, over time the Kindle has become larger and slimmer. First Kindle was introduced in 2007 with the size of 7.5 inches by 4.9 inches by 0.7 inches. Compared with

the first version, the most noteworthy improvement in the exterior of Kindle 2 (8"×5.3"×0.36") (Amazon 2009b) and the latest Kindle DX (10.4"×7.2"×0.38") (Amazon 2009a) is increasingly thinner and larger format. Just over one third of an inch in profile, both latest generations are as thin as most magazines, allowing them to fit perfectly in users' hands when reading. Amazon keeps the device packable and portable enough to take where a user needs to go.

One possible reason why Amazon enlarged the size of Kindle is to expand the reading experience with a larger screen. According to Amazon's official announcement (Amazon, 2009a), the first two versions are grouped together as 'Amazon's 6" devices' because of their similar screen size. The third generation – Kindle DX, is considered to be a larger-screen version with a 9.7" display screen to meet a wider range of reading formats. It is expected to "appeal to periodical and academic textbook publishers" and users (Worthen 2009).

Besides the larger size, Amazon also enhanced the technique of the display screen. Firstly, the levels of gray shades and the quality of pixel resolution have been greatly improved. It means that users can enjoy a more exceptional reading experience similar to paper books, based on the e-ink technology. The 9.7" device has 16 shades of gray e-ink

screen that runs at 1200×824 resolution (Amazon 2009a), which offers sharper and more natural pictures than the 6” devices, barely 600×800 pixel resolution and 16-level gray scales (Amazon 2009b). Secondly, an auto-rotating screen has been provided with the 9.7” device. Portraits, landscapes or graphs, all can be viewed full-width, once the device is turned. This indicates that Kindle DX’s screen is more suitable for reading graphic-rich books and newspapers.

Moreover, Amazon has adjusted Kindles to support an increasingly wide range of content formats, especially the PDF. Compared to the 6” devices, Kindle DX has a native PDF reader, which means that users can read PDF format documents directly through the device without any conversion. Users can e-mail the documents to Kindle or transfer them via a USB cable. According to the Wall Street Journal, “students at Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland” together with five other universities’ students “will be given large-screen Kindles” with textbooks (Worthen 2009). As a matter of fact, most electronic textbooks are in PDF format; therefore, Kindle DX is anticipated to be “Kindle textbook edition” (Worthen 2009).

In addition, the build-in memory has been upgraded dramatically from 256MB to 4GB. Kindle only holds up to 200 text-based books, while Kindle 2 can

carry seven times more, as much as 1500 books (Mossberg 2009). But Kindle DX is excellent for who like to stockpile, as it holds an average 3500 books. Meanwhile, the online Kindle store has expanded also its catalogues from 90,000 in 2007 to over 275,000 till now. In order to optimize the internal storage and maintain the expanded support format, Amazon has cooperated with several textbook publishers to provide their publications for the device (Worthen 2009). This series of movements implies that Amazon attempts to offer personal libraries for users.

Economic Transactional Justifications

Amazon has adjusted the Kindle family’s functions to meet the demand of the e-book market. Besides the well-designed possibility, Kindles also have their own economic transaction models to make them successful in the e-book market. If Kindle 2 is a replacement of Kindle, then Amazon markets Kindle DX as a complementary product with Kindle 2, as it targets the educational market.

It is claimed that the supportive online content system for individual market, associated with the biggest online bookstore – Amazon.com, makes the Kindle family fairly strong compared with other competitors. Amazon not only designs the wireless network, but also

offers the access to the content provider for free to all Kindle users. It provides abundant resources with much lower price than traditional printed books. Taking the New York Times Best Seller – Monica Seles’s “Getting a Grip” for example, the print list price is US \$26.00, but the Kindle price is only US \$9.99. The current Kindle Store offers over 275,000 titles. Every version ever printed in any language is available on all Kindles at only US \$9.99, except the specials. The channel between the product and information is constructed to make Kindles more attractive.

Additionally, when the large-screen version Kindle DX was introduced early this month, it was generally believed that the latest Kindle member responded well to the requirements of the current market, because it was well suited to the various options of newspapers. Associated with the advanced auto-rotating display technique, the 9.7” device is more convenient for reading newspapers, particularly attractive in the era of the inevitable trend of digitalization of traditional newspapers. According to the official announcement of Hearst Corporation, the 150-year-old Seattle Post-Intelligence will only publish online (Pérez-Peña 2009). During the last two months there were scores of American newspapers, which were “likely to fold or shutter their print operations and only publish online” (McIntyre

2009). The pessimistic commentators believe that printed newspapers will eventually disappear under the pressure of digitalization. However, people enjoy reading news without any limitations, neither geographic restrictions nor connection requirements. Therefore, the portable large-screen Kindle DX supported with the wide range of newspapers might be a suitable choice for the individual news reader. Also, Amazon creates the potential to take possession of e-newspaper market for its wide range of Kindles’ newspaper options.

Another prominent economic transformation in individual e-book market is the cooperation with Apple. It is an assistance program which provides a free application for iPhone and iPod Touch users to access the Kindle’s online electronic book store. Nevertheless, this collaboration seems a contradictory movement, because it is widely believed that Kindles and iPods are competitors, as both of them can be e-readers. Also, most critics believed that the economic transaction of first generation of Kindle was a copy of iPod Nano together with its online store iTunes. As a matter of fact, the cooperation business model of Amazon Kindle goes far beyond the preliminary speculation. The free software aims to alter iPod devices into short time consuming e-reader to increase Amazon’s market share. In other words, focusing on the short-content

e-book market, Amazon is attempting to emerge as an e-book content provider rather than a device designer. Amazon inclines more to be the pre-eminent e-book retailer rather than being a pure e-reader manufacturer. The free software transformation recommends a full access to the 275,000 e-books for vending on Amazon.com (Amazon 2009b). However, the Amazon's vice-president Ian Freed authoritatively claimed that both iPhone and iPod Touch were complementary aspects of the e-book market strategy, as people would not read books constantly for long periods each time by using the smartphones (Stone 2009). The official announcement from Amazon sounded reasonable. It also predicted that people might be persuaded to buy a Kindle device, which had "much longer battery life than the iPhone and a larger screen better suited for long-term reading." It appears that the purpose of the cooperation is obvious and simple – expanding the e-book content market through the promotion of device access.

Besides the individual market merged with iPod, which includes entertainment books, newspapers and magazines, Amazon also provides textbooks on Kindles for educational e-book market. Expanding its cooperation with the textbook publishers to make their textbooks available for the devices, Amazon optimises the native PDF occupation. Along with the Wall Street

Journal, the current cooperation with four major textbook publishers includes Addison Wiley, Prentice Hall, Person and Longman. It is expected that Kindle DX will have 60% of textbooks available from those publishers when it formally launches (Worthen 2009).

It is widely accepted that academic e-books occupy a large market share of digital publishing industry. PDF is the main format of digitising academic books and documents. Hence, when Amazon begins to partner universities, the native PDF reader offers Kindle DX possible opportunity to "hurt the thriving market for used textbooks on college campuses" (Worthen 2009). As mentioned above, Amazon has reached an agreement with the following educational institutions to pilot Kindle DX as carrier of textbooks in Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland along with Pace, Princeton, Reed, Darden School at the University of Virginia, and Arizona State. The students from those colleges will be taught by the installed freshman seminar to use Kindle DX as their textbooks for chemistry, computer science and so on. According to Lev Gonick, the chief information officer of Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland, the experiment will compare the experience of students who get the Kindles and those who use traditional textbooks (Worthen 2009).

This sort of promotion aims to attract the young generation to the Kindle family, and it is anticipated to cultivate a new reading habit for textbooks. This action also can be considered as the expansion of the preceding essential economic transaction model of Kindle – a loaner program, in cooperation with public libraries. Kindle first attracted public libraries' attention for the library's digitalising process. The Sparta Public Library initially purchased two Kindles, and loaned them to patrons (Fialkoff 2008). This action led Amazon.com to promote Kindle with a loaner program.

A wide range of public and college libraries were fascinated by the "Kindle loaner program". Students and faculties of the North Carolina State University can submit online applications for approval of the librarian to use 18 Kindles. Will Delamater, a heavy Kindle user and an insider in the publishing industry, who established the website: www.edukindle.com to analytically study Kindle for education, criticised that the model in NCSU (North Carolina State University) as a "suggestion box 2.0", which advocated the students were actively involved in the management of digitization of the library, in particular the benefit of expanding the electronic titles (Delamater 2008).

Kindle 2 is also being utilised for the library-loan service. Mequon's

Weyenberg Library in Wisconsin US, pilots with Kindle 2. However, the situation vary from those of SPL (Sparta Public Library) completely, as local clients of the library in Thiensville can loan the Kindle 2 with ten book titles, "including Jodi Picoult's 'Handle with Care', Emily Brontë's 'Wuthering Heights' and Stephen King's 'UR', which King wrote specifically for the Kindle" right now (Benson 2009).

This move has pushed the Amazon opening its door gradually to public libraries – the specific education market. When the SPL (Sparta Public Library) firstly offered the loan service to patrons in 2008, the Amazon reacted very cautiously, the Amazon spokesman Drew Herdener declared that it was acceptable loan a Kindle without content, but sharing a device loaded with content "with a wide group of people would not be in line with the term of use". But for Weyenberg's service, the devices are loaded with Amazon's e-book contents with weekly checkouts for monitoring the novelty. The Director of Weyenberg Public Library, Linda Bendix expressed that they have received the permission from Amazon supported to circulate the Kindles, which indicates the practice of service is sustained by Amazon. Next, when the cooperation with educational institution expands to universities, Amazon shows a complete agreement to offer the content to users. This progress indicates that Amazon is adjusting the

promotion of its Kindle family to a more acceptable range of target consumers. It also provides a reasonable capacity for Kindle family to possess the relevant market share.

Conclusion

The Amazon.com Inc. has been expanding the functional technologies all along. The Kindle family is considered to be “the best chance yet to spur e-book readership” (Fialkoff 2008). It may appeal to individual users who tend to enjoy an excellent reading experience. The shape and size are perfect to carry along. The wireless connection browser makes the access for e-books and other digital format easy. Consumers can access any preferred title from the online store without time restrictions and geographic limits. The advanced attribute of a wider screen enhances Kindle’s accessible formats for newspapers and textbooks. The extended internal memory, along with the large-screen format, provides Kindle family a wider range of educational usage.

All the functional adjustments indicate that Amazon shifts the wireless devices to meet the market demands. Also, Amazon markets Kindle family in series of adjustable economic transaction models. The expanding cooperation with textbook publishers strengthens Amazon as a

content provider. The cooperation with Apple indicates the potential of Amazon as the content provider and its purposed promotion to the e-book rendition. Promoting a loaner program to public libraries offers an opportunity for the public to get familiar with the devices. All the collaborations help Amazon’s to dominate with the market.

The Kindle family is here to stay. Kindles are not just a flash in the pan, because their evolving technology responds to the demands of the market. Moreover, the superior reading experience is assisted with smooth economic transaction. Therefore, it is believed that the Kindle family is the perfect and justifiable tool for Amazon to monopolise the e-books market in the near future.

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Picking Up the Pages

Discussing the Materiality of Magazines

Joy Enriquez

This paper looks at the emergence of microzines – a specific sub-genre of magazines that herald the survival of the printed medium in the face of digitisation. In this age of digital technology when laptop computers have morphed into handhelds and third-generation mobile phones boast the same functionality of desktop workstations, digital media – in all its accessible, scalable and searchable glory – has become the common source of information and entertainment. E-paper threatens to replace the printed medium with downloadable, portable and up-to-the-minute content (Hampshire 2006). Despite this proliferation of online media consumption and all the benefits that come with it, magazines are flourishing and newsstands are offering more (rather than fewer) options than there were a few years ago (Rothstien 2007). Though many periodicals are adopting a stronger online presence, the independent magazine industry has exploited the accessibility of desktop publishing and collaboration tools to experiment with the possibilities and constraints of the print medium. This article explores the social and cultural value of the printed artefact and discusses the tactility, longevity, and collectability of microzines, thus illuminating the way microzines are offering readers an experience that digital media can neither provide nor replace.

Key words: microzine, independent magazine, zine, print publishing, print media, media materiality

An Introduction to the World of Microzines

“Everything at Mag Nation can be touched, felt and browsed except for our staff.”

[SHOP SIGN IN MAGAZINE RETAIL STORE
'MAG NATION', MELBOURNE, VICTORIA]

Magazines, in their traditional sense, are dying. Consumer titles that have long dominated newsstands for over 250 years are now evolving in an attempt to convert

the seemingly outdated print medium into the increasingly pervasive and popular online platform. A strong online presence benefits publications by providing readers with supplementary material, more detailed coverage, and a richer multimedia experience (Holmes 2006: 148). Because of these benefits, there are real concerns that magazines will die with the growth of online content. Increasing media consumption via the Internet by way of RSS feeds and dedicated websites

signal the extinction of the printed periodical similarly to the way e-book readers will eventually see the death of the book (Yen 2008: 35). However, what many people do not realise, is that the introduction of computer technology – particularly that of desktop publishing tools to skilled youths with large supplies of creative ideas, ambition, time, contacts and caffeine – has signalled the emergence of an enduring category of print publications. Some call these independent magazines, small magazines, or microzines. David Renard refers to these publications as the ‘stylepress’; “physically and aesthetically engaging, vibrant chroniclers of trends,” that exist not just as platforms for ideas and artistic expressions but as a showcase of a current cultural experience, produced as visual pleasures as well as enduring artefacts (Renard 2006: 1).

Microzines are loosely defined as beautifully designed, producer-owned and made, serial print publications that have small circulation and high production values (Le Masurier 2008). These publications are unique objects, described by Angelo Cirimele, publisher of *Magazine* as “small jewels for connoisseurs” that the general public is mostly unaware of (Renard 2006: 2). They have a distinct place in the print genealogy; adopting their aesthetical

and counter-cultural values from their predecessor, the zine. Zines are hand-made magazines or mini-comics about anything and everything – bands, movies, subcultures, obsessions, rants, reviews, poems, photos and essays. They are distinct from commercial publications or today’s blogs in that they are tactile (usually made of paper, cardboard, or fabric which is stitched, glued or stapled together), are non-efficient to produce (often drawn or written by hand and photocopied), and are made by individuals or small teams as opposed to large publishing houses, and exist for small, niche audiences as opposed to large groups of global consumers (Todd and Watson 2006: 13). *MixTape*, *The Tilted Page* and *Tiny Paper Hearts* are just a few examples of over 50 Australian zine titles that visited the Museum of Contemporary Art for the 2009 Sydney Writers Festival – zines that are sold in bookstores, clothing shops and online vendors around Australia and successfully document the art and culture of the present day and combine it with the freedom and thrill that comes with independent publishing.

Microzines adopt the physical and cultural attributes of zines and merge them with the design and collaborative tools provided by digital media to create higher-end, polished publications. Titles

such as *elodi*, and *Dumbo Feather Pass It On* are such examples. They exist, not for commercial reason or gain, but to express a unique editorial vision or specific cultural philosophy; be it about skate, surf and street culture (*Monster Children*, Sydney), design and illustration (*Nico*, Luxembourg), or simple, random, ordinary life (*Karen*, Wiltshire). These publications embody similar personal qualities, creativity, labour, and the artistic and aesthetic characteristic of zines and merge these with the possibilities opened up by digital desktop publishing tools and affordable printing costs to create a larger and more durable print-run (Losowsky 2009).

Microzines in a Digital Environment

Self-publishing and do-it-yourself broadcasting are not foreign concepts in the digital landscape. Blogs, wikis, social networking sites, and the emergence of citizen and participatory journalism allow anyone with a certain degree of literacy and a decent Internet connection to publish their own thoughts and words. The online environment is perfect for communicating with global audiences, connecting niche communities with like-minded folk and providing a supposedly richer and more interactive platform for ideas-sharing and communication (Thompson 2005: 235). While this ability to collaborate and network with

specific contacts has aided independent publishers by making it easier to create collaborative content, gain a following within hard-to-reach niche audience, distribute publications, and build a public presence, the consumption habits created by these electronic mediums hardly support that of print publications (Anderrson and Steedman 2002).

Chris Chesher describes this new media space as one that favours space over time. Because digital media channels can be accessed globally by large audiences and are easily updatable, users now favour content that is fast and accessible than content that is durable and collectable. This trend towards needing up-to-date content is reflected in the ongoing popularity of easy-to-find “Top” or “Recent” stories on news websites, the encouragement of “present” status updates (such as that on Facebook and Twitter) and the use of customised news listings (Chesher 2007:21). These consumption habits pose a problem for print media because it is so easily dated – print publications take longer to produce and the moment it is produced the text cannot be updated (Hampshire 2006: 31).

But if the online environment provides an easier and more accessible gateway

into do-it-yourself publishing why then, is this genre of print publication booming? Despite the trend for ACP magazines and Reed Business Information towards expanding the digital version of their mainstream periodicals, the World Magazine Trends 2004/2005 states that there is optimism in the international magazine publishing market, and print on paper is likely to retain attraction from readers (McKay 2006: 215). Mag Nation, a recently established niche magazine retailer, stocks over 4,000 titles on its shelves in Melbourne (Yen 2008: 34) and thousands of micro titles lined the floors of Colophon 2009, the independent magazine exhibition held in Luxembourg (Pardi 2009: 26). In fact, microzines contribute \$13 million to the global economy, and this figure is projected to grow to more than \$500 million over the next two decades (Renard 2006: 2).

In his book, *The Last Magazine*, Renard argues that there is a place in the digital environment for the unique independent magazine. Digital devices such as tablet computers, PDAs, 3G mobile phones and e-books have failed to overtake the periodical's primary medium – paper – for two distinct reasons. The first is because book and magazine readers still seek the physical experience that comes with picking up a book. Whether it is thumbing through pages, marking the margins with handwritten notes,

displaying a collection on a coffee table, curling up in bed or sitting on the train with something lightweight and tangible, this essentially means that the physical attributes of a particular medium plays a part in how humans interact with it and associate with its content (Moylean and Stiles 1996). In an information-saturated society where the economy is increasingly based on knowledge, the physicality and materiality of media cannot be ignored.

The second reason is that print media lend itself to collectivity and endurance more so than digital media. “Internet web pages tend to have a limited lifetime,” and, by their nature of updateability, are made to change with the times (Chesher 2007: 23). Print media is akin to the cultural artefacts left behind by previous civilisations. This particular genre – the microzine – contains within its pages contents that reflect a specific time, era, and culture. The nature of their contents



Magazine specialist Mag Nation stocks over 4000 print publications in their stores, dedicating their shelves to hard-to-find microzines.

– art, photography, fashion, urban trends, social commentary and personal drawings – reflect a collectability and social significance that contrasts to the emphasis towards the “now” and “present” that digital media encompasses.

The Materiality of Microzines

“Clearly when we read books, we really read books – that is, we read the physicality or materiality of the book as well as and in relation to the text itself. Literacy, then, may be said to include not only textual competence but material competence, an ability to read the semiotics of the concrete forms that embody, shape, and condition the meanings of texts.” (Moylan and Stiles 1996)



Monster Children magazine uses a unique landscape layout, making the microzine look and feel like a photo album in order to reflect the publication's dedication to art and photography.

One of the microzine's most defining characteristics is that of their physicality and their “slickness” (Jacovides 2003: 24). The microzine's emphasise on physicality and materiality – the size, shape of the book, the texture of the cover and the durability of the paper – plays an integral part in what makes it an outstanding medium. They are distinct from consumer titles such as *Cosmopolitan*, *Time*, or *Women's Weekly* because, unlike mainstream magazines, microzines are not mass produced, nor do they follow standard magazine formats. Values and key messages are expressed not just in the content but in physical components – from the microzine's design to the material on which it is published.

These are elements which do not lend themselves to being digitised (Thompson 2005: 243). The size of the page, for example, is a critical design choice and blends message with aesthetic – *box* magazine is a square (210mm x 210mm), while *Monster Children*, which primarily features image and photography, has a landscape layout to mirror that of a photo album. This experimentation with paper size contrasts with a website designer's inability to play with a website's size. While there are ways of playing with a website's layout, designers are limited to the size of a user's monitor, the resolution of a reader's screen and the limitations posed by various web browsers.

As yet, digital media also lacks the ability to play with its physical attributes – texture, weight, binding, and even the scent of the paper are all elements of what make microzines unique. *Tank* magazine uses thick, cross-hatched matte cardboard and a large page size to emphasise the strength of its title and its contents, *Dumbo Feather Pass It On* shies away from the glossy paper used in consumer titles and uses matte paper similar to that of a paper-back to reflect the stories of the five individuals that are included in each issue, and *The Wooden Toy* is packaged in cardboard so the reader has the experience of unpacking it, contains a collectable art print in each issue and includes a certificate of authentication with each magazine (which prides itself in being “handmade”). Similarly, the pages of *box* magazine are glossy, thick and made to last. It is the right size for portability but it is the right texture and material for display and collection.

Asian Punk Boy (below)



Asian Punk Boy magazine (contents featured above) emphasises a tangible, hands-on user experience that cannot be easily translated to an online environment. Online versions of magazines (such as *Wet Ink*) play with visual design elements but cannot change the texture or durability of the text in the same way that microzines can. For this reason, Renard argues microzines will provide a reader experience unique to that provided by digital media.

Essentially, microzines cater for a tactile experience. Readers are encouraged to engage with the physical medium as well as the content within it (*Asian Punk Boy*, for example, is packaged in a wooden box which contains handmade contents which the reader must put together, while *Blank* magazine is delivered in a pizza box). In an era where much of human interaction is with machinery, the size, texture, weight, and even the source of the publication’s paper stand out to make these publications unique.

While different devices can offer different experiences (a laptop vs an e-book reader, for example), it is the machine that provides that unique experience, not the text itself. Because of this, many microzine publishers have websites or electronic versions, but they exist primarily as a print publications, containing within them a tangible

Wet Ink Magazine (online)



expression or thought that “someone can hold, pass to someone at a show, and find (again and again) at the bottom of your underwear drawer” (Todd and Watson 2006). While it can be argued that users can “discover” a website and share it with their friends, such experiences are still limited to viewing the text on a machine.

As a result, the experience offered by microzines is unlike that of digital media. Digital texts are commonly produced to be consumed via machine in bite-sized chunks, or “on the go”. While certain types of information lends itself to a digital setting, the material qualities and the artistic elements that are characteristic of this particular genre make it difficult for microzines to exploit the benefits made available on digital platforms (Thompson 2005: 327). Websites make the accessibility, searchability and storage of data far easier, and online magazine publishers use these functions to enhance the user’s reading experience by encouraging efficiency and interactivity with multimedia. However, microzines are different in that they do not prize efficiency or accessibility. In contrast, they are created to be savoured, collected and often hold value *because* of their rarity (Husni 2007). Their physical elements cannot be translated or appropriated in a digital setting, and while there are certain

design elements that can be mimicked on a screen, a digital reproduction would not have the same effect of tangible quality that is provided by a physical magazine (Leslie 2009).

The Collectability of Microzines

“In a culture that celebrates ease and immediacy, [publishers] are choosing to take part in a process that is deliberately messy, inefficient, and labour-intensive – they are choosing to take part in an art process” (Piepmeier 2008).

The very method of a microzine’s creation – meticulous design choices, hours of collaboration (be it with a small design team or a online network of social contributors), and its laborious, time-consuming printing process – lends itself to being dangerously outdated. However, it is this very investment of time, skill and labour that make the microzine a valuable cultural artefact (Piepmeier 2008). The personal and laborious investment involved in creating a physical object creates intimacy and affection between the creator and the reader and the arduous process of creating such a publication is, in part, what makes a such texts so valuable (Glass 1999: 47).

Technologists argue that the constraint of print publications as a time-bound medium will be its eventual cause of death, however this may be the key to

the microzine's resilience (Leslie 2002). New information delivery methods and the replacement of old tools with new technologies imply that microzines are soon to be an outdated form of content delivery. However, print publications offer a sense of place in a way websites cannot (Sacks 2006: 22). They have a specific place in a timeline and, due to their physical limitations, have a beginning, middle and end. Web pages, on the other hand, stand alone. There are millions of links to external pages and "there is no continuity, no real identity, no style, no familiar page-turning experience. No real beginning, no middle, and surely no satisfying end." (Sacks 2006: 22) In a response to an article about virtual magazines, a reader of *Dissent* wrote,

"Well, there's the problem: virtual magazines have no physical virtues. Reading them, I feel dispossessed. And I realize now that this isn't only because I can't hold the real thing and turn the actual pages. It is also because I value this finite object, where writers have committed themselves to these ideas and arguments, which I can read, and finish reading, and put aside (or throw away). And then I wait for the next issue. The waiting is a good thing. It gives me time to think about what I've just read."

Though it may hinder its updateability or even its accessibility, it is the microzine's physicality that differentiates it from

the tumultuous, and constantly shifting digital media landscape. Today's digital media scape may provide the benefit of spatial transcendence, but it does not mirror the permanence and longevity characteristic of traditional media forms. Websites or virtual content – artefacts that are only accessible via machine "are subject to the limits and thresholds of digitisation: bit size; sampling rates; encoding schemas and so on." (Chesher 2007: 23) Microzines, on the other hand, are based on a tried and tested communication model – the codex. A codex may age or become dated once produced, but its ease of use and permanence is its virtue, not downfall.

Based on this model, microzines provide a specific experience unique to this type of medium. The physical nature of microzines allow for them to "cater to all five senses" – something Samir Husni (2007) and Susan Stewart (1996) believe to be characteristic of an artefact of personal significance. As physical objects, microzines have the ability to resurrect certain feelings, memories and experiences in a way digital technology cannot – what Stewart calls the "authentic experience." Stewart argues that we keep souvenirs in order to represent traces of the experience once had. The creases on the edges, the smears on a page, the dog-eared corner, the scribbling in the margin

all attribute to the microzine's standing as a cultural artefact (Stewart 1996: 135).

Microzines are artefacts in themselves, created to celebrate a specific philosophy of the period in which it was created. They have a permanence that is tied to their physicality as a medium. Websites and other electronic, virtual texts do not have this - you cannot "collect" web pages. E-books, like websites, mp3s or virtual magazines are dependent on the machine on which they are viewed, held or stored, for access and value. The physical presence of a book or magazine has a lasting meaning, in a way a website does not, since it cannot be read, seen, held, or experienced if not in its mechanic casing of a desktop, laptop or handheld device.

Conclusion – the Future of the Microzine

Over the last twenty years, microzines have emerged onto newsstands with explosive force. The magazine industry is seeing growth in its independent publishing sector as creative teams find ways to utilise, experiment with and express themselves within the limitations provided by the printed form. Some newsstands are adopting these titles, lining their shelves with microzines from all over the world – unique publications that bring with them a certain sense of

personality and richness. While many tout the benefits of digitised media consumption, there are certain elements of the print medium which cannot lend itself to digitisation. The unique experience provided by picking up a tangible print publication is what the microzine genre represents.

For this reason, despite the exciting and viable offers that come from the multimedia experiences found online or in various media devices, microzines offer something unique that neither e-readers or online webpage browsing can replace. They are valued – not only for the content they hold or for their portability, tangibility and useability. They are highly regarded and sought after because of the personality that they embody, the texture and materiality with which they evoke specific values and messages, and the experience that is lived when one is holding it in their hands. Eventually they may be the only survivors of the print periodical, surviving only as a collectable anthology of cultural trends and creative practice. Whatever the case, in this digitally saturated era, they will pose as reminders that information is not *just* downloadable, or a snapshot of history is not just available via Google search or at the click of a mouse button, but an equally rich, rewarding and sensually stimulating experience can be accessed – simply by picking up the pages.

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Digital Footprints: a case study

Michael Schanzer

This article provides a conceptual description of digital footprints and examines the traces of digital data which academic researchers create within a range of information systems in the course of their work. Five essential qualities of digital traces are defined and four types of traces specified. This framework is used to analyse the writer's own digital research traces through a case study of his online research actions over the course of seven days. The research contributes to the literature on digital identity management by examining how particular research practices associated with specific types of traces may affect academic recognition and reputation. The case study and review of related literature suggests ways to enhance researchers' visibility of their digital footprints and awareness of the processes through which traces are generated and stored.

Introduction

In pre-Internet days, many types of interaction between researchers and information systems created traces of data as printed and electronic records. Library borrower records, journal subscriptions, bookstore purchases, and correspondence between academic colleagues are examples of data traces which could be searched through a specific request by someone with access to a particular information collection or system. However, these unconnected traces were not easily aggregated or retrieved by anyone else. These days, all research using Web-based information systems leaves digital imprints. Every search string sent to a search engine or research database, all emails and

posts to Weblogs or mailing lists, every item posted on a social networking or bookmarking site may be permanently associated with a researcher's digital identity.

Researchers are of course not alone in this respect, since every interaction between an internet user's digital hardware and a network may be logged and time stamped in an electronic database, potentially accessible forever by anyone with an internet connection (Miller 2009:3-4). Even without a personal internet connection, every swipe of an ATM card or other electronically readable document, telephone call, CCTV image, mobile phone call location, and RFI tag transaction such as a road toll payment may be logged in a database.

This article uses a case study of the writer's digital research practices to examine the digital traces created by internet researchers within a range of information systems as they conduct their research. The aims of the case study are to measure the effect of these practices on the writer's digital profile, and to explore the wider implications for the management of researchers' digital footprints. While these traces can serve as devices for extending recognition and reputation within a research field, as digital data they can also be disembodied from the original context, recombined in different ways and re-projected to audiences unimagined by the researcher.

Qualities and Types of Traces

This study defines five essential qualities of digital traces: they are typically fragmented, dispersed, structurable, (easily) disembodied and interwoven (with traces from other online and offline spheres of life). This last point encapsulates a basic premise of this study: the traces associated with an individual's digital research are a subset of their full digital footprint and may be linked with data from other dimensions of their life.

Digital footprints are composed of fragments of data dispersed in multiple, geographically-remote databases which may be subject to different corporate and legal governance frameworks. Some traces, such as cookies and beacons, are

situated locally ("client side") while IP addresses, URLs accessed, date/time, search strings, 'clickstream' data used by search engines, and user registration details are commonly stored "server side", on Web site computers. While some research-related traces can be retrieved by the crawlers of general-purpose search engines, many are located in searchable databases that are generally "invisible" to search engines such as Google, Yahoo, Ask and so on, and only produce results dynamically in response to a specific request. (Bergman 2001; Halavais 2009; Ratzan 2006)

A useful distinction can be made between structurable traces such as the text of a search string and non-structurable data such as a researcher's purpose for searching, level of subject expertise, attitudes and biases. Structurable data is usually syntactically consistent and suitable for quantitative analysis but generally lacks semantic depth (Clarke, 1994). However, all digital data is easily disembodied from the original context in which it was created. Indicators such as time, place, and intended audience may be obscured and the data transferred and recombined in ways not imagined by its creator (Madden 2007:5). Personal data may be replicated on multiple servers and information shared "actively" (voluntarily) in one context may be "passively" (involuntarily) disclosed in another.

A typology is introduced here to account for the diversity of digital traces and their social contexts: two modes of traces (“active” and “passive”), each of which are manifested in two distinct spheres of life (“public” and “private”). The resulting four types are (1) active-public; (2) active-private; (3) passive-public; (4) passive-private. Examples from the case study of these different types of traces are identified and discussed below. Traces may be actively projected by the individual or passively generated: active traces are personal data made accessible online through deliberate posting or sharing of information by the user, often in specific contexts with specific audiences in mind; while passive traces are personal data made accessible online with no deliberate intervention from an individual (Madden 2007:3-4). As the case study data illustrates below, online research practices such as blogging, internet search, collaborative bookmarking and referencing, online publishing and reviewing journal articles may originate as one type of digital trace based on the original context and intended audience, but may change types if the data is disembodied from the original context or linked with other traces.

Visualising a Personal Web of Digital Footprints

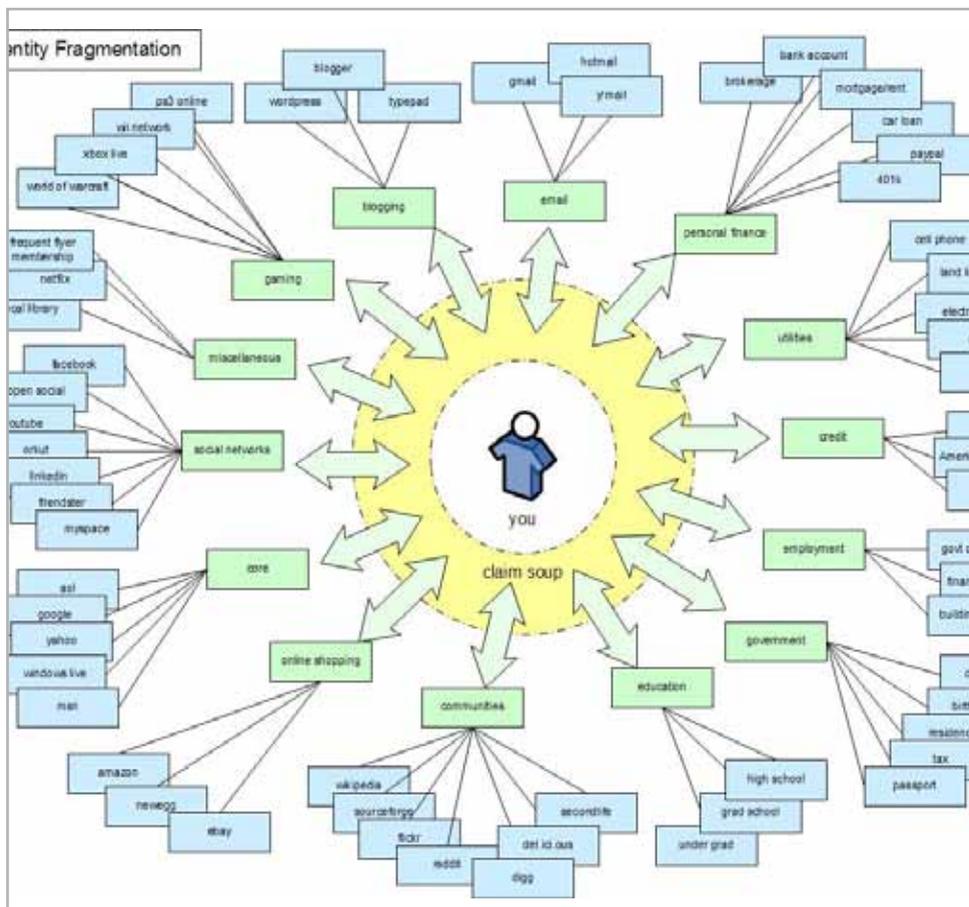
The literature on digital identity, notably Boyd 2002, Boyd & Potter 2003, Clarke 1994, Smith 2007, Weaver 2005 and Baier & Kunze 2004, offers a range of models which aim to elucidate the fragmentary and dispersed qualities of digital traces which are described above. Most instructive for the purposes of this article were Boyd’s study of “faceted ID/entity” (2002) and Weaver & Gahegan’s (2007) discussion of the “dimensional” qualities of identity because both studies focus at least in part on the relationship between particular online actions and specific types of digital traces. Weaver’s analysis (2005) of his own digital footprint, which he recorded using a GPS device, illustrates the complexities of modeling data traces. While Weaver’s research context is investigative profiling in the US Homeland Security response to 9/11, his concept of a digital footprint encompasses the five “essential qualities” identified above: “a very highly dimensional and constantly increasing space that is characterised by digital transactions, augmented by surveillance, and influenced by associations and patterns through space and time.” (Weaver 2005:201-202).

Due in particular to the fragmentary and dispersed nature of digital traces, researchers need clearer visibility of the

consequences of decisions to disclose and share data in terms of the traces left behind. This argument has been made by Boyd (2008) in regard to privacy settings for the sharing of personal information between Facebook “friends”, but applies also to the issue of data traces collected by external entities. Data visualisation tools such as TouchGraph’s application for Facebook, and investigative analysis tools such as Analyst’s Notebook may be useful

self-monitoring tools for researchers working within large and complex collaborative research networks.

The diagram below (adapted from Shanahan 2007), shows digital identity as a multi-dimensional web, and is included here to elucidate the conceptual definition of digital traces outlined above, in particular the fragmentary, dispersed and interwoven qualities of traces.



(Adapted from Shanahan, 2007)

Case Study

This research presents a seven-day 'snapshot' of my online research activity conducted in three different environments (home, café, campus) and using three different means of connecting to the internet (wireless, mobile broadband and networked PC). When each research action was completed, I reviewed the processes through which my digital traces may have been collected and stored by the various online entities with which I knew I had interacted. These expectations were tested by conducting self-search using people search engines which claim to be able to retrieve "hidden Web" traces as discussed above.

This led me to a self-reflective usage of person search tools to assess my own digital footprint. Nicolai, Bruns et.al (2008) explore the motivational origins of self-search through the framework of narcissism theory. The approach taken in this study is informed by the work of Lampel and Bhalla (2007) who examined "self-Googleing" as a means of monitoring the social construction of one's own reputation, and Weaver (2005) who evaluated the collection (using a GPS device) and visualisation of data comprising his own digital footprint.

Analysis

Commencing this research with a relatively "clean slate" in terms of digital

footprints was an advantage in that I was able to include data from the period when I was registering with a range of research services and using them for the first time. However, this aspect and also the small corpus of data and the temporal context of the study may limit the scope of the analysis. The findings of this study may apply in only general terms to long-term users of digital research services who use these services in specialised ways.

I discuss here the main differences between my digital footprint before and after the case study period, and attempt to identify which types of online activity had the largest effect on my digital profile. During the course of one week of online research, I logged over twenty different online research actions with a range of social research sites, search engines, online databases, mailing lists and subscription services. My use of social bookmarking sites such as diigo and delicious created traces which portray a rich source of data about my research identity and interests. The act of registering with these services and providing an accurate user profile may signify a desire to share knowledge with like-minded researchers in an open and collaborative spirit. However, I discovered how easily social research traces can be connected with other dimensions of my personal profile. For example, the people search engine pip! linked both my university email address

and my diigo username to my diigo account and disclosed my full diigo profile including photo, personal details and research description.

Compulsory user registration is a salient feature of Web-based research services. In the case study, registration was prerequisite for initial access to all the services used. User registration can also enable certain enhanced aspects of a site's functionality such as personalized search with online databases like Science Direct. This observation accords with Ho (2005) who described the trend towards registration in relation to commercial sites. The main implication of compulsory user registration for online research services is the potential for permanent storage of researchers' profiles. As a registered user, a researcher is compelled to accept a Web cookie from the site each time they log in, thus enabling a consistent user record to be maintained in the server log (Zimmer 2008:88).

Conclusions and Scope for Further Research

This article provided a conceptual definition and typology of digital traces and applied this framework to the question of how particular research practices are associated with specific types of traces. The case study showed how the consequences of disclosing personal information when registering for online research services are largely

invisible to the researcher. While researchers can self-monitor their digital traces on the local (client) side including browser history, they have no visibility of what happens to their traces on the server side, how many networks have replicated and stored their traces on multiple servers, and where those servers are located.

This article foresees, as does Boyd (2008), future developments in database access controls which would allow Internet users to precisely manage what they disclose about themselves and the range of people with access that information. One can imagine researchers being able to tightly specify the range of people who may access their personal profile, bookmarks, bibliographies or other artifacts such as photographs prior to these files being uploaded to the Web. To do so, one would need to be able to view the complete list of all people to whom each item would be visible. The ability to create a unique list of recipients for any digital content a researcher shares online may affect their decisions about which collaborative research services they use.

The concept of a feedback loop between researchers and the servers storing their traces has significant technical, legal and practical implications. However, increased awareness in real time of the content and confidentiality of digital traces will enhance researchers' control

over the projection of their academic reputation. However, reputation is strongly influenced by traces of information generated by others, and is essentially conferred upon an individual by the communities, online and offline, in which they live.

This case study has also identified a topic for further research in this area: The discussion regarding the writer's use of social bookmarking services foreshadows the question of how socially-mediated research practices enabled by these new Web-based collaborative technologies affect the academic recognition and reputation of researchers using them in the course of their work. A forthcoming article will investigate the socially-mediated research practices of a group of university-based astronomers, and explain the implications of these practices for their recognition and reputation within the field.

DAY LOCATION CONNECTION	ONLINE RESEARCH ACTIONS	TYPES OF TRACES	DESCRIPTION
DAY 1 – Monday HOME [Optus wireless / iPod Touch]	Login to USYD email account using wireless connection	Active- Private	USYD server records time and my unique login identity. User details, usage statistics and cookie ID for this session are recorded. Email and Web browsing poten- tially monitored as per policy.
DAY 1 HOME [Optus wireless / iPod Touch]	Set up USYD email to forward all incom- ing mail to my Gmail account.	Active- Private Passive- Private	Mail forwarding enlarges my email footprint as USYD email text and contact details are dupli- cated on Google servers. Linking these two accounts effectively merges part of my student traces with traces from other spheres of my life.
DAY 1 CAFÉ [“3” mobile b-band / laptop]	Login to Gmail ac- count using café’s WiFi service. Respond to mail forwarded from USYD email account. Use Google Reader to view RSS news feeds	Active- Private	Every time I log in to my Google account or another website requir- ing registration, a permanent record of my activity created in server log. Google may combine personally identifying particulars provided by me for registration (age, gender, profession etc) with my server log history to construct a detailed profile of me. (Zimmer 2008: 88)
DAY 2 - Tuesday CAFÉ [“3” mobile b-band / laptop]	Check Gmail. Subscribe to internet research mailing list: “Air-L Digest” (aoir. org) providing real name and USYD email (as required by site).	Active- Pubic	Even if I deleted yesterday’s Google cookie and used a dif- ferent IP address, today’s login enables Google to maintain a continuous record of my activity in the server log. (Zimmer, <i>ibid.</i>)
DAY 2 CAMPUS [“3” mobile b-band / laptop]	Use laptop connected to mobile broadband to search Gartner and AoIR databases for “digital traces/identity”	Active- Private	Hutchison (“3”) authenticates my account details, records my login time, tracks download volume and maintains a user log. My general location while online can be identified in relation to mobile cell tower positions.

DAY 2 CAMPUS ["3" mobile b-band / laptop]	Register with Slide-share.net and upload PowerPoint slides on search engines.	Active-Public	I provide a personal profile for user registration including occupation (student), affiliation (USYD) and academic interests (digital communication). Slides uploaded portray my researcher discipline, topic and level of expertise.
DAY 3 - Wednesday CAMPUS - LAB [networked PC]	Check Gmail and follow hyperlinks to diigo group. Subscribe to two RSS feeds for academic blogs [topics related to this research]. View results with Google Reader.	Active-Public	Personal details in my diigo profile are linked to by Google account. Google Reader records my feed subscriptions and usage statistics.
DAY 3 CAMPUS - LAB [networked PC]	Google blog search: "digital traces"; "digital footprints".	Active-Private	Google server log records search terms and results clicked as part of my "Web History".
DAY 4 - Thursday CAMPUS ["3" mobile b-band / laptop]	Login to diigo to bookmark, annotate and share links with student group.	Active-Public	When I bookmark, annotate or share a link diigo records the URL and my annotation links in a server log (diigo privacy policy). Self-search using pip! (on my diigo username or USYD email address) disclosed my full diigo profile.
DAY 4 CAMPUS ["3" mobile b-band / laptop]	Synchronise my diigo and delicious social bookmark accounts	Active-Private	Mirroring my bookmarks between these two services for convenience and accessibility effectively duplicates my social bookmarking traces.
DAY 4 CAMPUS ["3" mobile b-band / laptop]	Access USYD "Moodle" learning management site: Post two items to discussion forum.	Active-Private Passive-Private	Moodle registration details including detailed personal profile and photo are accessible to subscribers only. USYD server records session details, files uploaded, and comments posted as per policy.
DAY 5 - Friday CAMPUS - LAB [networked PC]	Search online databases and email references to myself@usyd	Active-Private Passive-Private	Journal references emailed to USYD are forwarded to Gmail and become part of my Google Account profile.

DAY 5 CAMPUS - LAB [networked PC]	Register with Science Direct to personalise search for journal articles.	Active-Private Passive-Private	I am required to provide real name, and university affiliation details for registration.
DAY 6 - Saturday HOME [wireless / laptop]	Use USYD online databases Google Scholar and ScienceDirect for full text journal search for terms “person search”, “deep web” and “digital traces”.	Active-Private Passive-Private	USYD records usual session details and access to online databases. Traces of my search keywords are attributed to USYD rather than my personal Google account, but could be linked, e.g. by law enforcement through access to my Optus ISP account.
DAY 6 - Saturday HOME [wireless / laptop]	Subscribe to RSS feeds Cyberjournalist.net; Publishing 2.0; ReadWriteWeb; The Guardian.	Active-Private	Google Reader specified. These feed subscriptions are added to my Google account.
Day 7 CAFÉ [“3” mobile b-band / laptop]	Login to Apple iTunes; subscribe to podcasts for BBC “Digital Planet” & “Click On”. Download episode on digital identity.	Active-Private Passive-Public (if released to advertisers)	iTunes has the ability to record my search strings and download history, and combine this information with my consumer details. My podcast download history reflects aspects of my research.
Day 7 CAFÉ [“3” mobile b-band / laptop]	Share podcast links via diigo and post comments on podcasts.	Active-Public	Self-search using pipl disclosed my full diigo profile including this bookmark just created.
Day 7 HOME [wireless – laptop]	Use USYD “Moodle” system to post items to discussion forum.	Active-Private Passive-Private	USYD records usual session details. Moodle registration details including detailed personal profile and photo are accessible to subscribers only.
Day 7 HOME [wireless – laptop]	Create account at Multiply.com for personal blog. First blog posted on 30 April and linked to Diigo group.	Active-Public	Basic user profile required including name, DOB, location, login ID and password.

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Virtual work spaces: The changing face of communication

Gina Spithakis

Virtual worlds are 3D immersive, interactive spaces that exist online. They simulate face-to-face interaction in user-generated social and business environments, adding a unique element to social networking, communication and collaboration, that is cost effective. Unlike virtual games, there is no fixed goal or purpose, it changes with the user. However, online presence is represented in the same way – via avatars. These enable users to chat, interact and connect with multiple users in real time in a more ‘human’ way. It is this element of social interaction that has prompted companies to explore virtual worlds to more effectively engage their publics, particularly employees. This article seeks to examine how virtual worlds, in particular Second Life, and Qwaq Forums, are connecting geographically-dispersed employees through 3D-simulated work environments. It will explore the balance of realism versus presence that enable the level of social interaction not available in other channels. The initial hypothesis is that organisations need to look beyond current communication practices to engage employees in a changing business environment. The social interaction offered through virtual worlds engage employees in a way other communications channels do not.

Keywords: *virtual worlds, second life, qwaq, communication, collaboration, emerging technologies, 3D web*

Introduction

As virtual worlds grew in popularity in the mid 2000s, so did the interest from organisations to use it as a tool to engage their publics, particularly employees. The rise of globalisation had led organisations to move away from conventional business models to run their businesses and create “virtual enterprises”.

These are organisations where virtual teams, that are dispersed across the globe,

share responsibility and make decisions to achieve business outcomes. (Rasmussen, Wangel 2006)

As organisations’ business models evolve, so too are their communications. In the new virtual enterprise, traditional top-down, hierarchical communication is not an effective way to engage these teams. Rather, communication must now be a two-way process to effect productivity and employee engagement. (Argenti 1998)

vital part of building this communication capability in organisations.

Virtual worlds, are defined as 3D virtual reality systems where participants communicate and interact with content and each other via their avatars - digital representations of themselves. (Bronack, Cheney, Riedl, Tashner 2008).

Essential features of these multi-user, immersive environments are: Presence within a space; interaction in real time, persistence in real time (ie. environment and objects remain whether we are present or not); the representation of one's online persona via an avatar. (Prentice, Rozwell, Harris, Sarner, Walls, Gartner 2009)

Their design philosophy centres around allowing users to take a collaborative approach to creating content, often simulating their real-life environment.

This is quite dissimilar from virtual games where competition among multi-player environments is rife, with the objective to be the best and win rather than work together to achieve a common goal. (Miller, 2006)

It is their unique presence capability, and their design philosophies that have drawn organisations to virtual worlds such as Second Life and Qwaq Forums to enhance communication and interaction among virtual teams, via their computers.

The organisational need for two-way interaction

In their work on best practices in virtual teams, Lurey and Raisinghani (2001) declare that a new business environment is emerging. It is one in which creating virtual teams within organisations is becoming critical for them to survive. Organisation structures are changing to enable effective use of an employee base's skills, often spread globally.

Organisations are looking at the use of computers in the workplace as a means to tap into the global employee base through the effective creation of virtual teams. These teams can either be brought together to work on short term projects or longer term, both of which can span geographies, time and business units.

Communication and the means with which to do so is crucial in virtual teams. Lurey and Raisinghani, claim technology profoundly affects the nature of group work.

DeSanctis and Monge (1999) concur. Their research explored the dynamics of online communication and how it helps employees maintain effective relationships regardless of whether or not they worked on short term or long term projects/tasks.

They concluded that the longer the interaction, the more likely the team would understand the message and

deepen their relationships both in smaller interactions and as a larger community.

If that is the case, organisations should seek to use the most effective technology for geographically-dispersed teams that enables them to build effective working relationships.

Communication models are evolving to keep up with the changing organisation structures and needs. When it comes to building relationships, traditional, top-down information download communication is not effective. Instead, two-way communication enables employees to interact both peer to peer and with their leaders no matter their location, and gives them an avenue to share ideas, opinions, and join the conversation.

This approach has been made possible because of the technology now available, such as blogs and forums.

While today's employees are exposed to more high-tech communications that link them on a global scale, they still want more human interaction. (Argenti 1998)

An online communication medium that can simulate face-to-face communication may be a more effective option. Virtual worlds are the only medium that can do this at the present time.

Ultimately, as Gunawardena (1995) infers, it is the people involved who establish

a level of community and a sense of presence online. (Bronack, Cheney et.al)

Organisation leaders and employees cannot rely on the technology to create the sense of community needed for successful virtual teams. They need to continue to drive the message and the interaction through the medium to ensure its success. This notion will be further explored as we examine the success of virtual worlds used internally to engage employees versus externally to interact with customers.

Social interactions in a virtual world

Virtual worlds take interactivity within the online space to a new level. While there is a host of collaboration and communication tools available in organisations today, such as blogs, and wikis, they still lack the ability to make employees feel as though they are present. The elements of virtual worlds are "filling some of the gaps left by the World Wide Web". (Driver, Jackson, Forrester 2008)

According to K-Zero, there are more than 300 million registered accounts of virtual worlds as of second quarter of 2008. Around 30 million of these users are reasonably active. This popularity triggered interest in organisations seeking cost-effective, efficient and "green" ways to get dispersed employees to work together. While virtual worlds offer the means with which to enable

dispersed employees to communicate and collaborate, it is not the technology that ensures its success, it is the people. (Prentice, Rozwell, Harris, Sarner, Walls, Gartner 2009)

It simulates realism, and unlike other Web tools, offers an added form of interaction that enables users, such as employees, the ability to create communities in a realistic setting.

How presence is depicted in the virtual world differentiates them from other communication mediums, and enables it to closely simulate realism – face-to-face interaction. Two of the most popular virtual worlds being used by organisations is Second Life and Qwaq Forums. In a work setting, both seek to simulate real work environments however, their design philosophies differ.

Second Life, as defined by creator Linden Labs, is “an immersive 3D environment that includes voice, text, video, document sharing, and a whole host of other collaboration tools.” In this world, it is very much up to the individual or team to create an environment they wish to work in.

Qwaq Forums, on the other hand, combine the 3D environment with 2D desktop applications such as Microsoft Office, Adobe, and email, IM, and calendars. Unlike Second Life, it was designed specifically for

organisational use. It uses speech – gesture – sketch to more closely simulate face-to-face interaction.

Presence simulates face-to-face interaction

In its most basic definition, presence is the feeling of “being there” and enabling users to “know what’s going on”. In defining presence, Prentice, Rozwell et.al, use Heeter’s definition: in a virtual environment, there are three dimensions of presence comprising: environmental, personal, and social. Through this definition we will look at the different ways Second Life and Qwaq Forums use presence to create a realistic simulation of a work event such as a meeting.

a) Environmental presence: This is the degree with which the virtual online environment reflects a user’s presence. For example, a user can leave a door open as a signal that they have been there. This is an extension of what is offered in other web tools such as discussion forums where even though presence is reflected via the conversation and interaction the user leaves behind once logging out of the forum, the virtual world expands this offering into a much more visual representation.

Bailenson suggests environmental presence adds to the concept of immersion. The user is surrounded by visual and auditory information ie



The Greater IBM bloc party: Employees gather in the virtual world
 Copyright: IBM.com

instead of hearing sounds from a single place, “sounds emanate from various places in the digital environment.” (Bailenson 2006) Visually, a user is stimulated by a broader environment, that often depicts its real equivalent. For example, a meeting room.

In Second Life, meetings can take place on a company’s virtual island in different settings including a beach, park, café, or office. They can be surrounded by the sounds of birds, or even waves crashing on the shore, as they brainstorm or participate in a conference.

To get employees to attend, the host just needs to send an email with the SLURL to make sure they teleport to the correct destination at the appointed meeting time.

IBM, which has around 387,000 employees in 170 countries, has been at

the forefront of virtual world use, having established its virtual presence in 2006.

Since that time about 5000 employees use Second Life and other virtual worlds as a way to build community among their dispersed workforce to great effect.

They use the world to conduct virtual meetings, train employees, and host orientation for employees (Cavernelis, Cape Times 2008) Through video, IM,

chat, and voice mechanisms, employees are able to record meetings and/or conversations and use them in ‘real life’ channels such as email and blogs. One of those events included The Greater IBM bloc party held in Second Life in 2006. About 150 existing and former employees from across the globe, attended via their avatars.

Comparing the experience to the more conventional way of bringing the IBM alumni together ie via a blog, or the more costly exercise of flying them to one, central location, Chuck Hamilton, IBMer, Center For Advanced Learning (CAL) - Solutions Leader described it as follows:

“After the introductory chat, people simply wandered around, chatted live, instant messaged, took navigation instruction from peers, explored exhibits,

tried math puzzles, went to the NMC museum, talked to robots, picked up free tee shirts or got themselves tossed out of canons. Long after the scheduled event people mingled and dialogued about what had just happened to them. In just a few short hours, people were ripped into a future world, old timers still frustrated with current browser usability issues flew about next to younger upstarts who were up and running in ten minutes.

A buzz began.”

Qwaq Forums take a more traditional approach in how they set up their virtual environments.

Rather than seeing employees congregate for a brainstorming session on the beach, employees using Qwaq come together in meeting rooms or conference centres not too dissimilar to those they would use in ‘real life’. These ready-to- use templates mean the meeting or conference can be set up within minutes. (Iggy O, 2009)

Unlike Second Life, Qwaq Forums work within the company firewall, preventing employees from teleporting to other islands during the team interaction.

All the meeting host needs to do is pull out the forum-type meeting room from the range of templates on hand, upload their presentations, web browsers and whiteboard they wish to use, and then send the invite via email. Just as a real meeting room would be set up, so is the virtual one. “She hasn’t struggled in Outlook to find an available room, checked for AV equipment or reserved a projector”. (Qwaq 2008)

Once the meeting is in full swing, employees can work on documents together, whiteboard ideas, and even browse the internet while in-world. It is very much integrated in their day-to-day workflow. Both worlds, while vastly different in their approach to creating the virtual environment, still



Qwaq Forum has all the elements in the virtual world, giving employees the ability to edit documents

Copyright: Qwaq Forums

give users an experience which simulates face-to-face interaction.

b) Personal presence: In virtual worlds this is represented through the use of avatars. Through these digital representations of themselves users can almost mimic the non-verbal cues used during traditional face-to-face communication and includes movements, gestures, expressions, and sounds. (Bailenson 2006)

In a virtual meeting conducted in Second Life employees can see the number of people present, who is paying attention (avatars tend to slump over when user is away from keyboard), who needs to ask a question, and who is speaking. This is unlike your average teleconference where there is no instant way of knowing who is paying attention and who isn't.

Second Life users will know who is talking via their gestures – often exaggerated typing when they're in chat mode, or a white dot surrounded by green light when they're speaking in voice. At all times, much like face-to-face interaction, it is clear who is speaking.

The same applies to users in Qwaq Forums except in this virtual world, they follow the design philosophy of speech-gesture-sketch.

This, they believe, “recreates the natural ways we work with each other

day to day.” (Malan 2008) As well as being able to know who is talking and when, employees can also “sketch” out their ideas on whiteboards.

c) Social presence: This, according to Baskin, Barker, and Woods, has more to do with the how we interpret the gestures, signs, expressions and other verbal and nonverbal cues. (Bronack, Cheney et.al) In a study conducted by Yee and Bailenson in 2007, they found users who have a more attractive avatar were more confident than those with less attractive ones.

In Second Life, creating your own avatar, ranging from a furry animal, goth, or one that looks identical to the user, is encouraged. Representation of the self is very much up to the user. In a work setting this led even IBM to come up with guidelines to encourage interaction in a safe work environment, even the virtual one.

They are told to “be a good 3D Netizen IBMers should be thoughtful, collaborative and innovative in their participation in virtual world communities – including in deliberations over behavioral/social norms and rules of thumb.” (IBM Virtual World guidelines)

Qwaq Forums encourage a more realistic appearance using their avatar as the medium. For instance, in a meeting, an employee can use a real photo

above their avatar head or a web conference video showing their real face. Alternatively, they are encouraged to create an avatar that looks exactly like their real selves.

Bronack, Cheny et.al agree with Prentice, Rozwell et.al, in that the technology itself doesn't promote interaction and community. It's the people within it. Their research showed no matter how well the space is designed, participants would only see it as an effective communication tool when they shared that virtual space with others. They argue, "presence is a precursor to interactivity, both among people, and between people and information".

Prentice, Rozwell et.al agree, stating that successful virtual worlds are those that look at "attracting and nurturing" an active community rather than on the function and creation of the virtual world.

Where the use of virtual worlds has failed

Organisations that fail in their attempts to use virtual worlds as an effective communication channel are those that have built their presence without giving it much thought.

As Driver and Jackson suggest, if organisations focus on real business problems and improving the experience of working remotely and managing

virtual teams then they would reap the benefits of working with and sharing digital 3D models. (Driver, Jackson, Forrester 2008)

A case in point is the initial use of Second Life. Media hype surrounding this burgeoning virtual world in 2006 and the ability for companies to make money through the SL economy had organisations setting up their own virtual presence. Some like Starwood Hotels did this by prototyping their new hotel, while others like American Apparel literally set up shop.

These brands' demise had more to do with the fact that they set up a presence for themselves without considering how to tap into the Second Life community and foster that engagement. (Holtz August 2007)

This has led many companies to use virtual worlds as an internal communication and collaboration tool as they take time to understand the benefits. With an internal audience such as employees, it's far easier to direct them to use the technology for a reason compared to customers in a public setting.

Conclusion

The changing nature of organisation structures, and the reliance of virtual teams to complete work tasks has led to the evolution of communication from a top-down, hierarchical type, to a much

more collaborative, inclusive type, that fosters and builds relationships. How organisations reach these virtual teams and foster relationships developed among these teams comes down to the range of communication tools available.

Regardless of how sophisticated today's employee has become and their knowledge and expectation of using interactive technologies in the workplace, their preference is for a more human approach to communication. For virtual teams, these could take the form of virtual worlds – the only means available that can connect employees dispersed geographically while still maintaining a somewhat human presence.

Virtual worlds are still an emerging technology for organisational use. While more research needs to be done to understand its real business benefit, it is clear that this technology has the capability to connect users, particularly employees, unlike any other. It simulates a work environment more akin to a face-to-face interaction, that enables them to connect, communicate, and collaborate to achieve business outcomes.

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Keeping it Simple: The Shift in Video Game Development

Kimberley Lau

For decades the gaming industry has been treated like the red-headed stepchild of entertainment. Today, the industry is a multi-million dollar business, surpassing its elder siblings including the movie and TV industry. According to a 2007 report released by Nielsen Wireless and Interactive services, two thirds of all men in the United States have access to a console in their homes.

However, there has been a discernable shift in video game development trends in recent years - from complex game-play to toned down (or as some say, 'dumbed down') versions of its predecessors; an indication that the video game market is aiming to appeal to a market other than its pre-existing stream of hardcore gamers.

This paper seeks to examine System Shock (including its sequel System Shock 2), one of the few surviving video game franchises from the 90s, and its spiritual successor Bioshock. released in late 2008, to demonstrate that the video game publishing industry has indeed changed in accordance with market needs in the last decade.

Breaking Down Game Mechanics

We live in a society where the simplest, easiest and most accessible is valued highly. The less buttons there are on a washing machine, the better. There are even exercise equipments that exercises you.

Young (1999) argues that the problem at present is the cultural mindset of the executives who make the decisions.

They will take no risks, they want to maximise the audience and they are cynical. They are also authoritarian, for example, in dictating the director and producer and

in interfering at any stage. One of the main network patrons has a chart on his wall with three words: 'Good, Cheap, Quick. Choose any two'.

This move to make life easier and simpler, however, is probably quite welcomed by most Australians which according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, are working longer and spending less time playing, sleeping and eating (ABS, 2008). So while it is easy to make the generalised assumption that people are just lazy, it is apparent that many people are time-starved and constantly seeking to relieve themselves of unnecessary time-wasting.

Hence the simplifying of experiences in modern day entertainment to minimise ‘processing’ time and maximise enjoyment for the standard audience.

According to website No Muzak, this concept of ‘dumbing down’ can point to a variety of things, including mean programming to avoid any intellectual challenge to one’s audience or the upholding of standard, trivialised cultural, artistic and academic products.

“For a long [time] the gaming industry’s primary focus were hardcore gamers – a relatively small segment accounting for disproportionate share of revenue. The thought has taken virtually u-turn since 2006” (Sen, 2008).

In recent days, a shift has been detected whereby video game publishers such as Nintendo set out to appeal to a wider market; including those who were previously non-gamers with video game titles such as Brain Age and consoles such as the Nintendo Wii. Nintendo’s senior product manager for handheld James Honeywell himself admitted so in an interview:

“With our marketing all we try do is make sure that the product is the hero and that we communicate it to the widest possible audience” (Dring, 2009).

An analysis of the time spent on the top ten games over the years shows a majority

play bestsellers for relatively shorter duration -- 10-20 hours in contrast to 2005, where a majority played games for more than 100 hours (Sen, 2008).

This paper will examine action-adventure role-playing-games System Shock, System Shock 2 and Bioshock for relevant ‘simplified’ differences in their game mechanics which according to Järvinen (in Sicart, 2008) are

“a particular set of rules available to the player in the form of prescribed causal relations between game elements and their consequence to particular game states”

by using Sicart’s more formal approach to game mechanics (2008). These mechanics, as defined by Sicart, are:

- Core mechanics: the game mechanics repeatedly used by agents to achieve a systematically rewarded end-game state.
- Primary mechanics: core mechanics that can be directly applied to solving challenges that lead to the desired end state.
- Secondary mechanics: core mechanics that ease the player’s interaction with the game towards reaching the end state.

Core Mechanics: Game Within Game

Within each of these game titles, there are alternate game areas or mini-games

that players can explore. These areas often provide tips or rewards which will enhance or ease gameplay.

In *System Shock*, the protagonist who is a hacker is required to enter Cyberspace via specific terminals that are located on each level in order to find ways to defeat SHODAN, the artificial intelligence that has taken over Citadel Station where the game is situated in. *System Shock*'s Cyberspace is made up of 3D wire frames which the hacker will visit in order to open locked doors, obtain information such as access codes, or upgrade combat and defense software (Dietz, 2006).

For *System Shock 2*, the player is able to hack devices such security cameras and vending machines which are governed by a mini-game; the player's attributes and the specific system's security rating set the rules for each iteration of the mini-game (Winn, 2004).

This is similar to that of *Bioshock*'s although it has been claimed that the hacking game in *Bioshock* has been further simplified from that of *System Shock 2*'s. According to Hunyak Blog, the security and puzzle system is simpler in *Bioshock*: While the security cameras in *Rapture* (the location of the game in *Bioshock*) stay hacked, the player in *System Shock 2* is only given "few minutes of time to disable the cameras or sneak by. Then the cameras come back on".

Winn (2004) compares *System Shock*'s Cyberspace with the hacking game in *System Shock 2*, which can be applied to *Bioshock* as well:

The original *System Shock* included extensive cyberspace levels; the final battle against SHODAN occurred inside her mainframe. In *System Shock 2*, this potentially rich dimension of storytelling and gameplay is reduced to the hacking minigame.

Primary Mechanics: Skill Selecting

This section will explore the process of in-game career selection as well as the use of weapons and other skill sets to solve challenges and complete the game.

In *System Shock 2*, the player has to choose one of three career paths in the game's fictional military, the Unified National Nominate. Each career path promises certain expertise; combat-oriented Marines who are known for their marksmanship and weapon proficiency, the Navy who specialise in technology and research, and the OSA, the paranormal branch of the military that teaches psychic powers.

The character is then given the ability to develop a number of skill sets as the game progresses. Upon completing certain missions or objectives, the player is given cybernetic modules or skill points which they can then use to buy improvements

in the ten different skill sets including Hacking (which enables the character to be more effective at breaking into enemy computers), Repair, Modify (lets you add new features to your existing weapons), Maintenance (helps you keep your weapons in working order) and Research (lets you research new technologies and enemy physiologies) (IGN, 1999). The higher the skill level, the more skill points are required to purchase it. The player thus has to make the decision on the area they want to specialise in as this will affect the way the game is played:

It's really important to pick intelligently here rather than squandering your modules on a little bit of this and a little bit of that... if you spend all of your points trying to become a Jack of all trades, you won't be able to use much of anything by the end of the game (IGN, 1999).

In Bioshock, there are no career paths and the player is forced to use the one available character. The player is able to use all skill sets without investing training time to upgrade the character's statistics, making the player somewhat 'all powerful' and removing many of the impediments that would usually present themselves under similar challenges in the System Shock games. The character's proficiency in the game world relies not on the assigned numerical representation crunched by the game for the character's

skills, but on the player's manual dexterity.

While weaponry statistics (for example, certain enemies are immune or only vulnerable to certain kinds of weapons) and tonics (passive upgrades to the character such as the Wrench Jockey tonic which increases the amount of damage inflicted during the use of the wrench) affect gameplay, these upgrades are not quite as essential as those acquired in System Shock 2, of which without, the game cannot be completed.

Secondary Mechanics: The Inventory System

Players in this genre of video games are usually equipped with a 'storage space' for items that they use, receive or find throughout the game. This section explores the effectiveness of the inventory systems within these video game titles.

System Shock and System Shock 2 utilised a general inventory system where everything is stored in a common space, as opposed to having different or several bags or pockets for different categories of items. The inventory system is represented by a grid that offers a finite amount of space in which certain items occupied certain amount of squares (for example, a rifle would require more squares than a lead pipe or a wrench). Hence, inventory management became an integral part of the game that requires

users to rearrange their inventory every time they pick up or buy an item.

Bioshock has no inventory system and uses the simplified “pocket-dimension trousers” approach taken by most simpler action-based first-person shooters (Chan, 2008), allowing the player to carry all useable weapons at once as well as purchase additional slots for plasmids (skills such as pyro-kinesis and cryo-kinesis) instead of having to make choices on what weapons to bring during a mission. Rejuvenation items (Eve and health kits), general usage items such as parts used for inventions, ammunition (three types of ammunition for each weapon, excluding the wrench) are allocated individual slots which allows the player to carry a predetermined amount of a specific item in those specific slots, requiring little organising and management on the part of the player.

Compared to System Shock, Bioshock’s inventory system is easier to manage but disallows the storing of certain items (for example, food items must be ‘consumed’ immediately upon pick up). Croshaw’s (2006) opinion of Bioshock in comparison with System Shock 2:

Quite a few elements have been removed presumably to dumb it down for the console tards. There is no inventory screen so you can’t easily check on what you’re carrying and every time you pick up filth-encrusted food or drink items off the floor, you scarf

them right down where you stand like you’ve got some sort of wasting illness.

The concept of weight and capacity has also changed in Bioshock whereby the weight of the weapons does not affect gameplay, although a recoil factor is included in weapons such as the machine gun and the shotgun. In System Shock, there is an upper limit of weight that the player can carry (the character is only able to carry a maximum of eight out of the sixteen featured weapons at once).

Conclusion

Rossignol (2007) sang praises of System Shock in his article *The Real Reason Bioshock Exists*, stating that it ‘delivered the most believable, detailed environments we’d ever seen’ despite the fact that the game was already over a decade old at the time he wrote the article.

Each of them was perfectly pitched - the great air-locks of the spaceport section, the clunky jungles of the bio-spheres, and the surprising elegance of the executive suites. More than BioShock’s Rapture, the System Shock space station gave a strong impression of being a working thing - a device for living in space (Rossignol, 2007).

Bioshock’s lead designer Ken Levine has himself admitted that it was necessary to simplify video game plotlines to pan to

what he perceives as the purpose of the video game (PC Zone, 2008):

If you want people to follow your plot, it has to be really f***** stupid... In recent times [the] plot has been highlighted as an area in which games fall short, but do we really want to be caught up dissecting a story for hidden messages and meaning. Or, do we just want to sit back and be entertained?

While this move is noble and acquaints former non-gamers with video games, this simplification of video games seems to have polluted the waters of the hardcore gamer's video game industry, affecting games that were not previously played by this more casual target market, causing much disgruntlement among hardcore gamers who feel neglected.

Despite the similarities between System Shock and Bioshock, the latter is and will always be infinitely better received simply because of its accessibility; that it is less difficult (Haas, 2008) and that its learning curve is not as steep as that of its predecessors System Shock and System Shock 2. This bid to appeal to the masses is not only demonstrated via their game design, but is also apparent in their decision to switch platforms (the System Shock series was a PC-based series, Bioshock was first made available on the Xbox 360). In his rather contradictory response to the question why Bioshock's developers decided to turn to the Xbox

360 platform, Levine (Drake, 2007) responded:

The 360 appeals to us because it helps us reach and even broader audience. Broader audience is a good thing, presuming you don't preemptively panic and dumb you[r] game down to the lowest common denominator. We won't do that. That's not to say BioShock won't be accessible. That's one of the huge areas of work of making this game: keeping it hugely expressive and hugely accessible.

This culture industry, according to Horkheimer and Adorno (1969, pp. 120-167) sacrifices identity and actively structures human consumption patterns by commodifying video game experiences through mass production, generating standardised feedback from its legion of passive mass users.

The entertainments manufacturers know that their products will be consumed with alertness even when the customer is distraught, for each of them is a model of the huge economic machinery which has always sustained the masses, whether at work or at leisure... the culture industry as a whole has molded men as a type unflinchingly reproduced in every product (Horkheimer and Adorno 1969, p. 127).

While some debate that video games should be accessible by the masses and not only hardcore video gamers or video

game elites of which they have been privy to in its earlier years, the loss of gameplay complexity is lamentable. This does not necessarily mean that video games need to be difficult for its own sake, but rather because there is still an audience for well thought out, intelligent game design. Just because the masses cannot understand The Illiad does not diminish its literary value, in which a little bit of investment would reap immeasurable gratification.

That is perhaps the biggest loss of the video game industry; not the neglecting of one market and the gaining of another, but the lack of avenue and opportunity for active immersion and the dwindling appreciation for 'challenging' content.

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Lurkers and Lolcats: An Easy Way From Out To In.

Claudia Leigh

The purpose of this Journal Article is to focus on the transition of Lolcats, often referred to as I Can Has Cheezburger, the deliberately misspelled, grammatically incorrect, cute collection of humanised cat commentary, from meme to an actual sustainable part of popular culture. This phenomenon has helped make participation in online communities within codes of conduct less threatening to the subset of Internet users who read and follow online trends, but are rarely active in the online community. This subset is commonly referred to as “lurkers”.

Despite the proliferation of Lolcat forums, this article refers to the weblog credited with popularising them – I Can Has Cheezburger (ICHC). Research will sit within a linguistic ethnography framework, following the observation that language and social life are mutually shaping.

The Article aims to show that Lolcats have become relevant to social culture, and that ICHC acts as an important gateway for Internet ‘newbies’ seeking the acceptance of an online community (without the pressure of divulging streams of personal reflections). The argument will centre on the fact that Lolcats does allow a “lurker” to understand a unique online language (the first language of the “intertubes”), thus feeling more comfortable and confident to participate.

Keywords: Lolcat, Participatory enabler, Ethno linguistics, In-group, Lurker

Introduction

For several years, across a huge variety of media, from academic and scientific journals to mainstream journalism, articles have been published surrounding the emergence and power of online communities. Many of these articles refer to the subversive nature of these communities, but few consider the huge number of inactive participants lurking on the edge of online society. What is it that makes a user participate

in online culture? Why are some online environments more attractive to participants than others and how come some types of digital ephemera cross over into the cultural realm, whilst others fizz and burn?

Since the evolution of Web 2.0¹, the digital population is generally referred to as being made up of three distinct groups of people. These groups have been defined as:

- Contributors, or those who provide content in the form of blogs and other forums
- Participants, who whilst may not create new content, participate by commenting on content created.
- Lurkers, the dominant group of users who read and follow online trends but are rarely active in the online community

The online Jargon Dictionary defines lurkers as:

One of the silent majority in an electronic forum; one who posts occasionally or not at all but is known to read the group's postings regularly. This term is not pejorative and indeed is casually reflexive: 'Oh I'm just lurking.' When a lurker speaks up it is called delurking.²

The term lurker conjures negative connotations of perverted Peeping-Toms, but in fact is a term that can be used to describe 90% of internet users today.

The statistical break down of these three groups³ is as follows:

1. Lurkers 90%
2. Participants 9%
3. Contributors 1%

This means that within any online community, 90% of postings are produced by 1% of users. This statistic is

reflective of the sometimes paradoxical, exclusive characteristics associated with digital culture.

For a culture which prides itself as a libertarian, self governing utopia, the Internet and the communities within can be un-inviting, foreign entities for the uninitiated.

The new user or "newbie" will often feel alienated from an online community, not only because they are new, but because they recognise that there is a system of rules or social norms dictating the community and the "newbie" doesn't know what they are. This is often due to a non-understanding of the lingo associated with the community. This linguistic barrier creates a closed community, and therefore a "them" and "us" mentality between participants and lurkers. Examples of such communities could be software discussion forums, where a specific knowledge set is required in order to participate, or discussion boards where an existing culture is governed by complex etiquette, unspoken rules and social norms.

Humans are linguistic creatures; we define things in linguistic terms. In 1981, Giles and Johnson proposed ethno-linguistic identity theory as a means of explaining this use of language for group identity. Ethno-linguistic identity theory implies that the existence of ethno-linguistic parameters helps

define social identity.⁴ Even as children, within our social groups we develop a shared language, which in turn gives us a sense of social identity and belonging. Who doesn't remember Pig Latin and the confidence of secrecy gained from whispering to your friend "*etslay kipsay lasscay*"?⁵ Across all cultures and eras, lingo and slang are used to define social creeds and hierarchies. Digital culture is no different.

However, one can argue that in certain online environments this barrier can be broken down and the very existence of a unique linguistic framework can in fact become a participatory enabler.

As defined in 2006 by Henry Jenkins, co-founder of the MIT Comparative Media Studies Programme, in order to be seen as a participatory enabler, an environment needs to consist of the following identifiers:

1. Relatively low barriers to artistic expression and civic engagement
2. Strong support for creating and sharing one's creations with others
3. Some type of informal mentorship whereby what is known by the most experienced is passed along to novices
4. Members believe that their contributions matter
5. Members feel some degree of social connection with one another (at the least they care what other people think about what they have created).

Not every member must contribute, but all must believe they are free to contribute when ready and that what they contribute will be appropriately valued.⁶

The recent Internet phenomena: Lolcats, often referred to as I Can Has Cheezburger (IHC), the deliberately misspelled, grammatically incorrect, cute collection of humanised cat commentary, can be seen as one such enabler.

To accept the transition of Lolcats, from meme to an actual sustainable part of popular culture, and therefore a unique online community, a brief discussion about the history of the original meme and its subsequent proliferation is helpful.

The term meme refers to an idea considered as a replicator, especially with the connotation that memes parasitise people into propagating them much as viruses do.⁷

Much like an epidemic, a meme works on a social bond and circulates via the communication channels of everyday nature. Examples of memes include Rickroll — a bait and switch link to 80's pop star Rick Astley's "Never Gonna Give You Up" and instances of successful viral marketing.⁸

The term Lolcats is a compound word derived from “LOL”, meaning laughing out loud; one of the many abbreviations and acronyms used in email, instant-message chatter and mobile phone-based text messages and cat. Whilst it is not clear when exactly the phrase was coined, the initial beginning of the meme is attributed to the anonymous message board community, 4chan.com. In 2007, Eric Nakagawa launched the oddly named “I Can Has Cheezburger?” website ICHC is made up of a simple interface message board containing cute images of cats with super imposed text. These images are commonly referred to as macro-image. They are not restricted to cats, and have expanded to include other animals as well as general odd photographs and politicians.⁹

Typically there are five varieties of Lolcats, each with a specific set of linguistic rules.

1. Invisible (fig 1)
2. I'm in ur... (fig 2)
3. Hai (fig 3)
4. I has... (fig 4)
5. Ceiling cat (fig 5)

Since that first image of a small grey cat grinning in an odd way asking for a cheeseburger, ICHC has become phenomenally popular and remarkably resilient. (fig 6)



fig 1 – 3

According to online satirist, Slate.com, one week is all it takes for a meme to propagate, become its own opposite, and then finally collapse back in on itself.¹⁰

If we consider the amount of digital ephemera, and the fickle nature of trend, it is quite amazing that ICHC has remained amongst the top 20 Blogs¹¹ for more than two years, with little change to its message.

ICHC has grown consistently. Currently it has a global monthly traffic above 38 million page views. This equates to over 350,000 people per day visiting the site.¹² These figures have remained consistent over the last 6 months, which considering the rapidity of online development, is a considerable length of time. To put this in context, that ranks in the top 1000 of all websites. Which means that out of the millions of sites, brands, products on the internet... funny pictures of cats beats 99.9% of them. (Appendix A). These site visitors would be statistically 90% lurkers but the consistent popularity of the site suggests that there is something uniquely appealing about ICHC.

So what is it that makes Lolcats so popular? As Aaron Rutkoff says in his 2007 piece for the Wall Street Journal,

“What makes Lolcats appealing is that it’s simultaneously obscure and accessible. It’s an inside joke told in an online lingua

franca, but with a bit of effort anyone can become an insider.”

This ease of participation and that magic word “insider” is what sets ICHC and the Lolcat phenomena aside from other online communities, and what makes it the perfect place for ‘lurkers’ to bite the bullet and de-lurk.

Rutkoff also observes,

“There’s not much to it: Take a digital photo – often one of household pets, particularly cats – and purposefully place misspelled text on top. Anyone with elementary skills in Adobe’s Photoshop or Microsoft’s Paint software can make their own.”¹³



fig 4 – 5

This ease of participation shows that the ICHC environment has hardly any barriers to artistic expression and engagement, fulfilling the first requirement to becoming a participatory enabler. The resilience and popularity of Lolcat indicates a strong support for the creative expression of its users.

In addition, the development of a Lolcat generator, where all the user has to do is follow a series of simple steps, and the existence of Lolcat tutorials, enables anyone to get involved. But what makes the ICHC more of a participatory enabler to the Lurker than any other online community?



fig 6

Blogger Anil Dash suggests that the popularity of Lolcats has to do with the paradox between obscurity and accessibility. Suddenly becoming an “insider” a domain previously reserved to elitist bloggers, was possible even if you weren’t a “geek”. Someone who doesn’t participate actively in the online world can still participate easily in Lolcats and learn a new language, which makes them feel part of a previously foreign community.

Rutkoff correctly identifies the origin of Lolcat language in the digital text practices of text messaging, instant messaging and leet speak. Leet (often spelt l33t and derived from the word ‘elite’) evolved in the 1990’s and was used by hardcore gamers and hackers to communicate over bulletin boards and in chatrooms as a means of creating a linguistic elite. But what cannot be simply explained is the uniquely compelling way in which the text choices and bad grammar make a digital photograph of a cat so entertaining. Why is it suddenly so attractive to learn a type of ‘geek’ speak and become a bonafide member of an Internet sub-culture? Why is Lolspeak so important with in the framework of participatory culture?

Text being used to enhance visual meaning is not unusual, French Philosopher Barthes argues that text is used to “anchor” meaning to visual

images.¹⁴ For example, the subtitles on news photograph provides immediate context and therefore understanding of how the photograph is meant to be read. The inherent multimodality in all images, benefits from the addition of text to reorient the viewer's understanding of the image. In the case of Lolcats, the text anthropomorphises the cats in the images giving them character.

This text exists in two forms: dialogic and expository. Dialogic text refers to the text attributed to the character of the cat in the image (fig 2) whilst expository text refers to the title applied to the image by the images' creator. (Fig 1)¹⁵

The dialogic text typically follows consistent grammatical errors, sentence structure and format creating a unique dialect or ethno-linguistic identity. The fact that this dialogic speak is replicated in comments, suggests that the common thread of support (the essence of community) exists within these linguistic parameters. More and more often, poignant Lolcats are provoking responses of support and understanding. This linguistic consistency further highlights the existence of a unique community (Fig 7).

Usually, an ethnographer with little experience visiting a foreign place will struggle to integrate on any more than a superficial level. Without years of study and immersion, they will

always feel like an outsider. In online terms, the majority of new visitors to a community will feel alienated. Whilst some will be unafraid of digging deeper and learning the local dialect, most will remain on the outer, unsure of the etiquette of participation. The exception is a community which enables visitors to learn fluently a whole new language quickly and simply. The virtually immediate and painless acceptance into a unique ethno-linguistic realm encourages users who may previously have found it all too hard, to actively participate. The sense of achievement which comes with unravelling one of the mysteries of an online community, and suddenly becoming an "insider", is exciting and encouraging. When a



Fig 7

Blog Comment: Pittypat June 22, 2007 at 2:33 am
 "yvi, I'm in da same boat as u. But lafter halps! It rly, rly halps! It duzzint diminush da compashun, I tink anyhoo."

“lurker” understands a unique technorati language they feel more comfortable and confident to participate.

The fusion that exists between the learned, direct language (Lolspeak) and the practical digital image (macro) identifies both sides of the information transfer, (the sender and receiver) as belonging to the subculture of ICHC. The existence of the learned language means that in order to participate, the receiver must have a working knowledge of the culture and its references. The in-joke is part of the language and, in turn, part of the communication. The existence of an in-group and out-group and the ease at which one can access the in-group helps drive the consistent growth of the Lolcat phenomenon. Everyone who gets it belongs in the in-group, and the behavioural cycle is encouraged and repeated.¹⁶

KTHXBAI

In conclusion, I Can Has Cheezburger, and the Lolcat phenomenon is a unique example of an online community that through the very nature of its linguistic barriers becomes a participatory enabler rather than the usual exclusive environment thus encouraging the large percentage of Internet users who remain dormant to morph from lurkers to participants. This metamorphosis is due to a combination of factors whereby the ease at which a new user can learn the

unique dialect, and the way this suddenly makes available access to a previously exclusive club.

A combination of online development and the evolution of leet speak to a sub-dialect Lolspeak has, rather than the norm of alienating new users, enabled the increased participation of a subset of previously inactive internet users to join and experience being part of the in-group inside an online community.

The existence of these strong linguistic ties has enabled ICHC to crossover from a meme to a sustainable part of popular culture. Although instances of Lolspeak surfacing in verbal exchange are already evident, whether or not this online dialect will in time crossover into the offline vernacular and become a cultural artefact in its own right remains to be seen.

NOTES

1 Def: Web 2.0 Tim O’Reilly states Web 2.0 is a set of economic, social, and technology trends that collectively form the basis for the next generation of the Internet—a more mature, distinctive medium characterized by user participation, openness, and network effects. (O’Reilly Radar, Principles and Best Practices, 2007)

2 Jargon Dictionary. Lurker Definition www.netmeg.net/jargon

3 Stats on lurker breakdown: http://www.useit.com/alertbox/participation_inequality.html

4 Ethno-linguistic identity theory: A social psychological approach to language maintenance
H Giles, P Johnson - International Journal of the Sociology of Language, 1987.

5 Pig-Latin is an English word game where words that begin with consonant sounds, the initial consonant or consonant cluster is moved to the end of the word, and “ay” is added. This creates a conversable jargon used by children

6 Jenkins, Henry, Puroshotma, Ravi, Clinton, Katherine, Weigel, Margaret, & Robison, Alice J. (2005). Confronting the Challenges of Participatory Culture: Media Education for the 21st Century, available at <http://www.newmedialiteracies.org/files/working/NMLWhitePaper.pdf>

7 defn: meme. (n.d.). Jargon File 4.2.0. Retrieved April 26, 2009, from Dictionary.com website: <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/meme>

8 Rick roll basically takes unsuspecting users to the video of Rick Astleys “Never Gonna Give You Up” The meme lead to the vernacuklar “You’ve been Rick Rolled”<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oHg5SJYRHA0> accessed 25.05.2009

9 failblog.org, and pundit.org are two examples of successful meme based blogs set up by Ben Huh, who bought the ICHC site in 2007. Basically Huh scours the internet looking memes which he then nurtures into online communities.

10 <http://slate.com/blogs/blogs/trailhead/archive/2008/02/21/the-life-cycle-of-an-internet-meme.aspx> accessed 25.05.2009

11 <http://technorati.com/pop/blogs/> “Top 100 Blogs” Accessed 18.05.2009

12 Statistics quantcast.com, see appendix A

13 Rutkoff, A. (2007, August 25). With ‘lolcats’ internet fad anyone can get in on the joke. Wall Street Journal. Retrieved 26th

April 2008 from <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB118798557326508182.html>

14 Barthes, Roland. (1977) Image-music-text. London: Fontana. Barthes philosophised that the use of text and image created plurality of meaning with in the resulting macro image. Since the evolution of lolpeak as a stand alone dialect, one could argue in the case of Lolcats, that plurality has been lost as both the image and text stand alone, not necessarily relying on each other for contextual meaning.

15 Brubaker, J.R. (2008) wants moar: Visual Media’s use of Text in Lolcats and Silent Film. Gnovis Journal, Vol.8, No.2

16 McCraney, D . A special in depth analysis <http://icanhascheezburger.com/2007/05/08/a-special-in-depth-analysis-by-david-mcraney> accessed 24/4/09

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APPENDIX A

