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***Lost* online: TV series as multi-author, multi-platform metafiction**

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Abstract

Recent changes in TV consumption (in how content is delivered, interpreted and used) not only concern broadcasting channels, but the nature of small screen fiction itself. From self-contained shows that existed only in the temporal and physical realms of the traditional format, TV narratives have expanded in a manifold way that enlarges the spectrums of interaction and authorship. Wikis, blogs, podcasts and fictional entities and characters that invade online reality are but a few of the ways in which networks and viewers collaborate in the construction of a series as a complex cultural artefact. The small screen is being joined by the computer monitor, the mobile phone and other devices as the portals through which audiences not only receive information concerning the shows, but aid in its production (a process Axel Bruns (2008) has pertinently called *produsage*). The following article examines this paradigm shift, and explores the potential of TV series as a multi-platform, all encompassing canvas that thanks to the collaborative use of online technologies, alludes to the post-modern literary concept of “metafiction” (as defined by Patricia Waugh: “(a) fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artefact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality” [Waughn, 1993: 2]). *Lost*, the ABC series about a group of outcasts entrapped in a mysterious island, is used as a prime example of TV *produsage*, a kind of fruitful detachment of the “fourth wall”. *Lost*’s very structure – a sort of narrative zapping that evolves through mistaken identities, time travel and global connections – serves, moreover, as an accurate metaphor of the Internet age. And so does the enhanced reality that revolves around it: the web abounds with theories, interpretations, discussions and all sorts of digital memorabilia, some of which are referenced in the paper. A member of the Golden Globes committee is also interviewed. Previous television experiences, like that of *The Sopranos* and *24* (a pioneer in the delivery of mini episodes via mobile) are referenced, as well as current transmissions, like HBO’s *True Blood*. Other multimedia experiments, such as *The Tulse Luper Suitcases* (www.tulselupernetnetwork.com), filmmaker Peter Greenaway’s multi-platform experience, are mentioned additionally as precursors of 21st century audiovisual narrative.

Keywords

TV SERIES • POST-MODERN • METAFICTION • PRODUSAGE • AUTHOR • CANONICAL • FANS • NETWORKS • COLLECTIVE • WIKI • LOST

“Where a modernist text might pass over its recursive structures in silence, these postmodernist texts flaunt theirs. Our attention having thus been focused on recursiveness *for its own sake*, we begin, like Borges, to speculate: why stop the recursive operation of nesting worlds within worlds at any particular level of embedding? Why stop at all, ever?”

– **Brian McHale, “Chinese-Box Worlds”**

The bizarreness was hard to escape. The buzz extended from living rooms to office spaces, from Hollywood power lunches to chat rooms all throughout cyberspace. Everything started with a plane crash as violent as any ever filmed before, and then madness unfolded. Polar bears rummaging wild in an island deep in the Pacific, an enigmatic string of seemingly unrelated numbers, tormented individuals from all over the globe –fugitives, fathers and sons, modern-day Homers, Koreans, Iraqis, African priests and Scottish sinners, conmen and cops–, a hatch of small proportions and infinite connotations. All were entrapped in a landmass that serves both as a character in itself and as a metaphor for Western civilization.

In September 22, 2004, American network ABC aired the costliest pilot in small screen history and, by doing so, earned a viewership of 18.9 million, caught up with cable broadcasters and aspired to reclaim the leadership of public television. Creators JJ Abrams¹ and Damon Lindelof had configured a world so intricate and mysterious, that it was bound to engage audiences in noteworthy ways. Genre-wise, they also followed the lead of HBO, which had been involved since the late 1990s in the production of large-scale TV shows which consolidated as a new hybrid format: the mega-film, episodic narratives that use the audiovisual grammar of cinema and the intricate structure of the literary novel. In analyzing *The Sopranos* phenomenon, Jaramillo recalls how pay cable gained ground over broadcast networks: “The best part of the deal was that the broadcast networks had passed on series creator David Chase’s pitch. HBO emerged as the saviour, rescuing television from itself. The eagerness to play up competition between broadcast and cable through *The Sopranos* does everything to reinforce the methods by which HBO’s parent company, AOL Time Warner (along with every other conglomerate), obscures its anticompetitive hold on media.” (2002: 59-60) *Lost* has helped reverse that trend.

In content and form *Lost*, penned also by Carlton Cuse, incites comparison with various sources and its references are so diverse that they blur the borders between narrative and

¹ Abrams became Hollywood’s *wunderkid* for the 21st century. He is responsible for TV hits *Felicity* and *Alias*, as well as films such as *Cloverfield* –which he produced and had an intricate online campaign that could fall into the category of metafiction, as defined here–, the third instalment of the *Mission: Impossible* saga and the revamped *Star Trek* franchise. This evidences the creative collaboration between television and film in contemporary Hollywood.

data-basing. From literature, *Lost* draws from classics such as Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking-Glass*, William Golding's *The Lord of the Flies*, Kurt Vonnegut's time-travel puzzle *Slaughterhouse Five* and Jorge Luis Borges' escherian atmospheres; but also from pop literature like Stephen King's *The Dark Tower* series. As his direct predecessors it singles out other television immortals, among them *The Twilight Zone*, Chris Carter's *The X-Files* and David Lynch's surrealistic *neo noir Twin Peaks*, which, despite attaining funding for only two seasons, gathered a cult following and was, one could argue, the precursor for HBO's deeper, more intelligent dramas. *Lost*'s vast cast directs us to cinematic ensemble productions in the vein of Robert Altman's choral films (*Nashville*, *Shortcuts*) or P.T Anderson's post-modern extravaganzas (*Boogie Nights*, *Magnolia*). Composed of six seasons² (the series finale, the 120th and 121st episodes, aired on May 23rd 2010), *Lost* is a fabric of elaborate patterns that serves as an allegory for the Internet age: a network of transatlantic interconnections where the rules of time, semantics and space are defied and rewritten.

It is a hypertextual narrative in which everything, from familiar names like Locke, Rousseau or Hawkings, to mathematical conundrums and smoke monsters can be hyperlinked to something else –thinkers, string theory or mythology; *wikipaedic* knowledge as a quick fix for the age of massive ignorance. As a companion for the release of the show's fifth season in Blu-Ray, for instance, ABC Studios included access to Lost University (www.lostuniversity.org), an online learning centre where users can take courses on philosophy, history or quantum physics, among other disciplines, taught by certified academics. The topics are directly related to the mysteries of the show.

The series' various directors go beyond evident data-basing and methodically place information within the camera's scope, especially in the form of books, which serves as a sort of hyperlink so the viewer can research further and share his or her findings with fellow *Lost* enthusiasts in the fan-made sites that infest the web, like darkufo.blogspot.com. In the episode "Eggtown", for example, one of the characters, Sawyer, is reading *The Invention of Morel*, by Borges' collaborator Adolfo Bioy Casares, a surreal novel about... nah, look for the answer yourself!

How? Online, of course! Care to share and discuss your findings?

² In this paper, we use the American nomenclature –series composed of seasons–, as opposed to the British one –shows composed of series–.

Vive la révolution!

As digital technology and unconventional distribution channels (many, if not most, copyright infringers like LimeWire or Torrentz) started to gain momentum among viewers, the advent of the Internet age and its potential repercussions sent ripples of panic all throughout Hollywood, in general, and the television industry, in particular. Harris and Dumas analyzed consumer's perception of piracy and concluded that, among them, downloading content is not necessarily seen as a reproachable act.³ Moreover, they assert that "file-sharers mainly use peer-to-peer networks to download music from famous and wealthy artists and Hollywood movies, and in that case, they did not believe that their behaviour had negative consequences. Some of the informants even highlight the fact that businesses seem to cope extremely well with the situation." (Harris & Dumas, 2009: 389)

Concerns over the economic toll of this practices, as well as video streaming, continue to challenge the conventional metric that defined failure and success in TV lingo –that is, the omnipresent ratings–, and has forced both creators (television's version of the film's *auteur*) and producers to rethink the way in which they conceive, air and market TV series. If studios are to adapt to the hybridization of the medium as the new paradigm, they better come up with fresh, community-building ideas.

This has subsequently led to a slow but steady change in the nature of television fiction in narrative terms (*Lost* is as best an example as any), the magnitude and features of the channels it covers, and the sources of authorship. All of these transformations influence each other and shape an organic mechanism in which, as extended cultural goods, TV series are imbedded with an unpredictable and uncontrollable structure that encompasses numerous media. For instance, a television genre that has been quite successful since the late 90s, the reality show, sells the idea of unpredictability –one could argue, though, that its dramatic arch is meticulously crafted– and sometimes determines winners by an open voting system that involves the audience through SMS and other electronic means. When

³ They report: "Numerous studies suggest that some consumers believe that illegal downloading is ethically acceptable. Vitell and Muncy's (1992) study reveals that 46% of the 569 US heads of households interviewed believe that it is not wrong to record an album instead of buying it. Among the 71 informants of Fukukawa's (2002) research, 58% think that copying computer software or using unauthorized software is acceptable and 32% actively softlift; furthermore, 71% claim that recording a tape or CD instead of buying a new copy in a shop is acceptable, with 52% already engaging in this deviant behaviour. Vitell and Muncy's (2005) survey discloses that 26% of informants strongly believe that downloading music from the internet instead of buying it is not wrong, against 11% who strongly believe that it is. Finally, Ingram and Hinduja (2008) unveil that 90% of their sample believes that downloading music illegally was an *appropriate* behaviour." (Harris & Dumas, 2009: 383)

it first aired, some critics described *Lost* as a dramatized version of *Survivor*, an exemplar of this genre.

This paper argues that, because of the involvement of the viewership and the accessibility to online channels, a series' airtime is just one of the components of a much more complex cultural good: a multi-platform, multi-author metafiction. "Metafiction" is a term related to post-modern literature and much discussed, among others, by Patricia Waugh, literary critic and professor at Durham University. She defines this narrative practice as "fiction writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artefact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality", and adds that "in providing a critique of their own methods of construction [...] not only examine the fundamental structures of narrative fiction, they also explore the possible fictionality of the world outside the literary fictional text." (Waugh, 1993: 2)

The inner workings of metafiction lead to the abovementioned factors of unpredictability and uncontrollability, which hereby are not negative qualities, as in traditional mass media that follow one-to-many communication patterns. Quite the contrary: a strong incidence of those factors implies a cult following, a many-to-many model, a mass appeal which networks, in their marketing campaigns, are just starting to get a hold of. Whereas films seek to be blockbusters –that is, garner such a box-office success that cues literally turn the corner–, the modern TV series aims to generate buzz (moderate viewers and geeks: busy bees buzzing around the hives of pop culture). To accumulate fans, who Costello & Moore (2007: 126) define as "viewers who act outside the common expectations for a member of the audience" and who "do their own interpretation of the text, ignoring the opinions and desires of producers, advertisers, network executives, and critics", networks must provide the proper communication milieu. We interviewed Vera Anderson, long-time industry insider and member of the Hollywood Foreign Press Association, as well as the Golden Globes committee. She explains how Hollywood is feeding the fire of fandom:

"Every TV show seems to have its own web site these days, as the networks explore new ways to market their prime time series on the Internet as a way of reaching a broader demographic. A recent study⁴ indicated that nearly 80 million Americans have turned to the Internet to watch one of their favourite television shows, almost doubled from the numbers of twelve months ago. But those sites are self-promoting and self-financed. Independent sites like Hulu, which is advertiser-supported and brings together all the networks (and movie libraries), make it possible for users to choose from more than

⁴ As reported at: <http://www.marketingcharts.com/television/any-time-is-prime-time-online-for-tv-shows-dvr-ad-skipping-up-3346/>

1,700 current primetime hit shows –from *30 Rock*, *Lost* and *The Office* to vintage shows like *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* and *Married... with Children*– and view them easily right on their computers without downloading. The formula for how networks can continue to compete in the market and maximize their advertising dollars in the future is still evolving.” (Anderson, 2010)

Anderson is clear about the path networks must follow: “One thing is certain: old school promotional strategies don’t make sense anymore. The Internet is the new frontier, with limitless cross-marketing potential, and so far, the networks have only tapped the tip of the iceberg.” (Anderson, 2010) *Lost* is certainly not the first series to expand its universe online, but represents the epitome of this practice. Wikis, blogs, Twitter accounts, websites and continuous interaction among the public and the creators: all that is part of the narrative of a show, to a bigger or lesser extent, since the turn of the millennium. We can think of *The Sopranos* (1999-2007) and *Six Feet Under* (2001-2005), both from HBO, to name just a couple among an extensive list of such experiences (Showtime’s *Dexter*, FX’s *Nip/Tuck*, ABC’s *Grey’s Anatomy*...).

During the fifth season of *The Sopranos*, for example, one of the show’s mobsters, Christopher Moltisanti, embarks in the adventure of producing a horror film, *Cleaver*, in itself a metanarrative that relates to the fictional reality of the Italian-American characters. HBO produced a website for the movie, and aired a mockumentary that contained interviews with the cast and crew. In the case of *Six Feet Under*, HBO launched a website with the photographic work of one of the characters, Claire Fisher, a struggling artist. As is customary now, those series also sparked the creation of fansites (www.the-sopranos.com, www.fanpop.com/spots/six-feet-under). A recent emission, the ultraviolent vampire fantasy *True Blood*, also from HBO, has created a site for The Fellowship of the Sun (a religious group that fights vampires; fellowshipofthesun.org), the American Vampire League (americanvampireleague.com), and even a drink, Tru Blood, that emulates real blood (www.trubeverage.com) and can be bought in the United States.

Multiple platform concepts are not exclusive to the small screen. In 2003, filmmaker Peter Greenaway (Newport, 1942), creator of baroque multi-scene films like *The Pillow Book* (where the frame is divided into two or more sub-frames that depict parallel actions, demanding a high level of involvement from the cinephile), embarked in a Quixotesque quest as of today still unfinished: to tell a story through all available media. *The Tulse Luper Suitcases* (officially defined as “a cross media project”) is to be conformed by a series of films (so far, five have been completed), an opera, books and a website (www.tulseupernetwork.com), all adding pieces to a complex narrative puzzle that connects

diverse points in 20th century world history. As in Julio Cortazar’s emblematic post-modern novel, *Rayuela (Hopscotch)*, where the reader can choose to experience the story in order, skip through the chapters at random or follow a proposed path, Greenaway’s audience is given the opportunity to construct *The Tulse Luper Suitcases* at will.

Isn’t it the same case with the array of media that encompasses the *Lost* experience?

It’s all about the buzz!

How, then, can we conceptualize the production process of this newly refurbished narrative experience in which networks are rethinking their creative and promotional methods and fans are tightly embedded in the process? We can rely on Axel Bruns’ concept of *produsage*,⁵ a model in which, thanks to the multiple-way communication enabled by the Internet, users can have an increasingly active role in the development of diverse narratives. Bruns defines his idea of *produsage* as “the collaborative and continuous building and extending of existing content in pursuit of further improvement.” He elaborates: “Users who participate in [...] processes of massively parallelized and decentralized creativity and innovation in myriads of enthusiast communities do no longer produce content, ideas, and knowledge in a way that resembles traditional, industrial modes of production.” (2008: 17) That is, the days of top-down mass media communications are over, and we are witnessing the dawn of a new era of audiovisual entertainment.

This has materialized in the online buzz swarming around *Lost*. Ever since it first aired, the network launched websites that connected the reality represented in the show with the off-screen world. Recently, and as the series approached its long-awaited finale, it also took some other radical actions, like broadcasting the week’s episode online, free of cost, though with territorial restrictions defined by ISP locks. Networks are beginning to get aware of the nature of the media consumer for the 21st century: to depend on broadcast, an extremely limited delivery mechanism in the age of digital recording and mobile devices, would be to ignore a viewer that wishes to be liberated from spatial and temporal constraints.

In 2004, Oceanic Airlines, the carrier of the ill-fated airplane, had its own site, www.oceanic-air.com –currently, the URL redirects us to the show’s website– and later got another one, www.flyoceanicair.com. As more fictitious entities left viewers dumbfounded, ABC built a larger expanded universe: The Hanso Foundation, a consortium supposedly dedicated to extending the realms of human knowledge and that conducted experiments on the island, had its own website as well. In 2008, Ubisoft presented *Via Domus*, a

5 For further, updated information, visit www.produsage.org

videogame that followed the whereabouts of Elliot Maslow (does the surname ring a bell?), a character new to the *Lost* universe, thus escalating the sphere of the island into consoles and computers.

The expansion has gone even further, replicating FOX's *24*, which in 2005 produced 24 *mobisodes* for the series. They were episodes designed to be transmitted via mobile technology –the term was trademarked by Fox Mobile Entertainment, FME, although it is now widely used. In this fashion, *Lost* producers created *Lost: Missing Pieces*, a dozen clips that were made available for Verizon Wireless users between the third and fourth seasons and posted on ABC's website a week later. The creators also had a podcast, *The Official Lost Audio Podcast*, where they enjoyed an intense interaction with viewers and guided them through the mysteries of the week's episode. Also, events where the “puppet masters” themselves can interact with their fandom, such as Comic-Con (@comiccon), organized every year in San Diego, are an obligatory stop for the show's promotion and development. Lindelof and Curse engage with fans through their Twitter accounts, @TheRealDamon and @Carltoncuse, respectively. But can we make an argument in favour of a massive community? (Oxymoron noted!) Yes, under Burns' terms: “It will be mass culture, in other words, not due to the efficiencies of an outdated industrial production system, but because a large enough number of users as *producers* of culture and cultural knowledge agree on its value.” (Bruns, 2008).

That agreement is no longer necessarily reflected on ratings alone, but on the loudness of the buzz, measured by, among other tools, search engine ranks, Twitter hashtags and mentions in diverse social media. In the age of the Web 2.0, buzz is king. Harrison & Barthel outline the canvas in which *Lost's producers* freely roam: “The popularity of Web 2.0 applications demonstrates that, regardless of their levels of technical expertise, users can wield technologies in more active ways than had been apparent previously to traditional media producers and technology innovators. Users build and maintain social networks, they tag and rank information in ‘folksonomies’ and become deeply involved in immersive virtual web experiences. They do all these things in collaboration, pooling knowledge and constructing content that they share with each other, which is subsequently remixed, redistributed and reconsumed.” (2009: 157)

Collective theories, shared knowledge: into the garden of forking paths

One of the biggest leaps occurred in 2006, when the producers launched *The Lost Experience*, an interactive game, a sort of scavenger hunt where *producers* had to find

clues in websites, newspaper ads, television and a novel –albeit, a physical, traditional one. The game was played by viewers in the United Kingdom, the United States and Australia in May 2006 and was approved as canonical by the series’ creator, Damon Lindelof. The purpose of the game was to keep viewers engaged in the blank space between the seconds and third seasons. A second alternate reality game (AGR), *Find 815* (it was hosted in the now defunct URL www.find815.com) which consisted in helping a man, Sam Thomas, in instigating Oceanic Airlines to keep looking for the doomed airplane, was not considered canonical by Lindelof and Cuse.

This practice is not without precedent: as Henrik Örnebring (2007) has noted, JJ Abrams and the team behind the spy series *Alias* constructed and elaborate AGR where convergence culture is present and fans feel ownership of a text. When dealing with alternate reality games, we face a key term for grasping the new relationship between the soon to be extinct roles of producers and viewers: *canonical*. As individuals foreign to the production team create their own artefacts around a concept, the ones who hold control over the established industry structures have to give their blessing, or not, to these artefacts (to name a few, spin-offs, viral videos, novels or comics). The paradigm shift evolves: conglomerates such as ABC are no longer the only determinants in the creation, development and transformation of mass culture.

But cultural practices can also render content *canonical*. Apart from the online spaces deliberately shaped by ABC to incite user communication, fans themselves have created interactive atmospheres through which theories, reactions to the show and knowledge on the *Lost* universe are canalized. The most concurred, the wiki *Lostpedia: The Lost Encyclopedia*, published by Wikia Entertainment, offers news and articles on the show’s participants, spoilers and a discussion forum in which, through pinpoint analysis, fans can construct, not without heated controversies, their own narrative upon the foundations of the show itself and the official communications of Lindelof and Cuse.

Thus, we make a case that all of *Lost*’s internal and expanded universes, producer and *producer* originated, can fall, as a unit, into the category of “metafiction”. That is exactly the board game that networks lay in front of *producers*, and they, in turn, gladly play. In such a scenario, it would be naïve to consider that the old broadcasting model can be perpetuated: producers know that clinging to total control over cultural products would eventually backlash. *Lost*’s “ideal reader” (Eco, 2005) is more interested in deciphering its narrative mechanisms, than in feeling trapped or cheated by an omnipresent narrator. Passive viewership, the old pact between creator and

audience that encouraged the “suspension of disbelief”, will soon be forever forgotten. Do you want to join in?

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Join the Group: Facebook

Getting young people involved in social and political matters

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Abstract

In this article, recent studies in the implications of social networking are presented and discussed with a focus on Facebook Groups as a new form of public sphere for social and political debate. This paper intends to verify the hypothesis which states that Facebook Group uses are “more correlated to civic and political action than to recreational uses” (Park, Kee, & Valenzuela, 2009). A comparative analysis of the previous theoretical framework demonstrates the mobilizing potential of Facebook Groups as a new forum for political debate.

Keywords

SOCIAL NETWORKING, ONLINE POLITICS, PUBLIC SPHERE, FACEBOOK, GROUPS, WEB 2.0

Introduction

To the future or to the past, to a time when thought is free, when men are different from one another and do not live alone – to a time when truth exists and what is done cannot be undone

George Orwell, 1984.

We post on the Web as ideas come to us, merely aware of its consequences but certain that those words will not vanish and with the feeling that we are part of something. As it happened in the fictional London created by Orwell, the emergence of the social Web, or Web 2.0, enabled a kind of “collaborative remixability”, a phrase coined by Barb Dybwad to refer to “a transformative process in which the information and media we’ve organized and shared can be recombined and built on to create new forms, concepts, ideas, mashups¹, and services” (Dybwad, 2005). The on-line communities have derived into a powerful mechanism of civic and political participation. Thought has never been as free as today; the self has never had as many opportunities as nowadays to share its life with others; truth or the sense of multi-perspective has never been as strong as in these days.

Three years ago, in the early summer of 2007, Facebook opened its doors to the vast number of Internet-users worldwide. “I remember sarcastically thinking to myself, ‘Oh, great. Another social network. Just what I need’”, writes Fowler, CTO of Info Ether and

¹ Mashup: web page or application that uses or combines data or functionality from two or many more external sources to create a new service.

creator of Facebook, “I had signed up for a number of social networks in the past and gone through the same routine every time: hundreds of friend requests lead to building out a friend list with which you can accomplish nothing new. I assumed Facebook would be more of the same. But I’m a glutton for punishment, so I signed up anyway”. Fowler goes on and comments his experience as a Facebook user, “it was then that the Internet collectively realized the existence of a valuable asset that we all started calling the social graph. Your social graph is the model and codification of your relationships with other people. These relationships form the basis of the real killer app of the Internet. Facebook brought this concept to the forefront by helping users construct a real and interesting social graph more effectively than ever before” (Fowler, 2008).

This article examines Facebook Group application and its effect on the social and political scenery. According to several authors, since participation of social activities on Facebook is mostly “carried out through the Groups application, it may be appropriate to highlight Groups when exploring the impacts of Facebook use in promoting individuals’ civic and political involvement” (Park, Kee, & Valenzuela, 2009). Further research on the influence of Facebook Groups, show the tendency to engage with social and political activities of its users as well as the consequences on the Media and makes room for an interesting debate within Digital Culture theories.

Theoretical framework

Social networking

It is a difficult task to find a generally accepted definition of the term ‘social networking’, as it is in constant evolution. Professors Lamb and Johnson point out that “social technology refers to the connection of people for cooperation, collaboration and information sharing through computer-mediated communication environments” (Lamb, A.; Johnson, L., 2007).

According to Stowe Boyd, an authority on social tools, social software has three basic characteristics:

Interaction: allows virtual conversations between individuals or groups.

Feedback: provides tools for commenting, rating, or reacting to the content shared by others.

Connections: supports the creation of new relationships helping to establish new contacts

through profiles and invitations to join.

The procedure of social networking is easy and its possibilities unlimited. A good explanation on how social networking functions is given by Dwyer et al.: “when people join social networking sites, they begin by creating a profile, then make connections to existing friends as well as those they meet through the site. A profile is a list of identifying information. It can include your real name, or a pseudonym. It also can include photographs, birthday, hometown, religion, ethnicity and personal interest. Members connect to others by sending a “friend” message, which must be accepted by the other party in order to establish a link. “Friending” another member gives them access to your profile, adds them to your social network, and vice versa” (Dwyer et al., 2007).

Dwyer et al. state that members make use of these sites for several reasons. Its main purpose is communication and maintaining relationships. Popular activities include “updating others on activities and whereabouts, sharing photos and archiving events, getting updates on activities by friends, displaying a large social network, presenting an idealized persona, sending messages privately and posting public testimonials” (Dwyer et al., 2007).

Social networks play a critical role in “determining the way problems are solved, organizations are run, and the degree to which individuals succeed in achieving their goals” (Lamb, A.; Johnson, L., 2007). These sites became very popular since its conception in 1995 with the creation of Classmates.com. It was not until 2004, however, that social networking started to expand rapidly throughout the World Wide Web.

Facebook

Facebook, by some measurements the most popular social network with more than 200 million active users worldwide (those who returned to the site within the last 30 days), is one of the fastest-growing and best-known sites on the Internet nowadays.

The company, founded in 2004 by a Harvard scholar, Mark Zuckerberg, was first devoted to Harvard students; then to all high school and college students until it became available to the general public.

A good amount of studies have been conducted in order to figure out the link between Facebook usage and civic and political involvement based on social capital theory. In particular, there is a very in-depth study focused on Facebook groupings which establish that, amongst the various applications of Facebook, “Facebook Groups is a particular and

useful module that allows discussion forums and threads based on common interests and activities” (Gordon, R.S.; Stephens, M., 2007). The recruitment characteristic of this application is encouraging “diverse political, social, and other special-interest (e.g. global issues, health concerns) organizations to create online groups and utilizing the useful and fun enhancements of Facebook groups” (Park, Kee, & Valenzuela, 2009). In their research, Professors Park, Kee and Valenzuela found out that “once they belong to a political or civic group on Facebook, individuals can receive mobilizing information that may not be available elsewhere. These individuals may also encounter more opportunities to engage in political activities” (Park, Kee, & Valenzuela, 2009).

As far as this academic journal is concerned, it will aim to contribute and present further discussion on the link of Facebook Groups use with political and civic engagement. Prior studies have set the basics of this social networking new power to attract and promote people’s participation in social and political matters. This paper pretends to summarize the key components of Facebook Groups effect.

The re-making of the Theory of Groups and the Public Online-sphere

The so-called theory of groups establishes the greater effectiveness of relatively small groups. It was thought, therefore, that “when the number of participants is large, the typical participant will know that his² own efforts will probably not make much difference to the outcome, and that he will be affected by the meeting’s decision in much the same way no matter how much or how little effort he puts into studying the issues. Accordingly, the typical participant may not take the trouble to study the issues as carefully as he would have if he had been able to make the decision by himself” (Olson, 1971). The online-world, however, is proving different.

Applications such as Facebook Groups include a large number of members and almost all of them tend to contribute somehow to the group by means of comments, posts or links. These groups function, to a certain extent, just like collective blogosphere does. In the words of Fergusson and Howell, “it provides a bridge between the private, subjective sphere of self-expression and the socially-fragile civic sphere in which publics can form an act” (Fergusson & Howell, 2008). It can be argued that, by losing the fear to speak (that is, type in the online-sphere) people get motivated towards social and political involvement rather than entertainment purposes. Being able to express their incomplete thoughts, lead Facebook users to find self-confidence. As a consequence, they will be more likely to form part of political activities (Park, Kee, & Valenzuela, 2009). Various studies indicate that “the

² This book was written in 1965, when the non-sexist writing wasn’t required in academic works.

social needs of these online groups strengthen social contacts, community engagement, and attachment by connecting the whole community through networks. [...] Groups are created to organize meetings or events and share or discuss common issues about campus, community, politics or casual issues” (Park, Kee, & Valenzuela, 2009).

Politics moves online³

The Internet is perceived as the next great leap forward in political and organizational interaction. [...] If political processes are to move online, it is essential that the code, which facilitates and constraints the discussion and measures the community’s opinion, must be as open and transparent as the systems of democratic government that we most admire. Public interest sponsorship of such code...is critical if online deliberation is to become a trusted and valuable tool of democracy

(Berkman Center for Internet and Society, 2008)

As it has been said previously, Facebook is one of the new forums for political debate. Some authors in the 1990s speculated that the Internet did bring a movement into being. They regarded the “research-oriented, noncommercial origins of the Net as an inherent and irreducible quality that stamped, or could stamp, the political character of those who would master it” (Cornfield, 2002). This statement could be re-phrased and worded as the political valuable character of the ‘communities’ who would master the Net. Jon Katz proclaimed the existence of a ‘digital citizenry’. The hypothetical future of Cornfield may have arrived. As he stated: “In the future all winning campaigns will have grounding in broadband communications. The Internet has altered the best ways in which to build networks of people and databases of knowledge about donors and activists, the opposition, policy details, the media, and so on. No computerized network, no reaching the potential of people power. No computerized databases, no exploiting the effectiveness of pattern recognition” (Cornfield, 2002).

Although there are no specific research studies on the field of political campaigns and its correlation with social networking, previous studies suggest that they are very likely to interfere as powerful political weapon in future political issues.

Analytical framework

The possibilities for an accurate in-depth research are limited. There is already an extensive literature on group behavior and the implications on the Net as well as some key research articles focusing specially on Facebook (Berkman Center for Internet and Society, 2008) (Cornfield, 2002) (Dwyer et al., 2007) (Dybwad, 2005) (Fergusson & Howell, 2008)

³ Title taken from the book *Politics moves Online* based on the U.S. election campaigns of the last decade and its evolution towards e-politics.

(Lamb, A.; Johnson, L., 2007) (Gordon, R.S.; Stephens, M., 2007). Some of the most notable contributions to this literature have been made by scholars in the research area. Before I proceed further, I should clarify the relationship of my own analysis with this body of research; for although I hope I have learned from it, I do not see myself as directly contributing to it. It is, therefore, a compendium of different theories and researches about the subject and my own reflection on it.

Most of the previous studies show that “the survey analysis of Facebook Groups use suggests that Facebook as an online tool plays a significant role in facilitating youth engagement in civic and political activities. Rather than driving people who are already highly motivated to engage in social issues, diverse Facebook Groups could provide platforms through which young adults who are not interested in social or community services and politics in general can socialize with others on the basis of social issues and common interests. It shows the potential of SNSs⁴ as an emerging yet powerful tool for drawing young adults’ attention to societal concerns and uniting the young generation as active participants in society” (Park, Kee, & Valenzuela, 2009).

Self-reflection and Conclusion

Human beings are, and always have been, diversely motivated beings. We act instrumentally, but also non-instrumentally. We act for material gain, but also for psychological well-being and gratification, and for social connectedness. Facebook Groups help to create information, knowledge and cultural production, based in the networked environment, and applied to anything that the many individuals connected to it can imagine. Its outputs, in turn, are not treated as exclusive property; they are instead subject to an increasingly ethic of open sharing, open for all others to build on, extend, and make their own.

Online Group phenomena are breaking pre-established assumptions in regards to the Theory of Groups. They work just as effectively as small organizations in the real world, but are conformed by a large number of individuals, mainly youngsters. Not only Facebook Groups operate effectively, but they do have an impact in the real civic and political scene. It has become, indeed, a powerful tool which mobilizes people and makes them get involve in social and political matters.

4 SNS: social network systems

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Is Twitter making news more interpersonal?

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Abstract

In this article I explore some of the challenges that Twitter poses to the current news reporting environment. I discuss the speed and accuracy of Twitter as a media and the issues posed by the volume of tweets in cyberspace. I argue that despite these challenges, Twitter is making news more interpersonal and that this is desirable and liberating for the public.

Keywords

TWITTER • BANGKOK • CHILE • CHINA • INFORMATION • MASS COMMUNICATION • COMMUNICATION • TWEETS • MASS MEDIA • INTERPERSONAL • NEWS

In a paper by Nicholas Garnham discussing Habermas' *Structural Transformations of the Public Sphere* (1991), he says that the:

“current technical developments in communication... are legitimated in terms of a desirable move away from mass communication and back toward forms of interpersonal communication that are seen as inherently more desirable and liberating.” (Garnham, 1992: 367)

In this article I explore some of the challenges that Twitter poses to the current news reporting environment. I discuss the speed and accuracy of Twitter as a media and the issues posed by the volume of tweets in cyberspace. I argue that despite these challenges, Twitter is making news more interpersonal and that this is desirable and liberating for the public.

Information that is shared on Twitter is not verified. You can lie, be creative, sell your services, preach and even find lost relatives. Sometimes it is used to circulate useful information and other times “mass disinformation” (Greg, 2010). Without much thought or perhaps with a lot of thought, you can craft and post a tweet, and depending on the number of followers you have or the hashtags you use, your tweet may or may not be viewed by a lot of people. It is also possible that no one will pay attention to your tweets. These are some of the dynamics of the real world that play out in their own way on Twitter.

In the aftermath of the Chilean earthquake of February 2010, a French newspaper commented that “with more than 2,000 tweets per minute coming from Twitter... the popular micro-blogging site has ... proved that it can be one of the speediest albeit not the most accurate, sources of real-time information.” (Seibt, 2010) It is undeniable that Twitter has had a positive impact in assisting communities in emergency situations. The minimalistic design of its user interface facilitates its ease of use. It is described as one of the fastest means of communicating with a large group of people. During the Bangkok protests in 2010, there were constant updates on Twitter recounting the violence and reports from ordinary citizens like “explosions of cooking gas canisters”, for instance (Purnell, 2010).

In the past, before television, news was first announced through newspapers and radio. McLuhan (1964) said that “the content of any medium is always another medium. In recent decades, television has taken over as the first port of call for breaking news - an example would be the events of September 11 in 2001 in New York. In the most recent decade, the internet has surpassed these other means for breaking news stories and in the last four years and more prominently in the last two years, Twitter has become a new dissemination point for breaking news.

However, the speed with which information can be disseminated has perhaps come at the cost of accurate or verified information. While most tweets have no need to be accurate, some do. In an ideal world, facts are checked and sources verified before a large group of people who form public opinion view the news. There is no way to make this happen on Twitter. Twitter itself claims that “the timely bits of information that spread through Twitter can help you make better choices and decisions” (Twitter, 2010) implying that information on Twitter is reliable. With reference to the Bangkok protests one blogger said that,

“Because Twitter doesn’t have the usual guarantors or (semi-)veracity of traditional media - fact-checkers and other verification protocols, long-standing reputations to protect, libel suits to fear, etc. – [they] looked for independent verification (disregarding the endless retweets) and found enough to have some confidence in what [they were] reading.” (Greg, 2010)

In February 2010, a French language broadcaster conducted an experiment to test the quality of news from social media and micro blogging. Five reporters spent five days in an isolated French farmhouse with access to only Facebook and Twitter and were asked to deliver “news”. Their aim was to show that there is value in different sources of information

and to consider the legitimacy of news discovered through Facebook and Twitter (Cheng, 2010). One of the reporters that took part in the experiment said that while there was a large volume of tweets, they were often repetitive. The reporter said that no large news story escaped her but that in the example of Roger Federer winning the Australian Open tennis tournament, little value-added content was tweeted other than the fact that Federer had previously won 15 grand slams. Indeed, part of the difficulty in finding useful information on Twitter (and the internet) is sifting through all the useless tweets. It is perhaps here that traditional media outlets have an advantage. They curate and thereby select the relevant information on behalf of their audience. A survey¹ conducted by Pear Analytics (Kelly, 2009) found that more than 40 per cent of tweets were “pointless babble” and less than 5 per cent were “news”.

Some have argued that Twitter is increasing news accountability and thereby transparency. By several journalists at a press conference instantly tweeting the main facts presented, it is argued that there is little to no curation of the information by editors at the major media outlets. (Kelly, 2009) One blogger said that an advantage of Twitter was that news of the Bangkok protests was “unmolested by any attempts at censorship or spin”. (Greg, 2010) Furthermore, we know exactly which journalist or tweeter has stated a particular view. The flip side is that there are also tweeters who post tweets on behalf of a political party with the intention of swaying public opinion. Not all tweets are anonymous but they can be. A forum where most tweets are from anonymous or unknown tweeters means that everyone is equal yet not knowing who the real author is creates its own complex problems. The Venezuelan president, Hugo Chavez announced that “he was setting up a special office with 200 staff and public funds to handle... tweets [to] him.” (Wiley, 2010)

One of the main issues with Twitter is that it not only facilitates but seems to validate the view of the masses. A “retweet” is an action on Twitter where you can post someone else’s tweet to all your followers. Effectively you are saying that you like or agree with someone else’s tweet and by sharing their tweet, you are acknowledging your agreement. For this reason and as mentioned in the experiment of the five reporters from the French broadcaster, there is a lot of repetition on Twitter.

Other than being a fast means of communication, why is it then that despite its questionable accuracy, and informational quality, its repetitive and non-value adding nature and the fact that many tweets are pointless babble do we continue to enjoy using

¹ The study categorised 2,000 tweets from the public timeline into six categories: news, spam, self-promotion, pointless babble, conversational and pass-along value.

Twitter as a means to access news?

Twitter has allowed individuals to communicate with someone they do not know about a news topic that interests them. There are few other contemporary forums where this can take place. By using hashtags², a tweeter can find a fellow tweeter who is interested in a similar field. For example, during ABC's Q&A television program, as you follow the Q&A hashtag, people who feel strongly about a topic will throw their views into the public space of the Q&A Twitter hashtag. This means that even if I do not know that person, I can use the hyperlink that is their name and decide whether I would like to follow them and continue to view their opinion on the matter outside of the Q&A forum, as well as read their day to day "babble". Indeed, we shouldn't discount the babble because it is perhaps this intermittent babble that gives tweets an anthropotropic feel.

Instead of hearing the opinion of a columnist that writes for the Melbourne Age, the views of an individual who I can ask a question to and who may reply instantly, are more personal. The author seems real because we are interacting with them. Twitter can help reporters better ascertain the public sentiment of a large group of people. In the case of a natural disaster, Twitter may help a reporter gauge the feelings of the community. In a political candidacy race, Twitter may shed light on which politician is favoured.

A discussion on how Twitter is making news more interpersonal follows. There has always been a desire by individuals to be heard. Twitter provides a platform for this. In 1989 in Tiananmen Square, fifteen hundred or so journalists descended on Beijing to cover the visit of Mikhail Gorbachev, the leader of the Soviet Union at the time. His visit drew world wide attention. The students who were protesting in and near Tiananmen Square at the time, were aware of the international coverage that Gorbachev's visit was generating. They held signs in English and French and symbols such as the "Statue of Liberty" below portraits of Mao to convey their message to the Western world. There was a desire by these students to be seen and heard by the international world.

While Twitter has been blocked by the Chinese government for over a year, what impact might the availability of Twitter have had during the Tiananmen Square protests on the reporting of these events? One of the main attributes of Twitter is that it gives an individual a platform to broadcast their personal opinion with little to no censorship. The way Twitter is structured as a platform makes us feel like we are being spoken to on a personal level. A

² A hashtag is a community-driven convention for adding additional content and metadata to your tweets. It was designed to accommodate the real time news community to allow users to track what was happening. On Twitter, hashtags help Tweeters track topics, communities, live events or breaking news. They help make tweets searchable and assist collaboration on a topic.

tweet must come from someone. Unlike the anchor of the six o'clock news on a television screen where the opinion read from the autocue is clearly not their own, it is not so obvious on Twitter who the author really is. It is somewhat disguised by the simplicity of the text itself. For instance, with a limit of 140 characters, it is possible that President Obama actually posted his own tweets, maybe even just some, but because of how short a tweet is, it is very difficult to make the distinction. Without any better information, we then defer to the conclusion that it is President Obama tweeting and that we are "so close" to him - our names are on the same user interface and take up an equal amount of space! The way Twitter has been designed is personal and interactive. In this example for instance, we are reminded that we are speaking on the same platform as Barack Obama.

The Red Shirt Protests in Bangkok highlights that rather than replacing traditional media, Twitter has given a voice to the news' audience who previously only consumed news. Not only are we "mere consumers" but we begin to "foster the development of citizens" (Garnham, 1992: 374) Not only are they interacting with professional journalists but citizen journalists who provide their own account of events.

Twitter sees one of its main attributes as the ability to know who the tweeter is. This is evidenced by their attempt to authenticate some Twitter accounts to ensure that the author is who they purport to be. There have been cases where people have used Twitter to impersonate well known identities such as respected journalists or well known celebrities. It can be assumed that this move by Twitter is an attempt to make tweets a more reliable information source.

If we conclude that Twitter has made and continues to make communication more interactive, does the public find the type of communication that Twitter is, desirable and liberating? There is not yet a definitive answer. It appears that the masses for which mass communication was targeted do appreciate personal communication. Twitter as a media facilitates more targeted news being fed to its audience. If you receive news that interests you, you are also more likely to interact with its author and other people who are also interested in the topic. A journalist reporting on the Red Shirt Protests in Bangkok said in a tweet recently: "I've been out and about all day reporting on the red shirt protests here in Bangkok. It's difficult to update Newley.com remotely, but I've been posting snippets of text and a few images on Twitter." (Purnell, 2010) This is a much more personal account than you would see usually in print media.

On a superficial level, Twitter provides a healthy alternative to traditional mass media.

It is desirable in this context because individuals are more comfortable being entertained by people that they already know and like. Yet there remains a strong argument that there must be a balance between news that you want to hear and the news that will one day form “general knowledge”. Having your news tailored to the subjects you are interested in, given time, may make relating to people with whom you are not familiar, more difficult since there are fewer common points of reference. It can be argued that there needs to be a few common values in society for it to remain cohesive.

Twitter is liberating the public from the control of mass media. This statement is true to some extent. Mass communication in the form of radio, newspapers and television have, for a very long time, controlled the news. Until the popularisation of the internet, mass media and simple interactive communication such as phone calls were the main methods of exchanging information and sharing news. Twitter says that it “is the evolution of mobile messaging, not replacing SMS, IM, or email but introducing a new public dimension to messaging.” Like a text message, there is freedom to express yourself however you choose. It also appears to be a more democratic platform. As mentioned above, each tweet takes up the same amount of space on the screen. The concept of “long tail” (Anderson, 2004) suggests that value in the internet comes from its ability to cater to the large disparate interests of its users.

Some would argue that feeling liberated by Twitter is an illusion - that you may feel like you have a voice on Twitter and that you are being heard, but are you really? Is anyone really paying attention? Am I tweeting into a black hole? (Gabe, 2009) It is not surprising that some of the tweeters with the largest followings are those that already have a public profile. They are often trained journalists or politicians. Those with performance backgrounds also feature prominently - comedians and actors for example. So while I feel like I am being heard, am I actually just being engaged by the same people who write for mass media?

In conclusion, Twitter is a good example of how there is definitely a desire for more interactive and personal news. People want to be heard. There remains a lot of value in well researched, long-form news articles that are best written with the incentives that economies of scale can provide. Certainly mass media compared to individualistic platforms have the advantage in this respect. Users of Twitter should be aware that not everyone on Twitter is equal despite appearances. It may feel liberating to move toward more interpersonal communication channels like Twitter, yet the major players are still lurking.

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Love or Lies: Deception in internet dating

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Abstract:

They were once the home of the desperate and obviously dateless, yet dating websites have begun to grow in popularity, slowly being considered an acceptable by the majority. Though is what people post in their profiles what they are really like, how much difference is there between the way they see themselves and who they actually are.

This article will focus on the world of internet dating. What profiles are successful? Why are they successful? What do sites do to try and increase compatibility of the matches they suggest for the user? And why sometimes people are just more engaging in a 250 word summary of themselves than they are in real life.

This will be explored by looking at firstly the idea of self, and how people construct their profiles in relation to this. Looking at the sites themselves will follow this, and which sites are popular. This will be followed by person experiences of the people that have used the sites. Finally the future of internet dating sites will be looked at through programs like Grindr and Second life and the representation of self through avatars.

As a whole, people do not try and deceive they are just trying to give a more positive version of themselves.

Keywords

ONLINE DATING: DATING WEBSITES: ONLINE PROFILES: RSVP: E-HARMONY

You can get anything on the internet these days, from a house to a dog even a tissue apparently once used by Elvis, so why not a soul mate. Internet dating sites have grown in use throughout the growth of Internet, they have also grown in diversity. However how truthful is the information that is presented in these thousands of profiles. This article will look at the representation of self in online dating sites. This will be explored firstly by looking at the definition of self, then by looking at research conducted over the past few years into the area of disclosure and misrepresentation online. Interviews with people from Australia, the UK and the US will look more closely at personal interactions in regards to online dating. Then finally what the future holds for online dating will be discussed. When people are creating an online dating profile, although they don't intentionally create a profile to deceive, they often create a profile in order to be more attractive and desirable to the people that they hope to attract.

Self

When looking at how people present themselves on the web, they often need to present an idea of self; either a *true self* or a *real self*. This theory comes from studies done by Rogers' (1951) and Higgins' (1987). Although these theories predate computers, in the case of Rogers and before the growth of mass personal internet use in the case of Higgins, their ideas are still relate to construction of self online, and directly relate to how people create their profile pages.

Rogers' theory looked at the idea of *true self*. Rogers' defines the 'true self' as traits and characteristics that the person possesses but is unable to express, a person's inner core. His theory relates to the *true self* being the self that was constructed in relation to other individuals. This is the true inner self, who the person really is (Rogers 1951). This is contrasted with Higgins' (1987) theories on self. He looked at the idea of *actual self*, *ideal self* and *ought to self* (1987). He breaks this down to *actual self* being the representation of who you or another actually believes you are; the *ideal self* is the representation of how you or another would like to see yourself. Finally *ought to self* is the attributes you feel you should possess. Monica Whitty in her article 'Revealing the 'real' me, searching for the 'actual you: Presentations of Self on an internet dating site' looks to both these theories and notes that researches have found individuals who are more likely to express their *true self* or *actual self* online are more likely to place importance on these relationships. People that form relationships in this space look at them more in relation to identity that an individual who is more likely to express their true selves in non-internet relationships. Whitty (2008) noted in the work done by Bargh, McKenna and their colleagues, it is suggested that people

unable to express their 'true' self in the real world are more likely to have a profile closer to what their 'true' self is online, this is in contrast to information Whitty found in her own study.

Whitty found that the people in her survey group for her article tried to keep their profiles as close to their 'true self' (Whitty 2008 pg 78). She found that although many people admitted to misrepresenting themselves online, it was mainly in the form of exaggerations rather than direct lies. People most commonly lied about their looks, age and weight (Whitty 2008). This concept is also looked at by Cynthia Feliciano's et al article 'Gendered racial exclusion among white internet dating' (2009).

Feliciano's study (2009) of racial preferences when dating found that people would often mislead about their appearance more than they will lie about their preference for race or their interests. She found that women are more likely to describe themselves as heavy set or carrying a few extra pounds compared to men. She also found that her sample seemed to be more educated than the average American, with over 90 per cent stating that they have completed at least some college schooling, and a large number having a post-graduate degree. This she notes is far higher than the national average (Feliciano et al 2009). She does state that it is likely that many of the men in his study overstated their education, perhaps in relation to men being seen as providers (Feliciano et al 2009). In line with this a study conducted by Conwell and Lungern (2001) found that misrepresentation of age and physical characteristics is higher among daters who meet through online dating sites.

As noted in the research by Whitty, Feliciano, Conwell and Lungern in people's profiles on online dating sites people often mislead about their physical appearance. The reason for this could link to what people are often looking for in traditional dating. In an article by Larry Rosen et al "The impact of emotionality and self-disclosure on online dating versus traditional dating" (2008) he notes that there was a difference between what people found important for a future date in an online environment and in traditional dating. For traditional dating people found education, attractiveness and personality more important, whereas online dating the most important thing was communication. Though even communication was important people were reluctant to contact a person without a picture attached to their profile (Rosen 2008). As Rosen points out this is because online people were limited to only a posted photograph, whereas in traditional dating people have the physical contact.

Whitty (2008) in her article makes an interesting point about online dating sites in

relation to the construction of self and the construction of profiles. In comparison to social networking sites such as Facebook or Myspace, online profiles are created in order to represent the *ideal* self. Yet the online profile is created purely to attract people in order to engage them in a relationship. Therefore people will create profiles that are more attractive than the person may otherwise be.

The Sites

There are a number of different sites around Australia and around the world. Each country looked at for this article has different sites that lead in popularity. Each site has a different way for people to interact each other and asks for different information for their profile creation.

The most popular in Australia is RSVP, which has been operating in Australia the longest, since 1997, it was bought and relaunched by Fairfax, and has since increased in popularity. Interaction on this site is through kisses, which are free to send, and are basic introductory sentences. To send messages, one must purchase stamps, with one stamp equalling one message. When this is sent to a person of interest it allows for open conversation between the two people for 30 days. As Whitty notes, people's interaction communication after the initial contact through online dating sites tends to be to organise a face to face meeting (2008). This is similar to websites in the UK, for example encounters.com and in the US for example Match.com.

This information asked for by each site is different, for example, some sites, ask the user to complete extensive personality questionnaires in order for the site to connect the user with the most appropriate match. They in effect find matches for the user from the information that the user gives. In linking this back to the idea of self, it brings into question how honest people are when answering these questions. The two most popular sites in Australia that come under this premise are e-harmony and MyType.

E-harmony is an American site that started in 2000 and was founded by two Psychologists (Sunday Telegraph 2008). The site was launched in Australia in 2008, and uses a questionnaire of 256 questions to determine which people are your ideal matches (2008). In the sites advertising they claim to have been responsible for over 2 per cent of the marriages in America (e-harmony 2009). Despite the 256 questions (e-harmony 2010) they ask the people that subscribe to the site, they only give limited information on a person's profile. Most of the information is about values and appearance, with few areas for self expression, or to break away from the predetermined answers. E-harmony often

ask the individual to answer very over arching questions such as “Who has been the most influential person in your life?” or “What are you passionate about?”. This leads to often over inflated answer such as “I am passionate about living life and taking things as they come, my life is there for me to take and do the most with it.” (Ben e-harmony 2010).

This is true of the other sites, MyType that matches the users, instead of the user being able to search for their match. This site, an off shot of RSVP, which claims to be more personal, also limits a person’s area to express themselves. It again asks very over arching questions, such as “What are three things you want to do before you die?” (Mytype 2010). It also makes the individual give stock answers to questions, and information is mostly about appearance, education and employment. (Mytype 2010)

These sites are considered mainstream, where as there has now been an increase in sites for the niche market. These are sites that focus on either a certain type of person, such as fitness singles (fitnesssingle 2010), for exercise interested singles, to sites for only members of the defence force (miliatrysingles 2010). There are also sites that focus on the intimate encounters side of things, such as Adultmatchmaker.com and one part of the Lavalife site. These sites have proved to be popular within certain sections of society, for example people in relationships that are looking to stray.

The use of these sites has grown over the past few years. A Neilson poll conducted in November of 2009 and January of 2010 results for New South Wales and Victoria it showed that there were fewer daters in New South Wales with 57.5 per cent of people having tried online dating, compared with the 64 per cent in Victoria. Although New South Wales had less people they were more successful. In NSW 19.5 per cent had a serious long-term relationship compared to the 16.6 per cent for Victoria. 8.5 per cent of New South Wales respondents had gotten married, and 29 per cent had said they had made long term friendships out of the experience (Sunday Telegraph 2010).

According to a poll conducted by RSVP 33.6 per cent of people who used an online dating site reported a short term relationship, 16.2 reported a long-term relationship where as 8.9 per cent reported being in a marriage or a de-facto relationship.

The Users

In order to look at how this deception or exaggeration carries over into real life, several interviews were conducted for the purpose of this article. The respondents were selected due to their use of online dating. The interviews with the respondents in the US were

conducted via email, the interviewees from the UK were conducted by phone, and the Australian interviewee was conducted in person. All had taken posted profiles on internet dating sites in the past few years and all had face to face meetings with people they had met online.

One of the most important things found in these interviews was that often the appearance of the people they met did not meet their expectations. This is in line with Whitty's (2008) view about exaggeration. Daniel, an interviewee from Brooklyn, New York noted that often people photos were a bit deceiving, and Pete, an interviewee from Queens, New York, noted that the pictures were sometimes misleading, "Everyone always posts the best pictures that have of themselves." Carl, an interviewee from Brooklyn, New York, also said that the girls that he met were often different from their profile "In some cases the girls used an old photo; they were 10 to 15 pounds heavier or 2 to 3 years older."

Yet other than that most of the boys interviewed found that the other information given by the girls they met were honest, or at least close to their personality. Carl said "The best people had fairly cryptic profiles with one awesome detail that made you want to learn more." Both Pete and Daniel said they found the girls they met in person were pretty close to their online profile.

The girls interviewed though found that the boys they met were often different in personality to their profiles. Lisa, an interviewee from London, first date with a person she met online was quite different from what she expected. The communications she had with the man she contacted via the online dating site she subscribed to was witty, full of humor and on topics that they both liked. When she met the man in person, he admitted that he had used the Internet to find facts that would have interested her, and actually was not interested in those topics. He was also missing an arm, a thing Lisa notes would have been nice to know before first meeting him.

Emma, an interviewee from Sydney, also had several negative experiences with people that she met in person from online dating. A number of the men that she met were quite different from their internet profile pictures, and also seemed less engaged in person. "I often wondered if it was just that in Australia the guys that tried internet dating were just the quite guys that had problems with dating anyway." This would be in line with the findings by Bargh and colleagues. She found the biggest difference was that a large number of people elaborated about their employment, for example one man was an executive assistant at a bank, yet had put on his profile that an investment banker. "It doesn't bother

me what job people have, I don't know why he felt he had to lie." Yet as noted by Feliciano noted men are more likely to lie about their employment because of the perception that they have to be the breadwinners (2009).

Of their overall experience with online dating, most of the people interviewed came to a similar conclusion regarding it. That it was a good experience but it often wasn't successful due to their often being a lack of chemistry. As Carl said "It works, you get to meet people, go on dates but it's still missing something of the magic that comes from meeting someone for the first time...because when you meet online and then go on a date. You are meeting for the first time - but each of you knows something about the other person. There is this familiarity that is not real. Mistaken familiarity" Rob, an interviewee from Sydney, also noted that although the girls that he met were lovely, they often seemed to lack the spark that he was looking for. Although Rob does admit that he often used the site as a way to meet women to "hook up" with rather than for dating, though does not share this with the women he meets.

In line with the research mentioned above all people felt they had been honest about themselves in their profiles. Though as Paul said "Putting a positive spin on your personality is another thing entirely, why be negative." Although the perception of their positive spin may possibly be seen as deception by the people viewing the profiles.

Going forward

As we move into the future of online social sites moving towards sites such as Second Life and Chat Roulette Internet dating and the way people represent themselves will change. In Asimina Vasalou and Adam Joinson's article 'Me Myself and I: The role of interactional context on self-presentation through avatars' (2008) the authors looked at the use avatars instead of photos in order to maintain people privacy but still give personalisation to their blog comments. Vasalou and Joinson found that people did create avatars that were self-reflective and self-representative, yet in the situation of dating people tended to create avatars that more physically attractive, and more, that they perceived, romantic (Vasalou et al 2008). Vasalou in an earlier article in 2007 notes the many of the participants of her study on representation of self in avatars often created that embellished how they appeared. For example a balding man when creating his profile gave himself more rather than less hair, and a more youthful appearance. In this regard a study by Yee and Bailenson (2007) found that people with more attractive avatars were more likely to approach people that people given less attractive avatars.

Within the gay community there has been the introduction and the growth in the use of the iPhone application known as Grinder. This identifies people in the area who also have this application, and often used to facilitate impromptu intimate encounters. Although the creator notes that it was not created for this purpose it has become adapted for this. In regards to deception, this application allows people to turn off or block certain people from seeing that they are available, and also allows them to chose what kind of people contact them. Any false information that is given though is often dispelled quickly due to this facilitating a face to face encounter at a quicker rate than an online profile does. This seems to be a more advanced version of the the website sites such as adult matchmaker.

Conclusion

Deception in online dating is more a presentation of self in a positive light rather than a person planning to deceive. Self is a construct in relation to others and how we want ourselves to be viewed by others. This correlates into people creating profiles so that they feel more confident in their appearance. Appearance seems to be the most important area for people and also seems to be where people will deceive in creating an online profile. Yet at times this is in order to sell oneself in a positive light. So what it all comes down to is that if you are looking for your perfect match online, they will probably not look like their photo, and will probably be a little older and plumper than you first thought. Even their interests will be pretty much spot on. Though before you criticise, make sure you aren't doing the same in your own profile.

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To be or not to be: T.Sina in China

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Abstract

As Twitter has become popular all over the world, from 2007, companies that localize Twitter have considerably promoted the prevalence of Twitter in China. In 2010, FanFou, the most popular Twitter website with more than one million users, closed down. At the same time, however, Sina.com managed to recommend its own microblogging tool-T.sina.com.cn and became one of the few web companies under the application of web1.0. This article will discuss the differences between T.Sina and Twitter, and consider whether T.Sina will be successful.

Keywords

MICROBLOGGING • T.SINA • TWITTER • WEB 2.0 • GREAT FIREWALL

Introduction

A company can lose but the microblogging service will never lose; a website can be blocked but social networking will never be blocked. Microblogging services are increasingly popular around the world. As the newest form of web 2.0 communicating tools, microblogging allows messages to be posted through both mobile phones and the Internet. Therefore its connection with users is much broader than other social communicating tools. In the USA, Twitter is such a popular microblogging tool that it has almost become another name for microblogging service.

In China, Sina.com is one of the four largest web portals. Its blog service, usually focusing on news and entertainment, is the most popular in China. On 14th August 2009, Sina Corporation put out its new microblogging service T.Sina . However, the Great Firewall, which blocks Internet content that the government deems unsuitable, was introduced a few months ago and therefore Twitter and other domestic Twitter clones have been blocked in China.

In this essay, I will explain the microblogging tool in China called T.Sina and analyze its features by comparing it with Twitter. I will also introduce the Public sphere of Habermas to highlight the market method used by both Twitter and T.Sina. The main purpose of this essay is to identify the effects of China on T.Sina and to discuss its future possibilities.

1 Internet policy in China

“The People’s Republic of China is not known as a nation of personal freedoms. Control is fixed on the Communist Party of China (CPC)”, especially the media control. Since 1997, Chinese national Internet usage has grown from 630,000 users to more than 123 million users. The government realizes that the power of the Internet is now stronger than traditional media and has adapted its policies according. The Great Firewall is probably the best example of government “regulations on Internet content and services” in China. “Some of the better known tactics used involve filtering search engine content and removing results, blocking or editing Web log (blog) posts with political keywords, and regulating cybercafés to prevent banned Web sites from being accessed.” Both International and domestic Internet service companies have to follow these policies and “help plug gaps in the technical net.”

2 Comparisons between T.Sina & Twitter

2.1 Structure Comparisons

Both T.Sina and Twitter are microblogging tools, so their structures are similar. However T.Sina does add some functions which support multi-media sharing such as video-sharing, picture-sharing and music-sharing. In particular, music-sharing allows users to add songs aggregators (RSS) or to choose songs from Sina’s selection of music. Based on these functions, users of T.Sina prefer multi-media tweeting rather than pure text tweeting.

T.Sina has made some changes to please Chinese users. The reply @ID in Twitter is replaced in the form of comments in T.Sina, just like the comment function in Facebook. In Twitter, when someone replies to a tweet except that users reply by RT@, the reply can only be seen in the publisher’s timeline, not in the original tweet.

Compared with Twitter, in T.Sina all replies (comments) are listed under the original tweet, which is more familiar for Chinese users. However, the line-form timeline of Twitter makes sure that all tweets are displayed in a two-dimension surface, placing all the information in an equal position. Therefore the Twitter up-to-date flow information makes up-to-date research possible. In T.Sina, the timeline of comments is showed in a tree-form, which means other dimensions are added. It leads to unequal positioning of the replies and tweets, meaning T.Sina loses the up-to-date nature of microblogging. Moreover, a successful microblogging site must be oriented on millions of users, rather than millions of media or IT workers. This is because the value of microblogging is to communicate and to accumulate data, which is generated by huge numbers of users. Comment functions

reduce the amount of tweets and change microblogging back to an ordinary blog format. Fortunately T.Sina has an extra option- tweet the comment when making comments, which enable it to keep the up-to-date nature of microblogging.

2.2 non-user friendly in two-way communication

T.Sina keeps the function of @ID communication, but the @ID does not appear after users click other users' ID. Therefore mutual communication between users is through direct message or the manual inputting of @ ID. In this context, T.Sina is not user-friendly in two-way communication. Moreover the main page of T.Sina is more complex than Twitter. It contains hot topics, top users and top Tweets, lists for celebrities, brands, and media and extends the "see who is here" function of Twitter. Therefore users spend more time on the suggestive tweets or users but less time communicating with others. In this context, T.Sina seems like a media rather than microblogging tool.

2.3 Open & Close

T.Sina does follow Twitter on some functions; however, the current T.Sina is quite different from Twitter. The main difference between Twitter and T.Sina is the attitude towards open service, especially the OpenAPI. API is the software as a service model of a common application. OpenAPI means that web service providers package their own web services into a series of API and open them out for third-party developers. Twitter is almost completely open services, supporting RSS, OpenAPI for almost all the features. More than 3000 kinds of Twitter applications are developed under the OpenAPI form, from both developers and users. These third-party Twitter applications enhance the attractiveness of the original platform. Taking Stock Twits and Twits coop for instance, plug-ins and other applications enrich functions of Twitter and provide extensibility and flexibility to users. Therefore, Twitter is a platform for both users and third parties to develop applications and enjoy their benefit.

When T.Sina was introduced, it was a completely closed microblogging site because it supported neither the API nor RSS. Latter T.Sina tried to cooperate with KaiXin and other companies through mobile clients. From 4th February, the OpenAPI platform 'Open T.Sina' came out. It shows T.Sina has started to support API services for certain developers. T.Sina still seems prudent. Access to the OpenAPI platform requires API keys. Developers have to apply for a secret key before they can make IPV changes. The most important element of T.Sina is to still meet the rules of information security. They are long-term rules that keep T.Sina under-control. In other words, T.Sina has shown a trend to open up, but

at least for now still keeps everything under control. This may bring negative effect on its future development.

2.4 T.Sina & Twitter on the Internet Policy.

Before T.Sina appeared, other microblogging platforms failed to solve the problem of information security and were forced to shut down. Even the most successful microblogging tool, Twitter, was blocked by the Great Firewall because Twitter is unsuitable for the Internet policy. Twitter only deletes the spread of advertising because the regulation of context is opposed to Twitter as a platform based on users.

As a domestic Internet company, T.Sina has developed a proper audit mechanism in order to follow the rules of the Internet Policy in China, and to not cause users' psychological conflict. Because of the real time character of microblogging, it seems difficulty for T.Sina to keep a balance of both sides. Due to a lot of experiences dealing with BBS, news and blogs, T.Sina has found a review mechanism for all the tweets. "Harmful information" is deleted immediately and, at the same time, a direct message of apology is sent to the users.

In this context, the main difference between Twitter and T.Sina is that T.Sina is concerned about internal things, while Twitter is concerned about external. Internal refers to own, controllable while external means public and cooperation, which is not controllable. T.Sina is a community microblogging product tailored for Chinese customers. T.Sina is more like a microblogging application where users enjoy simple functions provided by T.Sina. For most of Chinese microblogging users, T.Sina is enough with its all functions. Twitter is more like a large eco-system, a system under balanced cross-applications. Its main purpose is to provide a platform for users to apply and design applications.

2.5 Certification and its benefit

How to ensure the reliability of the information on Twitter? The most questionable aspect of microblogging is reliability. Fraudulent use of celebrities' accounts in microblogging is not uncommon. Google Vice President, Greater China president, whose English name is "KaifuLee", found his name in Twitter and that information referenced by media had also been published. He had to communicate with Twitter to gain back control of his account. Many researchers have pointed out that microblogging is also a hotbed for rumors.

The Certification of users in T.Sina may solve this problem to some extent. The certification for celebrities stops fraudulent use of their names. This is why T.Sina attracts

large number of celebrities. Also different from Twitter is the fact that all celebrities, media and publishing companies or accounts in T.Sina can obtain certification. It makes sure information is reliable and protects the safety of users. The certification attracts lots of fans who like to follow their favorite super stars. T.Sina is a platform for both celebrities and fans, and enhances the fame of celebrities. Take Joey for example, she has more than 10,000 Twitter followers, but she has more than 200,000 T.Sina followers. Therefore more and more stars in Honking and Taiwan have started to use T.Sina. Denise, an actress in Hong Kong, has less than 1000 Twitter followers. She became famous after she obtained more than 20,000 followers on T.Sina.

2.6 Public marketing method

Jurgen Habermas Public Sphere theory shows that the public sphere is “a discursive space in which individuals and groups congregate to discuss matters of mutual interest and, where possible, to reach a common judgment.”

Microblogging is in a “Focus broadcast” mode. Public topics bring together the “sphere of private” with “the public”. People use microblogging to discuss public topics and their “participation is enacted through the medium of talk”

Public topics are the energy of microblogging. The success of Twitter is due to the success of some other public topics. The first one was South by Southwest, the largest music festival in America. Many People published live information and pictures on Twitter, which attracted media attention for Twitter. Through this attention, Twitter shows its power and is pushed to the forefront of media, like the “Aircraft from the runway event in Denver,” or “a series of terrorist attacks in Mumbai”.

However, when Twitter came to China, public topics lead Twitter to be blocked technologically. As is known, the media in China are controlled by the state. Micro blogs, like Twitter, are a new kind of media, and are also in the “public space”. That is to say, public topics may become a most dangerous factor for micro blogs, especially in countries like China. There are also other examples in China. On July 2, on the microblogging website-Rice, user Shangnengfanfou provided a web site, “U.S. Congress member’s public revenue,” which linked directly to the U.S. Congress Web site. Three days later, “Online Publication U.S. balance of payments” came out in the major media in China. This was the first time that microblgging tools took place of the traditional media in China. It caused the website-Rice quite famous.

T.Sina has also promoted itself by creating a public topic. In December 2009, a self-proclaimed “wealthy lady”, Harem elegance, appeared on T.Sina. She won 54,342 followers and became the second most popular user. She introduced herself as a rich, hot girl. Her tweets were all about her personal relationship with popular stars such as, “ I booked a car from the United States for honey Jie (a famous singer) “,” Dad intends to invest in Avatar 2 “ , “ Jay would like to use my house in Beverly Villa Lee Villa for his photo shoot “ and so on. Every day lots of people visited her on T.Sina for more silly stories and her sexy photos. T.Sina knows this method is a high policy risk, so T.Sina it always keeps its focus on entertainment rather than politics.

3 Future of T.Sina

In 2010, new microblogging tools based on web portals appeared in China, such as T.126, T.Sohu, T.Tencent and so on. The homogenization of microblogging tools in China is quite serious, because the competition between microblogging tools pushes T.Sina to win more users. On a marketing level, T.Sina is now focusing its efforts on adopting mature users. Meeting the core demands of user needs is the future trend of microblogging products. However, T.Sina cannot be open enough to suit the users’ needs unless the Chinese Government changes its Internet policy.

On 31st May 2010, Sina.com launched the unaudited first quarter financial results of company. They showed the first-quarter net revenue of Sina.com as 85,000,000 dollars, which is an increased of 15.2%; the net income is 24,400,000 dollars, which is 970 million more than last year. The CEO of Sina.com, Charles Chao said advertising is still the main contributor of their income. T.Sina has successfully attracted advertisers and in fact, a number of important advertisers became T.Sina users, because they considered T.Sina a significant tool for promoting their brand. The number of users in T.Sina has doubled during in the last three months, and 35% of tweets have been published via mobile phones. In the near future, applications on mobile phones will become an important aspect of T.Sina and mobile value-added services will be profitable. Strategically, T.Sina has decided to develop the potential points on mobile phones and E-commerce.

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Cyberbullying and the “Net Generation”

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Abstract

For many, online networking forums have become an accepted part of life. For young users in particular – children, tweens and teens – social networking websites such as Facebook, MySpace and YouTube are key mediums for communication, social interaction and experimentation. Yet such sites have been leading enablers of cyberbullies in campaigns of harassment, torment and abuse. In this context, the question of how we police such sites, and thereby, how we protect our youth from the dangers they face online, is increasingly important.

This article considers the nature of cyberbullying and evaluates the various means of policing and regulating social networking websites.

Keywords

CYBERBULLYING • NET GENERATION • BULLYING • SOCIAL NETWORKING WEBSITE • FACEBOOK • MYSPACE • YOUTH

We are, as Bill Gates observed in 2000, living in the internet age. This technology has become one of the key cultural and economic forces of this century, redefining the way we work, live, learn, and interact with each other. While Gates celebrates this technological and cultural development, however, it is important that we also consider the implications for the “Net Generation”, the first children, tweens and teens to grow up in a technological world where nearly everything is computerised. They are the generation that does not *use* technology, but lives it (Rosen 2007, p 2). They carry mobile phones to school, they learned to email before starting school, and thanks to social networking websites their friends are scattered around the world, most of whom they will never meet (Rosen 2007, p 2).

They are also the generation having to deal with “cyberbullying”, a pervasive and public form of bullying that takes place via electronic mediums. Thanks to the accessibility and popularity of social networking websites, many young internet users are having to negotiate harassment, torment and humiliation from their peers in a new and global forum that their parents, guardians and teachers do not necessarily engage with or even understand,

putting them at serious risk of its devastating long-term effects. The question of what can be done to protect the Net Generation from such harm, while still allowing them to embrace and enjoy this phenomena, is a difficult one. Banning use, blocking websites, criminalising conduct have all proven futile in the face of the volatility and prevalence of the internet. What is left, rather, is for us to equip young internet users to understand and deal with cyberbullying via informed parenting, strong support groups, education campaigns, to teach teens how best to use the internet.

The MySpace Generation

The past decade has seen a dramatic change in the way that children and adolescents construct and negotiate friendships. As the generation to whom technology has become increasingly important, adolescents today are heavy users of newer electronic communication forms such as instant messaging, e-mail, and text messaging, as well as communication-oriented internet sites such as blogs and social networking, and sites for sharing photos and videos (Subrahmanyam & Greenfield 2008, p 120), and this is indicated in the blurring of boundaries and distinctions between online and offline communities, interaction, and identities (Hinduja & Patchin 2007, p 107). Friendships have not only moved from face-to-face,¹ “playground” interaction to a new, bigger online forum, but are also no longer restricted to one-on-one or small-group dealings but potentially encompass a global community or audience.

The booming popularity of social networking website MySpace in the mid-2000s, which was followed by Facebook, YouTube, Bebo and other networking websites is indicative of a cultural phenomenon that has only since grown bigger and more pervasive amongst adolescent internet users. Such websites, which at their bases enable members to connect, communicate and share information in the form of video, text, image and audio files, affords a kind of youth empowerment that cannot easily be achieved in their offline worlds. With no more than the necessary hardware, tweens and teens are equipped and free to access and contribute to the flow of information online: sharing ideas, exploring and experimenting, discussing issues with anyone, anywhere. Coupled with this unprecedented degree of interactivity and participation (McNair 2009, p 223) is the power to basically co-construct one’s own environment, creating personas and choosing friends, and playing out universal adolescent issues such as identity, sexuality, and a sense of self-worth (Greenfield, quoted in Rosen 2007, p 1).

¹ These include Xanga, Flickrster, LiveJournal, Imbee, Hi5, Orkut, CyWorld, vMix, WhyVille, Tagged, CherryTap, Friendster, blinked, eSPIN, Piczo, and Sconex (McNair 2009 at 221).

There is, therefore, little wonder in the explosive rate at which children and teens are engaging with such websites. In 2007, of its 140 million members, an estimated 25 percent were between the ages of thirteen and seventeen (Kelsey 2007, p xiv). In that same year, Larry Rosen found 87 percent of teens to be online an average of five days a week, two to three hours a day, while 80 percent of twelve- to seventeen-year-olds used MySpace weekly (Rosen 2007, p 14).² In 2008, Facebook claimed 59 million active users (Hodgkinson 2008). In that same year, telecoms regulator Ofcom's study of how people use social network sites, covering 5,000 adults and 3,000 children, found that about a quarter of those aged between 8 and 11 have a profile page on sites such as MySpace, Facebook and Bebo, in spite of site restrictions requiring a minimum age of 13 or 14 (BBC News 2008).

Cyberbullying and its Victims

With the advantages brought by this increased online interactivity and participation by means of valuable social support and information are, however, costs. As the numbers of youth embrace computer-mediated communication to meet social needs increases, so too does the rate of interpersonal violence directly and indirectly related to the internet (Hinduja & Patchin 2007, p 89). Cyberbullying in particular has garnered much attention, due to the emotional, psychological, and even physical harm to which victims can be subjected (Hinduja & Patchin 2007, p 89), raising deep concerns as to the level of unmonitored interaction is being allowed to children and adolescents, particularly the the younger age of members.

Cyberbullying is been described as “the use of information and communication technologies ... to support deliberate, repeated, and hostile behaviour by an individual or group, that is intended to harm others” (B Belsey, quoted in Rosen 2007, p 193). Like traditional bullying, it involves malicious aggressors whose behaviour manifests perceived or actual power over a victim, and is associated with violence and the infliction of injury of an emotional, psychological or physical nature (Hinduja & Patchin 2007, p 90). While traditional bullying tends to take place where the offender and victim are geographically proximal, cyberbullying is largely effectuated at a distance through the use of a computer and the internet (Hinduja & Patchin 2007, p 90), taking on different forms and to different degrees, such as by means of unwanted, mean, vulgar, or threatening messages via online communication tools such as email, text or instant messenger, posting sensitive information or rumours, or impersonation (Rosen 2007, p 194).

² “Not unlike Arnold's Drive-In of *Happy Days* fame where Richie and the Fonz spent their afternoons,” Rosen writes, “MySpace is the ultimate mall where teens can meet and chat” (Rosen 2007, p 14).

While the emotional and psychological impact of cyberbullying are not fully known, it has been linked to offline problem behaviours such as running away from home, cheating on a school test, skipping school, or using alcohol or marijuana (Hinduja & Patchin 2007, p 90). Sameer Hinduja and Justin Patchin suggest that the permanence of computer-based messages (as compared with verbal statements);³ the ease and freedom with which statements of hate can be made;⁴ and the invasive nature of malicious text via personal cellular phones and personal computers at all hours of the day and all days of the week characterizes cyberbullying as a high level of stress or strain that when experienced among members of this highly impressionable and often volatile adolescent population, this harm can result in violence, injury, and even death (Hinduja & Patchin 2006, p 149; 2007, p 93). Psychological and emotional effects can be similar to schoolyard bullying – depression, low self-esteem, school maladjustment, chronic anxiety and fear – can often be found in victims of online bullying, possibly in more pronounced form. Victims may begin to avoid friends and activities, and even contemplate, if not commit, suicide. (Rosen 2007, p 198).

Cyberbullying is not restricted to young internet users – “cyberharassment” or “cyberstalking”, for example, can take place in the workplace or on work-related online tools such as company websites, blogs or product reviews. The instances of its occurrence amongst the youth, however, have in recent years risen at an alarming rate,⁵ leading to devastating consequences. In 2003, 13-year-old Ryan Patrick Halligan from Vermont committed suicide after having been threatened, taunted and insulted incessantly online (Fox News 2007). In October 2006, 13-year-old Megan Meier killed herself after being the victim of cyberbullying instigated by the mother of a friend who had posed as a sixteen-year-old named “Josh Evans”. In 2009, 15-year-old Megan Gillan, a student at Macclesfield High School in Cheshire, took a fatal overdose of painkillers after being tormented via Bebo (Moore 2009). In late 2009, 18-year-old Keeley Houghton of Malvern, Worcestershire, was the first person in Britain to be jailed for bullying on a social networking site, after posting death threats on Facebook (Carter 2009). The Metropolitan police has since hired a consultancy to help monitor social networking sites for evidence of crime (Carter 2009). So publicly disturbing has the issue been that in 2009, Archbishop Vincent Nichols, the

3 As Rosen puts it, “information on the internet *stays* online – forever” (2007, p 198).

4 Online bullying also provides an easy opportunity for others to join in. Rosen writes, “The internet is also a worldwide phenomenon, and there are countless people out there who have nothing better to do than to search out opportunities to feel better by lashing out and hurting other teens” (2007, p 198).

5 The National Crime Prevention Council reports cyberbullying is a problem that affects almost half of all American teens, while the Australian Covert Bullying Prevalence Survey showed that rates of cyber-bullying increased with age, with 4.9% of students in year 4 reporting cyber-bullying compared to 7.9% in year 9 (Cross et al 2009). Participation in social networking sites such as Facebook and MySpace appears to increase the likelihood of being targeted by cyberbullies, with 39% of users reported having been harassed online, compared with 22% of teens who don’t participate in such sites (Lenhart 2007).

head of the Roman Catholic Church in England, joined the debate, warning that the trend towards creating an alternative reality of fragile virtual relationships leaves children and teenagers vulnerable when these broke down (Moore 2009).

Public scrutiny over social networking websites and other online forums, and their capacity to guard against and manage abuse, reached its peak when the memorial sites for 8- and 12-year-old Queensland murder victims Trinity Bates and Elliott Fletcher were defaced with pornographic and obscene messages in February 2010, leading to calls for heightened governmental control by means of an online ombudsman to be appointed to take complaints and advocate on behalf of families distressed by the inappropriate online content (Foo & Kelly 2010). The suggestion, not without its difficulties in the form of limitations on power where websites such as Facebook are based overseas and subject to their own domestic laws and constitutional rights such as the freedom of speech,⁶ has prompted debate as to where the onus lies to protect younger internet users from aggressive behaviour and offensive material.

Regulation

In relation to the defaced memorial sites, public blame was directed at Facebook for its failure to impose and more strictly enforce their terms of service,⁷ and to assume responsibility for monitoring their service for offensive or defamatory material, and cyberbullying and harassment. In fact, under their Terms and Conditions, MySpace, for example, assumes no responsibility for monitoring the service for inappropriate content or conduct, no obligation to modify or remove any inappropriate content, and no responsibility for the conduct of the user submitting any such content (para 7.1). There are, however, limitations on how much blame and responsibility can be apportioned to internet companies Facebook and MySpace. The very characteristics that make cyberbullying so prevalent amongst young internet users are predicated on the fact that, in cyberspace, aggressive and offensive behaviours are near impossible to monitor. The internet affords a kind of virtual anonymity⁸ which allows aggressors a buffer not only from physical or verbal retaliation, thereby freeing them from normative and social constraints on their behavior (Rosen 2007, p 196-7), but also from regulatory reach and reprimand.

6 David Vaile, the Executive Director of the Cyber Law Centre at UNSW, suggests that the ombudsman would need to be an activist to achieve results on behalf of the public, in a situation similar to Canada. The status quo right now in Australia is decidedly un-activist, Vaile argues (West 2010).

7 MySpace, for example, imposes a minimum age for registration of 13 years (para 1, Terms and Conditions), and reserves the right to delete profiles and terminate memberships if it believes that any misconduct. Users are encouraged to contact MySpace or “report abuse” upon becoming aware of misuse of the service by any person (para 7, Terms & Conditions).

8 For example, by means of temporary email accounts and pseudonyms (Rosen 2007, p 196-7).

Particularly in the case where the adolescents (both aggressors and victims) are more technologically savvy than their parents or guardians, online interaction is virtually free from supervision.

The lack of supervision and guidance has, to a large degree, to do with the digital divide between parents and the Net Generation. Subrahmanyam and Greenfield identify a growing concern that electronic communication, while reinforcing peer communication, is compromising communication with parents, who may not be knowledgeable enough about their children's online activities (2008, p 135). They found that parents struggled to penetrate their children's world and often retreated, with nearly one in three parents feeling that the time their teen spent on MySpace interfered with family life, while teens who spent a more time on MySpace felt that they were getting less support from their parents (Rosen, quoted in Subrahmanyam & Greenfield 2008, p 135). In large-scale internet-based survey of teens, it was revealed that 90 percent of the sample did not tell an adult, including parents, about cyberbullying (Subrahmanyam & Greenfield 2008, p 82). Subrahmanyam and Greenfield conclude that, overall, it appears that despite their concerns about their teen's online activities, parents may not know much about them and may not be effective at setting limits and monitoring their activities (p 82).

Yet, reports on internet safety call for the more prosaic approach of educating young people about the consequences of what they do online while still protecting people's right to privacy (David Vaile, quoted in West 2010), stressing that parents have a huge role to play in monitoring their children and educating them about responsible web use (BBC News 2008). The Ofcom report, for instance, found that for many children, the rules and restrictions that their parents set on social networking site usage are an important influencing factor in the child's use of social networking sites (Ofcom 2008, p 6).

Hinduja and Patchin identifies a role for schools and teachers to play in helping to resolve strain experienced by cyberbullying victims, by means of providing education, counseling, and pro-social outlets. Because schools hold such a prominent place in the lives of school-aged children, it is likely that the school will serve as a front line institution as interpersonal conflict moves from the virtual to the real world (Hinduja & Patchin 2007, p 107). Schools are well-advised to provide supplementary health-education programming to students to reduce the possibility of strain resulting from all forms of peer harassment, including cyberbullying. They may provide an empathic and nonthreatening environment where students are comfortable to candidly speak to teachers or counselors on campus. Finally, schools and parents must make available emotional and behavioral outlets for

youth to disengage from lingering negative affect and reconnect with positive feelings, including physical or mental extracurricular activities that occupy students' time and help them find satisfaction and self-worth in exploring personal interests. (Hinduja & Patchin 2007, p 104-5)

Conclusion

Bullying, of varying degrees and types, is nothing new to social interaction amongst children and teens, and as but a new, larger and more pervasive stage for people to make friends and make enemies, the internet is certainly no exception (Hinduja & Patchin 2007, p 107). Indeed, suggestions from studies and teen suicide cases of the real harm that can be caused by cyberbullying victimization has raised concerns about the deficiencies in current regulatory schemes of communication-based websites, and has led to calls for governmental intervention or stricter processes of surveillance and monitoring. Yet these options not only risk encroaching on civil liberties, but also serves only as a quick-fix solution. Rather, recognising that children and adolescents are spending large portions of their time online, and recognising that cyberspace is indeed a forum that can play a large part in their development as people by allowing the youth to explore their identity, make lifelong friendships, experiment with their sexuality, and to live life (Rosen 2007, p 17), adults and authority figures need first to manage their own fears and reservations about the online world, and to concern themselves less with ideas of surveillance and intervention and more with engagement. While it is not always the case, as Hinduja and Patchin suggest, that all youth are able to use and benefit from the internet without concern for, or expectation of, negative interpersonal experiences, with education, communication and support systems in place, they can be equipped to "look both ways" in cyberspace and navigate their way down a safe and healthy route (Rosen 2007, p 17).

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The rise of social media and the creation of a new digital divide.

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Abstract

Bill Gates wrote a book in 1995 titled, “The Road Ahead.” In this book, he explains the impact of changed by the Internet. He traces the early days of computing to the information revolution. He predicted a global shift would occur in which those who control the information and will be the most powerful. The media companies who have the content will rule.

This paper will explode the old myth that, “content is king” and examine the rise of social media and user created content. It will look at how businesses are coping with this sudden shift and how businesses must now cater for this user participation.

Some analyst predict that social media is the biggest shift since the industrial revolution. By the year 2010, generation Y will outnumber the baby boomers. 96% of generation Y have joined an online social network. Social media has even overtaken porn as the number 1 activity on the Internet.

Erik Qualman, the author of, “Socialnomics; how social media transforms the way we live and do business.” writes, “We no longer search for the news, the news finds us... In the near future we will no longer shop for products and services. They will find us via social media.”

More than 1.5 million pieces of content such as web links, news stories, blog posts, notes, photos, etc. are shared on Facebook daily. Public opinion now counts more than the truth. Social media is a fundamental shift in the way humans communicate and make sense of the world.

This paper traces the rise of social media from its traditional foundations. It will examine how the information revolution has been overtaken by the social media revolution. It will discuss the creation of the new digital divide through social exclusion.

Keywords:

SOCIAL MEDIA • SOCIAL NETWORK • DIGITAL DIVIDE • SOCIALNOMICS • CONTENT IS KING

Introduction

In the 1990s, the influential technologist, Bill Gates once predicted that content would drive the Internet. The information revolution was about fast and easy access to traditional media content brought through by advances in communication technologies. This has led to a rush of large corporate mergers between traditional media companies and new Internet service providers. These new Internet ventures aggregated and accumulated vast amounts of news and information in the hope that they would generate revenue through viewing.

This strategy began to unravel in the early part of the new century. The Internet has not only given people fast and easy access to news and information; it has removed the barrier to produce and disseminate content. This has led to a rise in user participatory Internet culture. The power to publish news and information no longer belonged to traditional media companies.

New Web2.0 websites and easy to use social media tools, social network technologies has allowed anyone in the world with Internet access to share, collaborate and disseminate information instantly. The mass adoption of these tools by the younger generation now meant news, information and knowledge are published as it happens; faster than traditional media companies can report on, publish and print.

Web2.0's aggregation tools coupled with social network technologies has created a powerful social inclusion consumer culture. We no longer need to go seek, sort and consume news, information, products and services; through our social network these all now come to us directly.

However, there remains people around the world who are not part of this new culture, who do not participate through the Internet. There is fear that this is creating a new digital divide. This new digital divide is not about whether a person has Internet access or not; it is about social inclusion or exclusion measured by a person's ability to participate in online social networks.

This paper traces the rise of social media from its traditional foundations. It will examine how the information revolution has been overtaken by the social media revolution. It will discuss the creation of the new digital divide through social exclusion.

Traditional content

There was an Internet gold rush that started early in the 1990s. Having and holding on to media content was like holding onto gold and the traditional media companies had lots of it locked away somewhere. It all started from the advice of Bill Gates, the infamous chairman of Microsoft Corporation.

Bill Gates authored a book in 1995 titled, “The Road Ahead.” In his book, he outlined the impact of changes caused by the Internet. He traced the lead up to the information revolution starting from the early days of computing through to innovations in communication technologies that makes up the foundation of today’s Internet. He predicted the Internet will cause a global shift in the way that we work and live simply because of the ease in which we can access knowledge and information. He prophesised that organisations and businesses that owns and controls this flow of information and knowledge content will become the most powerful. Hence, the traditional media companies who owns most of this content will be poised to control the world. (Gates 1995)

Bill Gates subsequent book titled, “Business @ the Speed of thought: Succeeding in the Digital Economy” published in the year 2000 continued to echo his belief in the importance of accessing and controlling the flow of this information for the success of business in the information age. (Gates 1999a, Gates 1999b)

The booming sales of his books were testimonial to the many people who believed in Bill Gates’ predictions. Traditional media companies stumbled upon each other to create mass mergers and acquisitions with newly formed Internet Service Providers (ISPs).

Hence in 1995, Microsoft formed an alliance with NBC, and created MSNBC; meanwhile, Time Warner merged with AOL to form one of the largest online media companies in the world. Rupert Murdoch, the global media baron, decided not to jump into the online world and instead continued to buy up traditional media outlet such as newspaper, magazines, print media, film studios, and cable television stations.

This scenario played out from the late 1990s and still continues on to this day.

Traditional media and publishing companies believed that information and content drove the Internet juggernaut, and without quality content, the Internet would just be become another online information system. They believed that most people still wanted to get their news from their main trusted sources; that people would still want the traditional tactile format of newspaper, and supplement this with some casual online information browsing.

In the 1990s, Larry Page & Sergey Brin was still at Stanford university finishing their PhD and Google was still an experiment in a lab. Wikipedia, YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, and other Web2.0 technologies won't even conceived words in anyone's language at this stage and so traditional media outlets believed only they had the main ingredient to be successful on the Internet.

All that content is not gold

10 years on from the 1990s, the landscape of the Internet has changed dramatically. This change has even caught Bill Gates by surprise. Owning the content generated through traditional media channels is no longer a requirement. It seems people now cared more about what the masses think than what a few people in media thinks.

Rupert Murdoch of News Corporation disagrees. Rupert have been criticised as living in the past however he continued to buy up and accumulate massive amounts of traditional media content from film, cable, television and satellite broadcasting, newspaper, magazines through to books publishing. Some of these entities included household names such as 20th Century Fox, Fox News Network, BSKyB, StarTV, New York Post, Dow Jones Wall Street Journal, Harper Collins, etc. At a recent National Press Club interview, Rupert was quotes as saying, "I'm old. I like the tactile experience of a newspaper.", "Google", Murdoch explains "is a just a clever model to sell key words and advertising."(Kohler 2010)

Rupert explains that someone must take responsibility and accountability for the generation of quality news contents for it to be reliable. He believes that reliable news and information content has an intrinsic value placed against it and people would be willing to pay for access to that content.

Google as correctly pointed out by Murdoch, does not own content but it is now the number one brand and one of the most powerful company on the planet. It is a search engine for other people's content. (Google 2010a; Google 2010b) YouTube is similar in that it has more than 100million videos on its website. It is the second most popular search engine in the world and yet it has only created 56 videos to date. It doesn't own any of the other videos on its website. (YouTube 2010a)

It is of no surprised then that Murdoch has initiated methods to block Google and other search engine to access his content freely. (AFP 2010, ABC 2010)

Web 2.0 and Participatory Culture

Other large global news outlets like CNN, BBC, and newswires believed otherwise. These traditional news media agency now regularly turn to Web2.0 websites, social media and the blogosphere to gauge public opinion.

Web 2.0 describes a set of easy to use features and functionalities designed into applications and software that makes the internet more dynamic, more rich, more interactive and more supportive of communicating and networking with others. It allows people to effectively choose the information they want to access, edit, repackage, reformulate, remix and share it with others. (Cook 2006 p.46)

Web 2.0 and social media technologies has emerged as a channel for accidental and amateur news journalism. Amateur journalism could be defined as something you do, reporting on your opinion and those around you through a blog, a video response, a micro-blog. Web 2.0 and social media tools have created an environment that allows conversations distributed over multiple media spaces. The act of cross linking, aggregating and syndicating feeds using tools such as RSS and ATOM holds these related threads of conversations together. As it branches off into different paths, serendipitous participation puts a new spin to the story, weaving and connecting all these personal stories into a narrative tallied all up to create current hot topics, trending topics or newsworthy events. (Efimova & de Moor 2005)

What makes something newsworthy is based on global interest. If one person said something and believes in it, then it's insignificant and irrelevant. If a group of people starts talking about it, then it could be a localised phenomenon and most likely interesting to that locality. However, if the whole world is talking about it, then the sheer numbers makes it an interesting and newsworthy situation or event.

The Internet has not only given people fast and easy access to news and information; it has removed the barrier to produce and disseminate content. Information dissemination is now as easy as pushing a button. New Web2.0 websites and easy to use social media tools, social network technologies and participatory culture has changed the way news is now generated and consumed. The power to publish news and information no longer belonged to traditional media companies. (Blood 2004)

“Engagement with the news is and should be inherently social activity”(Bruns 2006 p.20) Hence social media technologies, weblog and micro-blogging tools is perfect in allowing us to gauge what the masses think.

Traditional journalists must be prepared for the age of participatory news and “we media”, as peer-to-peer news reporting is predicted to eclipse business-to-consumer news. (Deuze 2006 citing Gillmor)

Rupert Murdoch have criticised the current Internet content as unreliability, with too many sources and too much personal opinions. Traditional media companies have always believe themselves to be a trusted objective source of reliable news and information gathering.

Some media companies have advocated legal action, copyrights, to contain their information and to keep control of it. However, due to the rapid flow of information brought on by nearly global ubiquitous connectivity and sharing of stories, traditional media is going to find it harder and harder to contain and control this information

It is true that on the Internet there is no single authority, accountability or ownership of amateur journalistic thoughts and opinions, however given a significant number of contributors, participants, and eyewitnesses; significant errors will be identified and weeded out. The information is quickly updated and verified by numerous people in the know. The wisdom of crowds maintains the quality and gives an objective multi-perspective to any news item. These independent wisdom collaborated will be more useful than the news coming from one or two traditional reporters viewpoint. It is the availability and accessibility to these multi-perspective news item of hot topics and events that makes public blogs a perfect medium for news gathering & reporting. Some of the world’s most recent events have been first reported on blogs or micro-blogs. Amateur citizen journalism are there at the scene with their wireless digital cameras, video phones, blow by blow “tweets” before traditional news crews are still getting organised. (Bruns 2006; Qualman 2009 p222-223).

Web 2.0, social network technologies has revolutionised the way we get our news and information. Traditional mainstream media should examine these technologies more closely and integrate them into their business models. Consumers will not come to your website if you can get better quality or free content elsewhere. Those companies like News Corporation who keep on running the same old model and locking up content will not survive in the new social media age.

Social networking technologies, social media revolution.

The Internet has changed rapidly, it is now a full on interactive society. User generated content, news, information, knowledge, social connectivity, communication and social networking is just the beginning. Web2.0 technologies has change the way that companies make, sell, innovate, market products to us. Just as we no longer search for news, we will no longer search for products, the right product that maximises our utilisations and value will search for us. (Tapscott & Williams 2008)

Some analyst predict that social media is the biggest shift since the industrial revolution. By the year 2010, generation Y will outnumber the baby boomers. 96% of generation Y have joined an online social network. Social media has even overtaken viewing porn as the number 1 activity on the Internet. (Li & Bernoff 2008)

Businesses are now closely monitoring social media websites and listening to what consumers have to say about their offerings. Businesses that listens to what customers wants and needs and change or innovate their products accordingly will ultimately succeed. This ultimately is good for the consumer, in that it saves them from buying more junk that they don't really require. Targeted social media marketing of products will increase utilisation, increase efficiencies and create less waste. (Qualman p151-153)

The importance of social media can be seen in this example in regards to personal health care. Most people would rather get the opinions from their social group then to seek direct professional advice. In an iCrossing (2008) survey, 34% of Americans turn to social media for research on health related issues. This is unsurprising in that in today's high costs of health; people want referrals and opinions online, especially if it's a delicate and sometimes taboo topics. The alternative is talking via direct face-to-face or voice communication to many separate people. However, discussing medical conditions can sometimes be seen as rude or outright embarrassing. Social media eliminates this awkwardness. When a health consumers turn to the Internet to search for medical information, they are in decisions mode. That is because most people when it comes to medical conditions are not in preventative mode, they only deal with medical issues when it dawns on them that they have to do something urgently. Questions asked via social networks range from finding out costs for certain operations or medical devices to reputation of certain providers or doctors. (iCrossing 2008)

A simple posts or tweet like, "have a sore throat, big lump, coughing up yellow", will solicit multiple response like. "Got that last week, saw the doc, gave me antibiotics, ask for

the cheaper brand” or “Yes nasty bug passing around, plenty of honey and lemon before bed helps you sleep”. These responses from social media is more timely, direct and personal and not at all awkward. (Qualman pp99-101)

These are just some of the examples of societal shift and use of social media. When 92 percent of consumers now cite word-of-mouth as the best source for products and brand information; social media provides real life users experiences and opinions. Social media is the new medium to use if you want access to the best products, the best information, the best knowledge, the best medical advice and the best jobs. (Qualman 2009 p.90)

The social media revolution is upon us now and it's not just about participatory culture where everyone can freely access and contribute timely to news and information. Social media has now meant that we can tap into the wisdom and knowledge of the crowds, our trusted peer group and social circles. These on total are not just merely opinions but aggregated real life experiences. There is no doubt that access to social media is going to change society in a significant way.

The new digital divide and social exclusion

People who actively participate in social media allow information, knowledge, product and services to find them. However, there remains people who do not participate through one reason or another. There is growing concern that this lack of participation, especially with the older generation is creating a new digital divide. This new digital divide is not whether one has access to the Internet or not; it is one of social exclusion by not being connected to an online social network.

There has been antidote evidence that the younger generation have been able to rapidly adopt technology and prioritise and multitasking from a young age. Young people's brain have been reprogrammed and rewired to take short burst of activities, and aggregate all that information to produce a result. However, further research has found that this is an adopted reflex and training of the brain. There is no reason why older people cannot also adopt and embrace social media. (Wallis 2006)

Facebook, it seems is the new standard in online communication and participation for the younger generation. Kids today prefer one-to-many communications; e-mail to them is antiquated. People are no longer asking or giving out phone numbers or email addresses; instead they ask people to just “Facebook me or send me a Tweet”. People no longer exchange long lengthy emails. They now exchange concise social information. (Qualman 2010 pp.46-48)

Facebook's popularity has now pushed it to be the largest social network website in the world. More than 1.5 million pieces of content such as web links, news stories, blog posts, notes, photos, etc. are shared on Facebook daily. Public opinion now counts more than the truth. Social media is a fundamental shift in the way humans communicate and the way we make sense of the world. If Facebook was a country, it will be the world's 4th largest just behind China, India and the US. (Facebook 2010)

The social media revolution is driving today consumer economy. Value is measure by ones personal utilisation. The best products that serves your needs will now come to you directly only if you're connected to a social network. Much like the early Amazon referral programmes that displays what other people who bought this product also purchased. Social media will aggregate data to provide a universal model of what most people preferred. The logic behind this is that if most people preferred it, you most likely prefer it as well. However, it is not merely what the universe enjoys; social networks will be able to tell you what people within your network, the people who you associate with and whom you trust also bought and feedback they provided. This will significantly help the consumer in deciding, since most people of like interest clump together in social groups. (Qualman 2009 p131-p.133)

To not have access to these social media resources would put one in a significant time disadvantage. A person would have to go through traditional means of trial and error or time-consuming information gathering in order to obtain a product or service that is suitable.

The problem of the digital divide isn't focused on developing countries anymore, even within our own boundary or borders, within our own country, access is not equal. Some have constant broadband, wireless access that keeps them connected to the Internet and keeps them networked into the information, knowledge and social media resources. Most however, especially those living in the rural areas do not. While not being connected to online social networks such as Facebook currently does not seem all that important; it will become more of a significant factor in peoples' lives over the next few years. (Leigh & Robert 2001, Warschauer 2003, SIQSS 2000)

Social media will revolutionise the economy and change the way in which we work, relax, communicate and interact with the world. The digital divide will widen between those who have social media and those who don't, it will be about social inclusion and exclusion within our society.

Conclusion

The information revolution has been superseded by the social media revolution. Content and information from traditional media outlets have now been displaced by faster, better, more accurate and timely information available free from the wisdom of the crowds or your social circles.

Web2.0 technologies such as weblog, micro-blogging, social media and social network tools, together with information aggregation technologies such as RSS and ATOM has allow us to become more efficient. We don't waste time anymore on trial and error or go through the time consuming process of doing self research. The best news, information, products and services seek us out through our social interaction with social media technologies. Younger people especially are very adapted to these new technologies with 90% of youths actively participating on an online social network.

To have these constant interaction with these Web2.0 technologies is to be social included. However, there remains people who for one reason or another are not connected or not part of a online social network. There is some concern that people who are not on a online social network in the future will be socially excluded. Put simply, the news, information, products and services that can help them won't be able to find them. Instead they're be consuming time and energy to seek, sort and consume in the traditional way.

This is the new digital divide. It is not about whether a person has access to the Internet or not; it's about whether a person is connected and interacting with social media technology. This digital divide gap is set to widen as the younger generation charge forward while the older generation remains offline.

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Building the Wheel: Popular Education in the Digital Era

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Abstract

The rise of digitisation has led to a radical rethinking of the way in which research and publishing contribute to education, particularly with regards to the previously distinct and now rather more unstable categories of knowledge production and consumption. This article explores aspects of the relationship between digital culture and social movements by examining the adoption of digital publishing tools by educators working in the popular education methodology. Using *Build the Wheel* (<http://www.buildthewheel.org>), an online community oriented towards the sharing of curriculum as a case study, it examines the apparent meshing of some of the principal components of digital culture as outlined by Mark Deuze, with the goals, values, and practices of popular education, and explores the re-imagining of power relations between teacher and student, author and audience, producer and consumer.

Keywords

POPULAR EDUCATION • DIGITAL CULTURE • SOCIAL MOVEMENTS • SOCIAL JUSTICE
CURRICULUM • REMEDIATION • BRICOLAGE • PARTICIPATORY CULTURE • CRITICAL
PEDAGOGY • SOCIAL MEDIA

Introduction

A great deal of hype and expectation surrounds the possible benefits of digital media and their technologies to produce new models of teaching and learning, and the possible benefits from this paradigm shift to democratic participation in society as a whole (egs Jenkins et al 2009, Coiro et al 2009). Rhetoric proclaiming the imminent and sudden overturning of traditional relationships between teacher and student being facilitated by digital technologies often neglects the important contribution of popular education to new modes of communication in an era defined by the rise of digital information and communication technologies. This article examines the relationship between the emerging practices and values of digital culture and the popular education approach to knowledge production. It draws together theoretical analyses on the nature of media, technology, and education,

and anchors its discussion in a case study of *BuildtheWheel.org*, a contemporary web platform for the publication and development of popular education curricular resources. *Build the Wheel* demonstrates the synergy between the defining characteristics of digital culture and popular education. I will argue that this website and the practices and values that emerge around it suggest the potential for digital technologies to enable modes of education, communication, and political organisation that transcend the separation of categories of teacher and learner, producer and user, and pose a challenge to the division between consumption and production in the field of education.

The potential for evolving modes of communication to play a central role in the fundamental reorganisation of power relations in capitalist society has been a key thread in the development of critical theories of media, communications, and culture. Benjamin's *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* (1969) provides the touchstone from which many later theories on the role of media/arts in social relations of power evolve. Of particular importance to the development of political theories of "new media" are *Constituents of a Theory of New Media* (Enzensberger, 1970), and Baudrillard's response to Enzensberger *Requiem for the Media* (1972). These writings build upon one another to develop theories that are consistent with Marx's analysis (1977) of social organisation under capitalism, but that take into account the development of the media, particularly electronic media, and their potential to act as either oppressive or emancipatory tools.

Concurrent with these political and philosophical discussions of the role of the media in society, theorist/practitioners Paolo Freire (1972) and Augusto Boal (1979) were creating models of literacy and education that were similarly concerned with addressing social relations of power. Arguably, their work on the development of popular education techniques went beyond the theoretical analysis of Baudrillard and Enzensberger in not only developing theories of communication in education that transgressed the production/consumption binary, but actually developing and deploying educational and artistic practices that constitute a form of revolutionary praxis, the transfer of theory into practice.

It is important to consider how the advent of digital technologies and the emergence new cultural forms around information and communications technologies relates to the continuing development and application of these theories and practices. In order to set some context for the case study, I will first delineate what I mean by the key terms "popular education" and "digital culture", and highlight parallels between the two concepts. Among the many and competing models for discussing digital culture, I am primarily drawing on

the principal component analysis of Mark Deuze (2005). Finally, these concepts will be applied to a case study of the *BuildTheWheel.org* project. My understanding of the site is built on information gathered through an interview I conducted with one of the website's designers, Le Tim Ly, and through my own reading of the website as an artefact of digital culture.

Context: Popular Education & Digital Culture

Popular education is an approach to teaching and learning that is focused on empowering people to take action to address unjust social conditions (Buras & Apple 2006). Closely associated with the academic field of critical pedagogy, popular education positions the development of literacy as a fundamental component in the construction of an anti-oppressive praxis (Freire, 1972), that is, the movement from theory to action, from a theorising of social conditions to the creation of a new reality.

In contrast to dominant models of education, which are characterised by a relationship between teacher and student in which knowledge is “banked” in the educator and transmitted to the learner, critical pedagogy reflects its focus on the nature of power relationships in the world back onto the classroom itself, seeking a more equitable exchange between all participants in the learning environment. This approach is intended to promote the agency of learners, with the hope that it will result in a form of collaborative knowledge production in which all participants are both “teacher” and “student” (Kincheloe, 2008). Lived experience is valued as a source of expertise in the popular education model. Participants are encouraged to acknowledge race, gender, class, and other multiple and overlapping social identities in their inquiries and to explore the ways in which systems of oppression and privilege shape their perception of the world. In this way, the work of popular education can be seen as connecting personal and political aspects of life.

The work of popular education is often interactive and multimodal (Olds, 2004). Workshops may include the analysis and production of audio-visual media and performance arts as a way of looking at how ideologies and relationships of power are transmitted through culture. A prime example of the combination of the principles of critical pedagogy and creative arts production is Augusto Boal's development of techniques that are collectively known as the *Theatre of the Oppressed* (1979). In Boal's workshops, participants are led through a series of acting exercises that encourage the dissolution of the categories of “spectator” and “actor”, in much the same way that the division between “teacher” and “student” are challenged in other modes of popular education. By constructing learning environments in which participants are encouraged to enact, embody, and experiment

with relationships of power, popular educators in the Boalian tradition seek to empower participants to envision what alternate realities could look and feel like.

When compared against the defining characteristics of the emergent digital culture and its technologies, remarkable resonances can be seen with some of the key attributes of popular education. Collaboration, interactivity, and multimodality are commonly noted by theorists (eg Quiggin 2006, Ryan 2004) as essential features of digital textuality, and these same attributes are central to popular education practice. The collaborative nature of knowledge production in popular education, wherein groups of participants come to gain deeper understanding of the world through the exchange of perspectives rooted in lived experience, seems to find its echo the “many to many” model of the networked communication structure of the world wide web, and particularly in social media forms. Digital media’s ability to support the participant/user’s sense of agency in the world figure heavily in theorist and programmer Gonzalo Frasca’s (2004) application of Boal’s theories of interactivity and embodiment to the study of video games. The ability of digital technologies to present and facilitate interaction with information in numerous ways, and through various sensory channels, is a key feature that differentiates new media from pre-digital media such as print, radio, and television. Multimodality and the analysis and production of various media forms also appear in popular education workshops, following from the principle that literacies are multiple and modes of education cannot be universalised into one standard, print-based mode of knowledge production and transmission (Kincheloe 2008).

Mark Deuze (2006) puts forward a model of digital culture that is defined by the interaction of three principal components: participation, remediation, and bricolage. Participation here closely resembles the concept of agency that is central to popular education, referring to learners’ sense of being an empowered actor in the world. Remediation, a concept Deuze borrows from Bolter and Grusin (1999) involves the recognition that the emergent digital culture builds on, and often exists in tandem with, pre-digital cultures and their models for making sense of reality. Bricolage is the process by which elements are drawn together from various sources to “reflexively assemble our own particular versions of such reality” (Deuze, 2006).

In the case study of *BuildtheWheel.org* that follows, I will first describe the platform’s functionality and affordances, and then reflect the applicability of Deuze’s interpretation of the nature of digital culture by noting the where these principal components can be seen in the website and its associated practices.

Case Study: *BuildtheWheel.org*

BuildtheWheel.org is an online community website designed to facilitate the sharing of popular education workshops and multi-media educational resources. At the time of writing this article the site is in a beta preview stage, meaning that it is functional but still undergoing testing and revision before a projected launch to coincide with the United States Social Forum, to be held in Detroit in late June, 2010.

Collaboration among educators in the development of curricular resources is not a new development created by the emergence of digital culture. The sharing of material, activities, and approaches among teachers is a well established practice in mainstream, as well as popular education. However, websites are particularly well suited to the storage and transmission of content, and to facilitate readily accessible information exchange and feedback in ways that previously depended on the establishment of personal and professional networks by individuals or organisations (Quiggin 2006). *BuildtheWheel.org* is designed in such a way as to allow participation in a network of educators and organisers with a very low threshold for professional experience, education, or organisational affiliation. Its design consciously incorporates features that encourage participation and a degree of collaborative curriculum design among its users.

Participant-users who wish to have access to *Build the Wheel* must first register an account. Their account profile contains biographical information that they wish to share with the community, and may also contain information about the user's organisational affiliation. Partnered organisations have their own profile pages that contain information about the group's work, their contributions to the site, and the ability to post news updates via an RSS feed.

The primary function of *Build the Wheel* is to share and to gain access to curricular resources that can be downloaded for use in popular education workshops. To publish a workshop on the site, a registered user uploads a workshop plan document and provides supporting information which can be used to help others identify content that is of interest to them, and that may also help support the use and adaptation of the workshop by other educators. Content providers are asked to identify how they wish to assign copyright of the material. In the interests of promoting a free and open exchange of resources, the program offers Creative Commons Attribution-Non Commercial-Share Alike licensing agreement as its default setting, although it is also possible to select an All Rights Reserved option, which preserves the workshop author's rights as described under standard US copyright law. Content providers are also able to limit which other users have access to the resources

that they can upload, and in the future, a function may be added whereby content providers can charge money for particular resources and collect payment through an e-commerce payment system. *Build the Wheel* developer Le Tim Ly explains the development team's approach to issues of ownership of the content in this way:

We want to respect where everyone's at with their particular approach to the materials they produce, meaning that some folks actually produce materials to be sold, and some folks produce materials just to share openly. Our leaning is towards a perspective that the information, the education, the materials are for the common good and can't be proprietary.

This ability for content providers to determine not only what they share, but how they share it, allows for organisations and individuals with differing needs and attitudes to coexist within the community, without administrators dictating a narrow way in which the content providers must behave.

For participants seeking resources to download, the ability to search for materials that are relevant to their needs is central to the site's functionality. Although still in its beta stage of development, *Build the Wheel* already hosts over a hundred individual workshops, many with supporting resources. To trawl through all of these pages would be prohibitively time-consuming, so the site provides various tools for filtering those materials that are most relevant to the user. Keywords can be used to search for workshops by language, duration, appropriate audience, and subject matter. It is also possible to see all of the resources that have been provided by a participating organisation.

The site also includes several social media features, and it is here that the potential for collaboration and collective knowledge production can best be seen. Ratings and comment threads are embedded on each workshop summary page, allowing users to give feedback on the workshop. Unlike in a traditional media editing or peer review process, this feedback is available not only to the author, but to the wider community of users as well. Beyond leaving comments, users can also revise and adapt workshops, or translate them into other languages than what they were originally uploaded in, and submit these derivative works for display along side the original material. Users can also group workshops into compilations according to their own logic, and have the choice to make these sets either public or private. This feature could be used to create themed sets of workshops, programs for specific groups or goals, and could also be used as a recommendation system, whereby users seek out individuals whose opinions and expertise they value and use their sets as an entry point to the wider database of materials.

In combination, these features consciously draw on the practice and theory of digital publishing to create a participatory online environment for knowledge production and dissemination, and seem to be highly compatible with popular education methodology. However, to be genuinely in keeping with the values and intent of popular education, knowledge production of this sort must be seen as just one element in a broader push towards action to further struggles for social justice. Le Tim Ly acknowledges that there are limits to how far a website can go in this regard:

We're talking about the process of coming together to imagine a different world and a different way of being, and then fighting for that. I think there's limitations to how that can be done, from what I've seen, in the online world. Because it's ultimately about building relationships and crossing comfortable areas. Organising, if it's being effective, shouldn't be too comfortable. You're talking about bringing people together that are being pushed apart...

Reflection

Build the Wheel demonstrates the applicability of Deuze's formulation of the principal components of digital culture, and suggests the potential for the use of digital technologies and cultural modes towards a reorganisation of the production and consumption of knowledge.

Remediation is apparent here in the simultaneous departure from existing processes of educational publishing and the informal sharing of resources among popular educators, and the reproduction of some of these models of knowledge production's core values. The online popular education workshop both diverges from and reproduces its precedents in print and oral traditions in form and content. Interactive, multimodal work was a characteristic of popular education before the digital age, and continues to be in many learning environments that do not have access to computers, the internet, or even electricity for that matter. *BuildTheWheel.org's* designers have not designed a platform for education to occur in digital space, rather they have created a tool for the development of educational resources in a digital environment to be deployed in workshops where groups of people gather to address oppressive conditions.

In the online community space, a single authoritative editor does not compile workshops and resources into a popular education canon. Instead, a web of autonomous bricoleurs upload, classify, and combine materials. This ability to tailor content by the user's particular identity and interests may be seen as resulting in what Deuze describes as "hyperindividualisation" (Deuze, 2006 p.85). However, in the case of *Build the Wheel I*

would argue that this ability to customise content works in such a way as to promote a sense of the intersectionality of identities (Crenshaw 1989, hooks 2000), in an effort to promote solidarity across identities and to foster discussions towards a broader shared power analysis.

Users on *Build the Wheel* participate in the community's creation and development by uploading, downloading, rating, commenting, and compiling. Through participation in the community, users take part in the development of a collective knowledge base and a shared set of values and practices. Importantly, these practices do not begin and end at the fingertips of participants logged into the site. By virtue of the propensity for popular education to encourage engagement with material conditions and social relationships, the digital culture around *Build the Wheel* affects the wider practices of social movements. The workshops developed and shared in the online space are generally intended for use in physical learning spaces, and as such the impact of the online community reaches out into the world beyond the hyperindividualised online activities and into rooms full of people engaged in critical analysis of their conditions.

In spite of these apparent opportunities to promote progressive political models through new publishing and education structures that share many attributes with democratic, participatory sectors of the Left, there is no real evidence that the advent of digital technologies truly has presented a great shift in the power structures of capitalism. Many fundamental issues of access to digital culture remain. The potential for this historic shift in the very nature of knowledge production is by no means guaranteed to contribute to the development of an emancipatory politics. The relationship between digital culture and social movements cannot be measured by the success or failure of a website to meet its goals. It will be tested in the experience of those who live in the new realities that are formed by new constructions of people's relationships to one another and the technologies and processes that mediate those relationships. That said, *Build the Wheel* serves as a hopeful example of the synergies emerging between modes of communication, education, and political organising that overturn traditional divisions between producer and audience, teacher and student, leader and subject, and points towards new ways of imagining the organisation of power in society in terms of mutually beneficial collaboration and participation.

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Publishers Attempt To Reconnect With Readers: two online technologies assessed

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Abstract

This article examines two online technologies, geotargeting and pay walls, on the basis of investigating their beneficial and detrimental effects on a diminishing reader base, and points out ways to use these tools to reconnect publishers with their audience. Geotargeting is assessed using Facebook as an example for the means of delivery of the geotargeted message, and pay walls are assessed in light of their impact on site visitors in general - new readers and existing readers. The result of this research has significant value to motivate publishers to change their business model in an attempt to reverse their conversion rate and increase their advertising sales.

The theoretical and practical points of reference for this critique are literature and reports on social media, industry-specific reference books and journals, social networking sites along with my professional industry experience gained in the publishing industry.

My findings indicate geotargeting has far more positive than negative ramifications; it enables publishers to improve their focus on the amount of stimuli given. And, Facebook acts as a valuable vehicle to reconnect with, locate and deliver tailor-made messages to geotargeted readers. News, offers, or information for readers to digest on a daily basis are theoretically controlled to arrive at the appropriate time and location in sync with the appropriate broadcasted message. Conversely, pay walls differ slightly. I found this system might not survive in evolving digital landscapes where new technologies dominate and often times supersede pre-existing forms of media, devices and software. Readers continue to consume news and collect information in various ways when it comes to delivery and access, and this devalues the need to pay for news online.

Based on these findings, my premise is that geotargeting will continue to advance and evolve, perfecting new methods of locating readers, such as contextual targeting on third party and social networking sites. And, pay walls as designed will most likely disappear; however, they will reemerge in a different proprietary platform or format such as subscriber accessible-only device, fully integrated in the users' lifestyle.

Keywords

GEOTARGETING • PAY WALLS • FACEBOOK • NEWSPAPER PUBLISHERS • DIGITAL MEDIA • NEWS ONLINE • ONLINE READERS

Introduction

Beginning in 2001, with the outset of major acquisitions in the publishing industry, the number of publications fell dramatically. This trend progressed without interruption and in 2004 in the US alone there were less than 50 major media companies as compared to 2001. A note of interest, this wave of acquisitions was even worse in Australia (Conley, 2006). News Limited, which controls of nearly 70 percent of the country's newspaper circulation, moved its headquarters from Adelaide to New York in 2004, after which Australia was left with only Fairfax Holding Ltd owning less than 30% of the market.

The problem of newspaper publishers' loss of readers and revenue was in large part due to their reticence in incorporating the changing dynamics of the interactive and socio-cultural trends of online technological innovations; the industry took the unprecedented new media and technological changes at face value, possibly even believing them an irrelevant fad. As criticized by Murdoch (2005), the industry had been unaccountably complacent in light of the digital revolution. Even when the majority of enterprises changed their business model from offline to online, the majority of publishers continued to refrain from intelligently adopting the new means and online technologies available to them.

This article aims to examine the elements of two online technologies – geotargeting and pay walls – as the basis of investigating the beneficial and detrimental effects on publishers in an attempt to reconnect with its audience. Geotargeting is assessed when reexamining the means used in conjunction with Facebook, and pay walls are assessed in light of its impact on site visitors in general. Both components are examined using industry data, literature, journals and peer-to-peer reviews on geotargeting, Facebook and pay walls to determine the impact and assess the implications of these findings.

Geotargeting

According to AdOne (2010), geotargeting is displaying (or preventing the display of) content based on the automated calculation or assumed knowledge of an end user's position in the real world. It is a potential powerful online tool that allows publishers to pinpoint their audience based on geographies, frequency capping, time factors, hierarchy or technology, with relevant news, offers and messages.

Geotargeting hinges on the publishers' knowledge of their online readers inclusive of their cultural, social, geographic, and demographic aspects in conjunction with the use of third party metrics such as DFP (DART for Publishers – owned by DoubleClick). This article does not examine the technical aspects of these third party metrics; however it

will exemplify Facebook as a vehicle that has been used by publishers in conjunction with geotargeting to deliver messages and reconnect with readers.

The success rate of geotargeting has grown tremendously, and the foremost reason is that in theory it increases publishers' conversion rate, brand awareness, creative expression and message content without disrupting the users' online experience. Newswire (2010) announced that geotargeted advertisements in the U.S. alone are expected to grow to \$1.9 billion in 2013. This is more than a 200% increase when compared to an \$897 million market in 2008. This demonstrates that publishers have discovered a cost-effective and enhanced targeting mechanism to reconnect with readers and deliver customized messages on third party and social networking sites. Although geotargeting is a powerful tool, I acknowledge its potential detrimental effect on readers, due to publishers' ability to have a strong say in what readers get exposed to, and subsequently digest; and, this controlling force could backfire.

For the purposes of exemplifying the seamless integration of geotargeting and publisher-to-reader information, I chose Facebook as the most visited social networking site and the most relevant instance. Facebook is one of the premier traffic generators to news sites, accounting for 3.5% of web traffic, compared to Google Reader that accounts for only 0.1% (Hopkins, 2010). Further, Facebook hits second place in ranking on the most site visits a day – harvesting a total of 400 million members (Nielsen, 2010).

Facebook is best described as a free-access social networking site where users join communities organized by city, workplace, education, and region in an effort to connect and interact with others – a knowledge-based community. Knowledge communities are discussed in Levy's *Collective Intelligence* (IN: Jenkins, 2006); they enable fans to create multiple memberships through affinities, and adopt means, technologies and recontextualize collected information through social interaction and intelligence. Thanks to its structural nature, emerging fan base, contemporary participation of reading and reusing news (Deuze, 2005), Facebook serves as an efficient and reliable vehicle to deliver tailor-made messages to fan's profile page or inbox.

The Economist and The New York Times, which respectively yield 256,064 and 567,567 fans on their pages (Facebook, April 2010), illustrate that Facebook functions adeptly to locate and reconnect with new and existing customers. This was equally acknowledged by Gartner (2009) who demonstrated in its research about the distribution of new media that Facebook is an excellent source for driving hits to publishers' sites. To further establish my

point on the significance of geotargeting to reconnect and deliver messages to readers, two proven industry examples: “Refer-a-Friend” and “Back-to-School” subscription offers have reversed conversion rates; and, fans may opt-in, take the offer or redistribute the message to other friends.

Another equally important aspect that became apparent on Facebook is how existing users distinguish friends. Fans on Facebook now redefine what they consider a friend by making a distinction between ones with strong ties and ones with weak ties (Maher, 2010). The latter in particular is paramount to publishers, strengthening geotargeting’s impact, by enabling them to accelerate the distribution of new information, archive, annotate and recontextualize content.

Pay walls

Publishers use pay walls to protect their content in an effort to monetize the work of their journalists, and to lessen the effect of the decline in advertising and offline subscription income. A pay wall is a digital barrier page that separates the access of online content into a paid or unpaid service. It supports business models like pay-to-access, subscription, charge-for-micropayment and premium-paid content-based (Radoff, 2009). News Corp has always been the industry advocate for this online tool, however, as of this date this tool has not successfully lifted off the ground yet.

As the first newspaper to implement a pay wall, the Wall Street Journal drew nearly one million paying online readers generating roughly \$65 million in revenue at its inception (New York Times, 2007). Despite appealing to an affluent at-work reader base, the paper has not achieved the returns projected by News Corp. In Australia, Fairfax Media considered the use of pay walls as a two-level access model, however it has not been implemented yet. And, after a failed attempt in 2007, the New York Times has announced it will once again institute pay walls as early as 2011. This metered model will be based on a pay-for-usage structure (New York Times, 2010) allowing the publisher to maintain a balance between free and paid content. In this manner, content remains accessible via search-driven web applications, which have proven to be one of the principal elements in maintaining a relationship with site visitors. Nevertheless, the implementation of such models remains a risk that could potentially turn sour. My premise is that subscribers’ online paid content needs to functionally transverse all present and future digital devices, and be considered as a holistic part of the users’ daily news feed and incorporated into the publishers’ future business model.

Five main reasons have been identified which might trigger or enhance possible user alienation risks: proficiency, expectations, commitment, searches and targeting. The first danger is because readers have become increasingly dexterous on the Internet: they have found ways to bypass pay walls by calling up the same content via search engines, such as Google, Yahoo and Bing. According to a study conducted by Hitwise (IN: Readwire, 2010), Google is still the number one search engine with 69.97%, followed by Yahoo (15.04%) and lastly Bing (9.62%). Secondly, publishers who fail to live up to users' expectations for paid content could devastate the relationship between publishers and readers even further. Thirdly, research conducted by Varian (2009) claimed that site visitors only spent about 70 seconds per day reading news online compared to the 25 minutes spent reading a hard copy. And, taking a closer look, online readers usually read their news during work compared to print edition readers who actually read during leisure time. The fourth reason underpins the importance of search engines in locating news: they account for nearly 70% of the traffic to major news sites in the US alone. Lastly, content in its basic form cannot be differentiated, a publisher can target a user who visits the art section of a site, however to target a user based on headline news is extremely difficult. This devaluates the importance of paying for a generic product making contextual targeting virtually impossible.

Conclusion

Research has demonstrated that geotargeting is a powerful tool and possesses a majority of successful parameters to locate and reconnect with new and existing readers. It increases publishers' bottom line, online brand awareness and conversion rate. As geotargeting is based on data driven parameters, Facebook's access to its sources of naturalistic behavioral and geographical data complements the execution of geotargeting. Further Facebook is tightly integrated in one's daily life, hence it enhances geotargeting to deliver tailor-made messages on fan pages quite easily. Although, this tool might raise concerns for the future in terms of being able to randomly access data online, I argue that the overall benefits derived from geotargeting nullify this impact.

Publishers also benefit from the use of geotargeting on social networking sites such as Facebook by cashing in on new subscribers reverting to targeted subscription offers, thereby publishers are intelligently monetizing on their resources. These sites offer a cost-effective, targeting vehicle with minimal and consistent technological investment, and an exponentially favorable outcome. They are beneficial mechanisms for the distribution, repurposing and recontextualizing of news, however, I argue that most likely they will not become a significant content consumption vehicle. As Lampe, Ellison, and Steinfield

(2006) discovered the cultures around social networking sites varied, and may therefore work in the publishers' favor. Further exploration on the value of fans and community pages is recommended in the long run.

Finally, I believe that pay walls unfortunately do not yield the results in the long run. If there is a shortage of alternatives on the digital landscape, users are forced to opt-in to use the paid service in an attempt to stay abreast. However, this is far from the current reality on the Internet. At present time 95% of traffic pointing to news sites is derived from search engines (Kirkpatrick, 2010) of which 70% is allocated to Google's search engine. This aspect has contributed to the rather loose relationship and involvement of the reader with publishers, as the former was always able to pull up its news from various sources using third party services online.

Further investigation on the potential of various applications or devices to prospectively act as payment and content distribution vehicles is needed. News content will then not be contingent on user actions; moreover the application or device will solely mediate the distribution of the content which the user is comfortable in paying. Successful implementations of such applications are already on the market (Gartner, 2009) – for instance iTunes – and it might be advisable for publishers to consider adopting similar systems as well.

Ultimately, publishers need to embrace the importance and impact of emerging digital media, future technology and changes in socio-cultural dimensions while adhering to a business model in which they continuously create buzz around their new content. Only by fully understanding the distribution of this content by others, the industry is then able to target their readers more effectively and efficiently with the ultimate goal of drawing a larger audience and thus advertising revenue to their sites. Whether this revenue will make up for the income lost in print subscriptions has yet to be seen.

Noting the aforementioned, when I assessed Apple's recent launch of its iPad, I found that only three major US publishers – USA Today, The Wall Street Journal and The New York Times – took the initiative to build a news application for the iPad. Regardless of the iPad's readiness, this fact begs the question of whether the industry continues to neglect to recognize the shift of emerging digital means and technologies, and intentionally restrains itself from embracing and exploring their innovative nature.

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Blooks: A New Era of Literature?

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Abstract

Over the last six years the ‘blook’ has been taking the publishing industry by storm. The blook is the result of the fascinating process where a blog is published as a book. During this period there have been many examples, most notably *Stuff White People Like* by Christian Lander and *Julie & Julia: 365 Days, 524 Recipes, 1 Tiny Apartment Kitchen* by Julie Powell.

In discussing this trend it must be asked, what is the attraction of a blog for a traditional publisher, particularly when faced with the reality that many readers are defecting from the printed book to e-books? Firstly, blogs are appealing to the traditional publishers as they come with a significant ‘built – in audience’. Secondly, it is a way for publishers to remain relevant in the literary and commercial worlds as blooks tap into pop culture in an immediate way, and can sell.

Although the relationship between the publisher and blogger appears to be a symbiotic one, the implications of this amalgamation of the blog and book must be explored further. With the proliferation of bloggers becoming published authors it can be argued that this is influencing methods of writing and genres. Some describe this new genre as hybrid literature in which blogs are being moulded into the traditional narratives and conventions of a book. Yet, despite this apparent ‘taming’ of the blog it may well be that the blog holds the advantage in its relationship with the book as it has the ability to maintain the sentiment of the blog, thus subverting the traditional narrative of a book by its very nature.

To explore this notion of a significant shift in writing and readership the article will examine blogs that have been developed into books along with various sources including journal articles and online discussions.

Keywords

BLOOK • BLOG • LITERATURE • PUBLISHERS • AUTHOR • GENRE • (RE -) INTERPRETATION • (RE -) CREATION

While browsing through the books on the shelf in a bookstore, tucked away amongst the literary classics are a new generation of unorthodox classics. You may come across such novelties as *F. U. Penguin: Telling cute animals what’s what* by Matthew Gasteier, the social etiquette book, *Rules for my Unborn Son* by Walker Lamond, or the political, *My War:*

Killing Time in Iraq by Colby Buzzell. The common thread that links this eclectic range of books is fact that they all had their beginnings in the blogosphere. How and why did these blogs leap from the computer screen to the printed page?

The purpose of this article is to investigate the reasons behind this transition and the consequences. The first half of the article will shed light on why blogs are being published, and the relationship between publishers and blogs, which can be defined as symbiotic. This will lead onto the second point, which will examine the implications of this migration of blogs to books. Essentially blooks are an adaptation of blogs, and with this process the blog also carries its unconventional form of hybrid literature with it. Thus it is necessary to analyse the end product and how this is influencing writing and indeed readership. By delving deeper into this topic it can be deduced that the introduction of blooks is a new form of writing.

Book + Blog = Blook

The Blook's Rise to Prominence

The blog has revolutionised the way that people communicate and interact with the world around them. In recent years online blogging has slowly emerged from the shadows and into mainstream channels. It is not uncommon to now see bloggers writing for a broadsheet's online edition. Put simply a blog is generally defined as 'a personal webpage in a journal format, using software that automatically puts new entries ('posts') at the top of the page' (Quiggin, 2006: 482). It is also an immediate and constant source of information and conversation. Bloggers can write and publish twenty-four hours a day, with the most dedicated bloggers posting every few hours. As Dianne Penrod notes, 'What viewers see is writers who are in the moment of writing, trying to capture how they are feeling and thinking at a particular point in time in relation to a topic' (2007:46).

The diversity of blogs is evident with the blogosphere populated by blogs written by amateur film critics, political pundits, and housewives wanting to connect with the world. Many blogs have attracted large numbers of readers, this fact not escaping the eye of the traditional publishers. As the publishing industry faces attrition of their sales through electronic sources, such as the e – book, blogs have become a way of revitalising the industry, and reengaging the average book reader. Thus in the last six years some blogs have made the transition from webpage to printed page. These texts have been affectionately dubbed 'blooks' by the media and social media commentators (Doctorow, 2007: <http://lulublookerprize.typepad.com/about.html>)

The attraction to books by publishers is two – pronged. Firstly, popular blogs already have a ‘built – in’ audience. The publisher can track which blogs are creating buzz, and attracting large numbers of readers. Thus the publisher can tap into this dedicated audience to sell the book version of the blog. Jeff Gomez notes studies have shown that ‘people who read blogs are more and more the same people who read books’ (2005:6). Publishers may take comfort in this, along with the fact that it is unlikely books will become extinct in the near future. As Thompson writes, books will survive as they are embedded in our society,

Books are not merely objects which will be swiftly and automatically replaced by technologically more efficient modes of content delivery, for they are bound up with forms of life and social practices which can only slowly change (2005: 326).

Secondly, publishers are publishing blogs as it is a way for them to remain relevant in the literary and commercial worlds. Blogs can link into and echo popular culture.

One of the complaints about the publishing industry is that it was too conservative, unwilling to taking risks on unconventional writing thus creating a disillusioned public. As Heidi James, founder and curator of the online publisher Social Disease argues,

Zadie Smith is not fucking interesting. All this postmodern irony is just so dull. And I realised that I really hate the homogeneity of the publishing world where it’s next to impossible to get genuinely interesting work published. The big publishing houses would have you believe that there isn’t a market for new and exciting work that takes few risks and makes a demand on its readers, but that’s bollocks. (in Gillieron & Kilgarriff, 2007:143)

Due to this conservatism of traditional publishers blogging has attracted unpublished authors as it provides a useful outlet for those who are daring, unconventional and experimental with their writing. Hence the blogosphere is fertile ground to build a collective of like-minded artists. Over the last ten years blog publishers have emerged to unearth and support writers. These include Social Disease, 3:AM and Scarecrow. Bill Broun reporting for The Times wrote in 2001 about the motivation behind these websites, specifically referring to 3:AM.

The cosmopolitan, rive gauche quality of the site is wonderfully obvious. From ‘cutting edge’ short fiction to political satire and music reviews, 3:AM is a dream publication for the young, literary and clued – up, and it counter – balances nicely the London/New York publishing behemoths (in Gillieron & Kilgarriff, 2007: 137).

This unearthing of new and interesting voices is filling the gap that both James and Broun highlight in the literary world. As these forums and blogs have gained traction in the real world many traditional publishers have noticed and taken action. Many blogs that have been popular enough for publishers to publish as books are confessional, observational and acerbic on topics that are relevant to different segments of society. They comment on various aspects of society, are interesting and anecdotal. They articulate things that are not necessarily acceptable in the realm of 'decent' society. This point is illustrated by the controversy that surrounded the book *Intimate Adventures of a London Call Girl* by Belle de Jour. Many argued that the book glamorised prostitution, undermining the issues surrounding this line of work. Those who criticised the work included reviewers of the book and the Archbishop of York, John Sentamu (Knight, 2009: http://entertainment.timesonline.co.uk/tol/arts_and_entertainment/books/article6917495.ece).

Popular books that fall into these categories of hype include *Salam Pax: The Baghdad Blog*, by Salam Pax, the diary of the days in the life of a young Iraqi before and during the invasion of Iraq by the US in 2003. Ian Katz, the Guardian Features Editor writes of Salam Pax that the blog has appeal as it is "powerful, subversive... [and] very funny" (in Pax, 2003:x). Other examples include *Stuff White People Like* by Christian Lander, a book of witty insights into popular culture of white people; *Anonymous Lawyer* by Jeremy Blachman, a fictional lawyer writing about the goings on in an elite American law firm. This book highlights the attitudes, behaviours and questionable ethics of lawyers. Lastly, *Julie & Julia: 365 Days, 524 Recipes, 1 Tiny Apartment Kitchen* by Julie Powell, a book on one woman's personal journey as she challenges herself to cook all of Julia Child's recipes. Besides their scandalous, salacious, and controversial nature, most importantly these books offer authentic experiences which are clearly attracting audiences.

From the above discussion it is clear that both the publishers, authors and readers benefit from books, however we must go beyond this and explore the implications of merging these two worlds into one. From the web page to the printed page it is essential to investigate what the differences are, what results and how this affects readership. The blog and book may appear to be similar, however it can be argued that a significant transformation is undertaken.

Books – The reinvention of writing and reading

Bloggers are an intriguing breed as they engender a sense of freedom in their writing as the earlier examples illustrate. This freedom is enhanced through the fact that the blog

allows a mixing of genres. As Penrod surmises, ‘What makes the blog such a fascinating genre is that it is a composite of several genres, a blend of forms familiar to most of us. Part conversation, part diary, part narrative, part letter, part newspaper article’ (2007: 44). Within this framework the blog and its progeny, the book can be viewed as hybrid literature.

To create a blog the blogger has almost complete control over how it is structured, written and presented, only limited by their own computer literacy skills (Penrod: 36).

This freedom lends itself to malleability, offering the writer the opportunity ‘break the rules’ of traditional writing;

... some blogs take on a diary appearance, other function more like newspaper articles, and yet others are just a set of links and comments. The volume of writers mixing genres and breaking grammatical and presentation rules in blogging is enough to make a grammarian or English lit major cry – or at least cringe (Penrod, 2007:36).

Yet in the transition to printed page this freedom is stunted to a degree. Essentially the book is an adaptation of the blog, rather than a simple mirror image. Brenda Ehrlich from Mashable the social media blog spoke with Pamela Slim, author of *Escape from Cubicle Nation: From Corporate Prisoner to Thriving Entrepreneur* who muses, ‘[Writing a book] forces you to string together a whole bunch of ideas into a cohesive story’ (2009: <http://mashable.com/2009/12/17/blog-to-book/>).

To understand this recontextualisation and the consequences of this migration, Linda Hutcheon’s discussion of adaptation is a useful theory to apply to the book and its various elements. Utilising Hutcheon’s theory of (re-) interpretation and (re-) creation the adaptive process will uncover significant differences (2006:8).

The notion of (re-) interpretation which Hutcheon also describes as a form of ‘filtering’ on behalf of the adapter, can be applied to various books (2006: 18). Many books contain introductions that are either written by the blogger or another individual. In *Salam Pax: The Baghdad Blog* the introduction is written by Ian Katz the Guardian Feature Editor at the time. His introduction not only introduces *Salam Pax*, but also justifies the support from blog to book. Katz states that it is “...quite simply the freshest, most exciting writing coming out of Iraq” (in Pax, 2003:ix). A sign that it is worthy of transcending the blogosphere into the traditional realm of print. In *The Intimate Adventures of a London Call Girl* by Belle de Jour she writes her own introduction giving a background on how

she became a call girl and how she came to write a blog about her experiences. Both these introductions are absent from the respective blogs, thus the blog reader would not be privy to these interpretations of the work unless they read the book. Hence the introduction in both examples may be viewed as a (re-) interpretation as it provides a new framework of understanding of the blog which in turn provides a new perspective on the blogger, their motivations, and perhaps their persona as a writer.

Secondly, the book may also be viewed as a (re -) creation as the content of the blog is placed in a new context. (Re -) creation connotes a notion of recycling materials leading to a new product. This idea can certainly be applied to the book. In the case of the book this (re -) creation comes in the form of a book, with pages, page numbers, key art, essentially all the traditional conventions of a book that are absent from a blog. Although the same words and sentiment appear on the printed page this (re -) creation naturally leads to a new way of reading the same material.

This new experience of the blog's content is a clear segue into the new interaction that readers have with blogs and books. Hutcheon writes of the change in engagement of the text after adaptation. Hutcheon writes, '... [adaptation] involves a different mode of engagement on the part of both the audience and adaptor'(2006:12). This is certainly applicable to the book as there are several major differences that will have a bearing on how the reader digests the text. Firstly, the interactive nature is lost and the communal experience is downgraded. Many blogs allow for readers to contribute to the dialogue through comments on each post the blogger makes. Thus it is possible to build a relationship with the author as the reader can be a part of the process of writing. As Quiggin notes, "... blogs (at least full – scale blogs with comments and trackbacks) are a collaborative process" (2006: 483). This interactive nature may have some bearing on what and how the blogger writes for their audience. Viewed as an interactive process the blog is a living organism that develops and grows accordingly. This interactive nature is lost once the text is printed into a book. The only meaningful engagement the reader has is to read.

The other significant loss in this transition is the ability to reference through hyperlinks. Many bloggers will include links to other websites or sources which may have some bearing on the topic they are talking about. Bloggers may also embed Youtube clips to illustrate their point. Zizi Papacharissi writes that this facilitates "expressions of connectedness through the use of hyperlinks" (2007: 22). This is completely lost when the material is translated into a book. Hence, the way the reader experiences the book is to some extent static, the words stand alone. However, this may be viewed as a positive as the bloggers

voice is clearly heard and uninterrupted by the sources that it may reference online.

Bearing these points of (re -) interpretation, (re -) creation and interactivity in mind there are several conclusions that can be drawn on the book. This transference to the traditional format of a book, may be viewed a death as it is not longer a living entity, it is now frozen in time. However, despite this the book carries with it the sentiment of the blog of a hybrid genre, thus by its very nature it is subverting the traditional forms of writing and literature. This literature is exciting and relevant, creating interesting narratives and enticing the reader to look closer at society through their observations.

Conclusion

The literary landscape has changed significantly over the few years as blogs have transcended the blogosphere and entered the real world in print. More and more people are turning to different sources to discover writing that is inventive, innovative and interesting. Blogs are a fertile ground to discover this new talent. Blogs are one way individuals to have the freedom to write what they want and how they want to. Traditional and conservative publishers have begun to see the value in publishing blogs as they have that edge and an audience.

Not only are these books edgy due to the nature of their topics, but also due to the nature of the writing. Blogs bring a mixture of genres to the printed book, thus creating a form of hybrid literature. The audience is also able to actively participate through writing comments, thus potentially having some bearing in the way that the author may post. The disadvantage for a book is that it loses its immediacy, it is final and cannot be updated. Although the book may be translated into a traditional form of writing physically, it still contains the sentiments of the blog that is on the web page, breaking writing conventions.

This is all evidence of a shift in writing and readers are accepting this different form of writing with vigour. As long as there are interesting blogs with relevance and an audience, there is the potential for them to become books, thus perpetuating and evolving forms of writing.

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The ‘Death of the Author’ and the birth of the reader?

An examination of the changing role of the author in digital collaboration and publishing

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Abstract

How does the changing notion of authorship online affect the process of reading and trusting information? With the rise of digital publishing through blogs, wikis and homepages, everyone and no-one can become an author. Text and image swirls across the Internet unattributed, with multiple changing authorships or with creators who act under pseudonym.

What does this mean for the way that text is produced and understood? How does a veritable ‘death of the author’ effect the production, dissemination and understanding of digital text?

This paper will explore the notion of authorship in online, using the theoretical framework of Roland Barthes’ seminal essay *The Death of the Author*. The digital realm has heralded a universe of new information and opportunities for self-publishing, but what is the meaning that we can assign to such texts? Does the opportunity to self-publish remove value from professionally published works?

The notion of authorship will be examined through the case-study of the online resource Wikipedia. Wikipedia was founded close to 10 years ago, and is an online “free encyclopaedia, written collaboratively by the people who use it.” Its mission statement is to be “the best information source on the Internet.”

Wiki collaboration and authorship – by its very nature yielding the death of a single author – is becoming increasingly common. But what trust value can we ascribe to such works, and what meaning? Wikipedia has gone to great lengths to try and ensure the quality and trustworthiness of its work, even enshrining codes of behaviour and presentation into its founding principles. This paper will give contrasting examples where this has worked, but also where it has fallen into disrepute.

Keywords

PUBLISHING • AUTHORSHIP • WIKIPEDIA • BARTHES • AMATEUR PUBLISHING •

Introduction

With the rise of digital publishing through media such as blogs, wikis, twitter and homepages, everyone and anyone can become an author. The ‘no-one’ author is also

prominent: text and image swirl across the Internet unattributed, with multiple changing authorships or with creators who act under pseudonym. What does this mean for the way that text is produced and understood? How does a veritable ‘death of the author’ effect the production, dissemination and understanding of digital text? This paper will explore the notion of authorship in the new media environment, using the theoretical framework of Roland Barthes’ seminal essay *The Death of the Author* (Barthes 1968).

Beginning with an exploration of the new media landscape, the case study of Wikipedia will be used to discuss the changing role and power of authorship online. Importantly, this case study will allow an examination of some of the key traits of authorship, and whether these have translated into the online environment – trust in a text, meaning and derivation of and authorial voice. Ultimately, this paper will examine whether the ‘death of the author’ online has rendered digital text to be empty in weight, meaning and trust or if a new mode of meaning and power has been forged.

The Death of the Author

The Death of the Author is perhaps Barthes’ most widely read and influential work (Allen 2003). His essay has become a key trope in the analysis of meaning and text, and the complex relationship between the two. The work traces the transition of authorial power in a historical context, following the changing role of the author, and arguing for textual freedom, separate from the author. Barthes argues that the author has always been seen as a powerful figure who controls the meaning of the work presented. Trust in the author yielded trust in the text; to know the author’s history was to bring meaning and weight to the work presented. The author is “at the centre of the work: the origin of all the work’s meaning, the author is the figure towards which all reading should direct itself” (Allen 2003: 73). In this scenario, the reader receives and accepts meaning through the medium of the author, never having direct access to the text. Barthes notes that “responsibility for a narrative was never assumed by a person but by a mediator, shaman or relater” (1968), whose ‘performance’ of the text transmitted its essential truth.

Barthes sees the author as confining, as limiting the text (Allen 2003). This is crucial when we consider the trust we place in a text, as traditionally value lay in the reputation of the author and the mode of publication. For Barthes, a story written by a respected journalist in a noted newspaper is given weight, authority and trust separate from the intrinsic quality of the text, due to its author and publication. The text is ‘chained’, its value

controlled by its authorial owner.

Barthes' search for 'textual freedom' is seen to him as urgent and imperative, as "[t]o give a text an author is to impose a limit on that text, to furnish it with a final signified, to close the writing" (Barthes 1968). The author must be metaphorically 'killed off' in order to allow a text to be free; free to have open meaning, interpretation, and the very essence of textuality itself.

We know now that a text is not a line of words releasing a single 'theological' meaning (the 'message' of the Author-God) but a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash. The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture. (Barthes 1968)

Barthes argues that "the removal of the Author (one could talk here...of a veritable 'distancing') is not merely an historical fact or an act of writing; it utterly transforms the modern text" (Barthes 1968). This act of 'distancing' - or removing altogether - is crucial when we move on to discuss the landscape of new media, and the authorial tropes present there.

New Media and *The Death of the Author*

This paper understands 'new media' to mean the media and communications environment that has evolved since the widespread take-up of digital communications and the world wide web (Creeber and Martin 2009). Whilst digital communications and the internet have been present since the 1980s, the crucial section of this definition lies in the aspect of widespread take-up - the digital communications environment since 2000. In other words, 'new media' refers to both the tools and the social processes that have evolved: both Web 2.0 technologies and tools, and the rapid 'mediatisation' of society. This is a two-pronged process, which involves both (a) a rapid diversification and evolution of media sources and technologies, and (b) a complementary explosion of media participants, both professional and amateur (Creeber and Martin 2009; Livingstone 2009; Quiggan 2006).

In simple terms, this paper takes the new media environment to mean the digitised and connected media world that encourages participation by both professional and amateur players, and includes creative, participatory platforms such as blogs, wikis, and personal homepages, but also the opening up of 'old media' to new platforms - for example, online newspapers and opinion sites with the ability for the public to comment on articles and be involved in debates, and to publish their own thoughts to a wide audience.

What does Barthes' *Death of the Author* have to do with new media? At first glance, Barthes' criticism may seem to belong in the realms of classical literary theory, far removed from discussions of new media and technological platforms. However, upon closer inspection, we can argue that classical literary critique has much to offer an examination of new media and digital publishing.

One of the key traits of new media, in all its promise, is its supposed ability to unite amateurs and experts in the same room, on an equal playing field. Anyone can write, create and upload in the Web 2.0 environment. The digital environment has seen an explosion of online publishing, and thus an explosion of 'authors' – be they professionals writing content for websites or online news sources, or amateur bloggers and wiki enthusiasts. Existing textual forms – such as newspapers and magazines – have moved digital and there has been the development of new types of texts through blogging, twittering and personal pages. Andrew Keen, author of *The Cult of the Amateur*, notes that:

We are enabling Internet users to author their own content. Think of it as empowering citizen media. We can help smash the elitism of the Hollywood studios and the big record labels. Our technology platform will radically democratize culture, build authentic community, create citizen media.

(Keen 2006)

However, the uniting of amateurs and experts in the same room has its problems for traditional structures of media and authorship. Throughout history, concepts of truth, power and influence have been vested in those with knowledge and authority. In the publishing realm, this was traditionally in the cradle of the authorial voice. It was through the author that we knew whether to trust the words presented to us, to know the type of information we were to receive, to know the weight and clarity of the message. The author's medium, genre and back-catalogue of works assisted in the untangling of meaning and truth. Trust was built in to a web of cultural clues. To use a clichéd but accurate observation, 'the medium [was] the message' (MacLuhan 1964).

In the new media environment this clarity is longer the case, and certainly trust and meaning are harder to untangle. Learned professors and high school students have blogs that sit side by side, Hollywood celebrities and best selling authors have twitter feeds devoted to the same issues. Foreign correspondents and anonymous citizen journalists post their news stories at the same time – and often on the same websites. In such an environment, can we ever know which information to trust? Does this even matter? What role does the concept of 'the author', with their intrinsic qualities and knowledge, have to

play in our response to text and content? This paper will now move to using the case study of Wikipedia to illustrate how a lack of authorial voice and power can profoundly change the way the user responds to media content – and argue that a ‘death of the author’ can herald a ‘birth of the reader’ (Barthes 1968).

Wikipedia: how collaboration reframes authorship

Wikipedia: the free encyclopedia (commonly known simply as ‘Wikipedia’) was founded by Jimmy Wales and Larry Sanger in 2001. The goal of Wikipedia is to create “an encyclopedia that anyone can edit” that is the a ‘free repository of all the world’s knowledge’(Wikipedia 2010). Wikipedia is structured to actively encourage people to change and improve its content over time, according to their own knowledge and expertise – and indeed relies on this happening for the site to work (Black 2008). Every article has an “edit this page” button, allowing any visitor to the site to add, delete or modify content.

As such, no page or piece of information has a single authorial voice – it is built up over time by the incremental edits of people who visit a page and see an improvement to be made. What seems like a chaotic, anarchic system has produced reference material which has been evaluated and revised by thousands of visitors and users for close to 7 years (Lih 2004; Tweeney 2007; Wilkinson and Huberman 2007). Each article is entirely user created, and the content is discussed extensively amongst users.

The foundation of Wikipedia is the software it is reliant on – the wiki. In layman’s terms, a wiki is a website which allows users to change, edit, remove and add content in a collaborative fashion. The ease of interaction and operation makes a wiki an effective tool for collaborative authoring, as wikis enable documents to be written in a simple mark-up language using a web browser—no special technological knowledge is required on the part of the user.

As Lih argues, a wiki is essentially a social software, providing the ability to track the status of pages, review changes, discuss issues of contention and foster communication between authors (Lih 2004: 4). Importantly, however, for a discussion on authorship, most users do not identify themselves by name, preferring to use a pseudonym.

Wikipedia has been chosen as an example to illustrate the changing role and dynamic of the author in digital publishing and the new media environment. The development of Wikis and similar open, creative platforms (such as blogs, for example) has created an environment of creative collaboration, one of the calling cards of the Web 2.0 environment (Keen 2006; Quiggan 2006; Skains 2010). Creeber and Martin note that one of the

transitions into Web 2.0 has been the move from digital publishing to digital participation (Creeber and Martin 2009: 4).

This development is crucial to our understanding of the role and power of the author. What Creeber and Martin mean by this move is a nuanced shift in how the web and its tools were used, the shift from Web 1.0 to Web 2.0. This shift from publishing to participation saw a move from professionals using the web as a platform for publication to anyone – and particularly amateurs - being able to participate in the publishing environment. New tools gave everyone the ability to self-publish articles, thoughts, creative writing, videos, and images – to participate in a public community of authorship.

Early digital publishing, including blogs and websites, saw the sideways move of authorial voice and authority onto digital platforms. Early blogs, for example, had no comment feature, and early wikis existed in small communities where everyone knew everyone else, such as within a workplace (Quiggan 2006). Today, crucial innovations have taken place on participatory software such as blogs and wikis, allowing a true remoulding of the author and her role. Blogs now have comments, which have become a crucial feature, and blog authors now write as initiators of conversation and debate rather than with simple stated fact and opinion (Quiggan 2006). As Markos Moulitsas Zúniga, founder of The DailyKos blog, argues, “[Such innovations] allow people to, instead of just responding to somebody else, they can set the agenda. They can talk about the thing they want to talk about” (Zúniga cited in Tweeney 2007). Through technology, power has shifted from the author to the reader’s participation and feedback, as Barthes argued it must.

With wikis, the change in authorial power has been even more pronounced. In Wikipedia, no entry has a definable author, or source of single voice and authority. The meaning comes from collaboration, reworking and discussion (Black 2008). Whist traditionally meaning and power has been in the cradle of the author, the text on Wikipedia stands alone – no author can be traced; ‘no-one’ is the true author.

Barthes argues that “a text’s unity lies not in its origin but in its destination” (Barthes 1968) and this is certainly true of Wikipedia. We can observe that the unity of a text – its truth, harmony and accord – normally rely at least in part on the role of the author, our knowledge of their works, their cultural capital. When the author is removed the reader must decipher the text based purely on what is presented to them – its ‘destination’. This disrupts the classical balance of authorial power, and challenges our view of meaning. Such a move places emphasis on other features at play – the text itself, the medium it

exists in, the presentation of the text - all these elements grow in importance.

An example is the case of ‘Wikipedia vs Encyclopaedia Britannica’ which was conducted by Nature in 2005 (Giles 2005). Nature used a peer-reviewed, blind experiment to compare Wikipedia and Britannica’s coverage of selected science articles. Entries on the same topics were chosen and given blind to experts in relevant fields to critique. The exercise revealed numerous errors in both encyclopaedias, but among the 42 entries tested from each source, the difference in accuracy was small. Nature reported that “the average science entry in Wikipedia contained around four inaccuracies; Britannica, about three.” (Giles 2005) Nature noted that some errors were small, others large, but that overall the quality of the articles chosen was relatively equal.

This experiment is of interest when we consider the notions of authorial power and trust. Britannica’s authors are chosen for their qualifications, work in the field and expertise. Indeed, on the Britannica home-page, the ‘trust quotient’ of the work is specifically promoted to as follows:

Trustworthy Results:

- Cited in U.S. Supreme Court cases.
- Expert contributors: More than 90 contributors have won Nobel prizes. Most are authors, university professors, commentators, museum curators, scientists, and other experts chosen for their field expertise.
- Trusted by over 7 million students at top colleges and universities worldwide.

(Britannica 2010)

By contrast, we have no way of knowing the qualifications – or lack of – in Wikipedia’s editors. Whilst some may well be Nobel winners, university professors or scientists, they could just as easily be high school students. It is this lack of authorial knowledge that has often been levelled at Wikipedia, and used as a critique at its quality, and its trustworthiness. Despite this, its accuracy has been shown to be of relatively high consistency, with stand-out cases of error the exception rather than the rule (Black 2008; Schiff 2006; Wilkinson and Huberman 2007).

Power transfer: from author to reader

The new media landscape leaves power in the hands of the reader, just as Barthes advocated. Whilst it is difficult to critique works such as Britannica due to the authorial weight of the work, all readers are experts when it comes to Wikipedia. A reader can consider an

‘authorless’ entry and immediately notate an improvement – yielding a complete transfer of power and authority from the text to the reader. The digital publishing landscape has thus seen a power transfer: anyone, everyone and ‘no-one’ is now the author, and power circulates to the reader-participant.

In his *Life Cycle of the Book* (1989), Robert Darnton sketched out the cycle of the text from author to reader, noting that every link in the chain was a crucial element for the transfer of power: author – publisher – printer – distributor – bookseller – reader. The source of meaning and power lay with the author, distinct and separate from the reader. Today, in the new media environment we have seen a radical breakdown of this power dynamic. A lengthy and distinct chain of processing no longer separates author and reader – the author is the publisher, printer, distributor and bookseller – and thus author and reader are closer than ever before. But perhaps more importantly, the author is often unrecognizable and identifiable, unknown through name, disconnected from power-source.

The digital media environment has killed off authorial power as we knew it, changing its role and disconnecting it from traditional modes of operation. New technologies have shifting the balance to align authors in a new light – as reader-collaborators, discussion starters, and contributor-creators, rather than singular power bases. The reader and author have re-engaged in a circle of influence and meaning. If authorial power has traditionally lay in name, cultural capital and the processes of production – as has been illustrated through this paper – removal of these elements leaves the author’s power dead at the feet of the reader.

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Crisis Communications and New Media

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Abstract:

Scholars marvel at the speed and potential audience that the internet can offer. At the same time companies and individuals continuously search to take advantage of the internet's capabilities for mass communication for their own benefits. One may argue that with the instant and direct nature of the internet, it is especially ideal for communicating in times of crisis when quick decisions must be made and information must be immediately distributed.

At the time of the January 12 Haiti earthquake, organisations such as The Red Cross and CNN used web and social media to disseminate and request information. Friends and relatives used these web platforms to share survivor information and for updates on the condition of buildings in the area. At times, this many-to-many connection proved to be more effective way to retrieve updates on individuals than from official reports. On the side of corporations, crisis communications comes in the form of damage control and image repair. In this aspect, corporate governance and accountability are issues to touch upon, as there is an increasing pressure for companies to maintain constant streams of information with the public to build a solid channel of trust. We see that overall humanitarian organisations take advantage of the community aspect of social media, whereas private companies benefit from the speed and direct nature of the platform.

By communicating on a social media platform, companies are able to supersede traditional media and transmit a purer form of information, instead of having it filtered and repackaged into a narrative format by commercial media outlets. This is the democratised aspect of social media that creates dynamism in the field of communications, and perhaps also alters elements of operations. Ultimately, it will be argued that with such an array of tools for instant communication, any company in modern times that refuses to be open is signalling that there are elements of their operations that are dubious or unprofessional.

Keywords

CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS • PUBLISHING • NEW MEDIA TECHNOLOGY • ONLINE MEDIA • HAITI • HAITI • CNN • MERCYHURST

Crisis communications are becoming a crucial part of any organisation's emergency plan, and its rise has been facilitated by new media technologies. When a natural disaster or scandal happens, the public wants to know every detail and to track its progress until

everything is returned to normal functioning order. This has occurred since the beginning of the 20th Century, as mass media always defended the principle that information should be circulated freely. According to Saouter, Maisonneuve & Char (1999), this is a reactive stance that leftover from the 17th and 18th Centuries of European monarchist rule when leaders had no obligation at all to inform the public. Organisations caught withholding information are often met with an interjection from the media who reminds them that they should be transparent in their operations under the weight of public demand. This has been a growing trend and in the digital age, and through the ubiquitous and hyperconnected nature of internet and social media, there is less excuse for large organisations not to have an open channel of communication with the public. Conversely, when used correctly, organisations can benefit from these broad channels of communication to have a better connection with the people they serve. While this may be pertinent in usual operations, it becomes integral in times of crisis or catastrophe. In using new media platforms, organisations are able to supersede traditional media and harness its potential reach to promote their own messages in a timely and direct fashion. This article will look at some case studies in which crisis communication helped, or could have helped, with the use of new media technologies. In addition to the use of technology, this article also plans to examine how the execution and strategies of crisis communications campaigns differ based on whether it is a commercial company covering for image protection, or an NGO using new media to collect data following a natural disaster. Both of these kinds of organisations have different methods of employing new media, and an analysis of their differences will demonstrate the power and versatility of the technology that is changing the entire landscape of not just communications, but also operations.

Crisis Communications: Catastrophes and Crises

To define the vernacular used in this essay, a *catastrophe* refers to a natural disaster, whereas a *crisis* is in the business sense. It is the result of a series of badly managed events that directors had ignored or neglected. In considering this, we are able to clearly bisect our discussion by examining how the same technology is used in polar opposite ways between the private sector and the public sector. To begin with we will mention their similarities as both sides have comparable methods and goals when they implement a crisis communications campaign. These include:

1) Establishing an emergency plan.

In theory, a crisis or catastrophe is an event that cannot be predicted. However, a pre-prepared plan will allow for rapid and unified action and will serve as a more mediated

course of action during a tense period. It is important that a plan is flexible, as one that is too rigid will result in ineffective or paralysed action and an obstruction of initiative (Fearn-Banks, 1996).

2) Maintaining corporate framework and thinking strategically.

Time is a crucial factor during crisis periods, so it is considered sage to function within the framework that is already established. Short-term objectives should be created, adhered to, and these should be precise, realistic and measurable (Seeger, Sellnow & Ulmer, 2003).

3) Communicating facts rapidly and directly.

In good crisis communications, accent is firmly on the present. “It is not about days or hours when it is about crisis communications, it is about minutes” (Marra, 1998). A consistent flow of communication is key during an emergency period, and it has an important impact on the behaviour of those implicated and the community. The public should ideally be able to follow the situation in real time and with internet technology, and there is little excuse for a modern company to not respond.

When a crisis or catastrophe strikes, the media is the instigator that turns a tricky internal problem into a questioning of the practices and ethics of an entire company or country (Seeger, Sellnow & Ulmer, 2003). Due to the democratic nature of new media in which every user is a producer, increased pressure is placed on corporations to assume accountability as every employee possesses information that no longer needs screening from traditional media to be aired publically. The global reach of social media permits instant lines of multidirectional communication, making the media landscape more dynamic and manageable when used correctly. However, we see often that this is not the case.

Catastrophes and New Media

Media often assists in areas hit by catastrophe to distribute warnings, evacuation advice or medical alerts by providing a communications network where it is lacking. This was the case during the Haiti earthquake when Radio France helped to establish broadcast communications channels in the wake of the destruction. In dire situations such as these, governments are open to assisting the media with facts, support and providing direct lines of communications with officials. At its best, the media will make rapid decisions, follow orders, avoid contradictions and prioritise information. However, as Saouter states, oftentimes this devolves in the following steps:

1. Journalists begin by cooperating with governments
2. Journalists see story potential in interviewing emotional victims in the aftermath of the disaster.
3. The victims give reports of certain previously unknown details about the disaster that puts the country's preparedness and government into question and contradicts the previous communication messages.
4. The journalists, once they report these testimonies as fact, defend themselves by saying it is part of the freedom of the press.

New media may be seen as ideal in this case as practitioners are participating voluntarily and, for the most part, are not in search of a sellable story. Similarly, the internet allows for direct interaction from a distance without being filtered through a journalist, or other traditional media intermediaries.

Shortly after the Haiti earthquake struck, The Red Cross and CNN assembled websites calling for information on survivors and missing persons. Users were asked to create Facebook-style profiles on persons presumed missing or dead in Haiti. The information included their full name, age, last known sighting and photo with caption. Comments were also enabled for those who were able to contribute more information. This database of missing persons was searchable, or able to be categorised with the statuses of dead, missing or found. New media here shows itself to be a far evolved version of data collection from the days of shouting at ground zero with a megaphone for survivors. Transmitted communications were able to reach anyone in Haiti or around the world, who would see the same page. Those who had a relative in Haiti with whom they had spoken since the earthquake were able to share information and from the combined contributions, a framework of the situation could be developed, as the amounted information made it obvious what buildings had collapsed, what regions were not so affected and who was there at the time. In effect, these website were vivid online communities that formed within days for those affected by the earthquake. This all was made possible due to the existence of the social network platform and the contributions of an engaged community (Gibson-Hancox & Peyronel, 2007).

An example of a positive result was when an individual wrote asking if anyone knew the status of Jean-Louis Barreau. One person in Port-au-Prince was able to provide information about which building Jean-Louis worked in, while another person in New York

soon confirmed that they had spoken to the presumed missing person, and that they were fine. There were several websites and Facebook groups looking for survivor information where friends and family members shared their knowledge, created online tributes, gave condolences or reconnected with lost loved-ones. The requirement for immediacy of information meant that the many-to-many approach facilitated the need for customised information. Each individual had a specific query which they posted themselves and that could be responded to by anyone possessing relevant knowledge. The democratic nature of the internet and new media proved to be beneficial in this case, as a traditional hierarchical model of media would not have been as efficient in addressing each individual's specific request.

Ultimately, social media allowed information was being distributed into a rawer form, through facts specifically relating to an individual.

Crises and New Media

We could talk as simply as NGOs use digital media for good, whereas corporations use it for bad, or at least, in a defensive way. Organisations in the private sector need crisis communications primarily for image reparation in the wake of a scandal. While an NGO uses the community aspect of social media to appeal directly to an individual, private organisations use the speed of the platform to reduce and accelerate the inevitable backlash.

According to Ivie, Krouser & Stellwagen, image restoration campaigns are mostly centred on denial, evasion, perceived offensiveness reduction, mortification, or correction. Denial is the act of denying accusations about whatever incident caused the crisis or shifting the blame for it outside the organisation. In evasion, the organisation does not move blame to another, but claims that circumstances out of their control lead to the crisis. A third strategy for rebuilding a reputation is to reduce the perceived offensiveness of the act, and communicate how the act is not as severe as it seems. Mortification is when the organisation admits responsibility and tries asking for forgiveness. Another strategy is correction, which encompasses admitting responsibility but with a vow to correct the situation. Ideally, a company will have a solid backup plan ready to distribute to the public and journalists at times of a crisis, this information allows an organisation to prepare the messages that will be used in crisis communication and helps a spokesperson answer questions from the media and present positive organisational messages.

It is an observed phenomenon during a crisis, wherein attention is distanced from the trigger event itself and the worth of the entire company's operations overall are instead scrutinised. As such, following a scandal, the corporation is eager to protect themselves as much as those implicated are (Ivie, Krouser & Stellwagen, 2000). Here it is key to be proactive instead of reactive and so we can mention the importance of new media in this respect for salvation of reputation. As Dougherty says, following the media frenzy, the public will never remember the logical facts about an organisation, but rather "perceptions and emotions".

This was true in the 2004 accusations of paedophilia at Mercyhurst College in the United States. President William P. Garvey was accused of sexually abusing boys over a 20 year period at the school (Lipka, 2004). The board of trustees were aware that there was the potential for a scandal already in 2002, when the Los Angeles Times published a testimony from someone claiming to be a victim. The newspaper attempted to contact the board, who instantly responded that it was untrue. No internal investigation took place and within a year the story had broken to all major news outlets (Palatella, 2005). The original accuser appeared frequently in the media, while the school refused to meet with members of the press. Eventually the board investigated Garvey, who then resigned as president. In the wake of the incidence, the public believed that due to no communication on the school's side, there was a considerable amount of deception and lack of accountability (Palatella, 2004b).

New media played a significant part in the public's reaction to this scandal. The student community frequently partook in online discussion, with blogs and chat rooms being the platform to share disgust and spread rumours about what they believe was happening in the background. Further still, bloggers managed to find the email on the server, which revealed that Garvey had asked for advice on the issue from a board member. This incited further outrage. Information control became so strict that when the local paper published a critical article, an employee of the school physically removed all copies of the publication from student access on campus. Despite the university having an intranet and student email database, the school refused to use these platforms to respond to accusations. By transmitting a mass e-mail, communication would have been simple and direct, and in fact, it was expected. By keeping silent, students and the community felt as though the school had something to hide (Palatella, 2004a).

What this shows, is that while much of the research into crisis communications emphasises the importance of a single spokesperson and one line of communication, companies no

longer have this luxury in the time of new media. Under a many-to-many model, focus has shifted towards the need of a corporate voice that is adopted by all staff. When traditional media was unrivalled, the crisis ran as a narrative that slowly developed. We can relate company crises now more to a dialogue with a strong public voice interacting with a constant and customised stream of official communication. As shown in the Mercyhurst College example, a failure for organisations to adopt responsiveness at a similar degree as the vibrant online communities resulted in an even greater negative backlash, accusations of deception and even hacking of public servers in a demand to discover the truth (Gibson-Hancox & Peyronel, 2007).

Ultimately, the school's biggest error was that they failed to rise up and become the primary source of information on the issue. A lack of responsiveness was deemed inexcusable and the online backlash was rapid, aggressive and widespread. College officials assumed that this localised event would cause little outside interest, however in considering the demographic of tech-savvy students that was involved, their online voices was particularly penetrating, with no rebuttal in sight.

Conclusion and Future Use

New media technologies encourage the use of direct communication in a many-to-many model. In the event of a crisis or catastrophe, communication has become dialogue between those affected by the event and those trying to manage it. Quick responses and real-time interactions are prerequisites for a successful campaign, and with so many new media platforms in place, an instant reaction communicated on mass is becoming a norm. When talking about the public sector, organisations use social media to gather communities, who come together from around the world to share information without a need for traditional media to reinterpret the facts into a narrative. From the perspective of the private sector, new media strategies will continue to be employed in communications to reach the most amount of people in the most direct way. Direct communication from officials will be expected as the public now demands knowledge to all corporate and governmental activities. Private companies will do their best to utilise the speed and direct nature to promote their corporate messages in a dialogue with the public. Ultimately, in this modern day of hyper-connectivity and instantaneous mass communication, it appears that refusing to comment is almost an admission of guilt.

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The Influence of Online Reviews: case study of TripAdvisor and the effect of fake reviews

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Abstract

The Internet has not merely changed the way consumers make their purchases via online channels, it has also changed the way they make their purchasing decisions. There are now innumerable sources to consult on the web, which allows the consumer to collect as much information as they require before they purchase. Websites have been specifically created so people can provide their opinions and ratings of products, services, businesses practices and brands. The World Wide Web brings together happy and dissatisfied customers alike to share and discuss their opinions. On average, an unhappy customer will tell 10 people about their experience (TARP research, 1999), on the internet they have an audience of potentially millions. However, what truth is there in the reviews? Why do we or why should we believe them? It has been proven on sites like TripAdvisor, the online travel review site, that some reviews are fake. TripAdvisor has conflicting needs which are advertising dollars and the needs of site visitors to receive truthful reviews. Websites need tougher controls on what their users post on their sites. Not doing so can have a major effect on their credibility and have the potential to have larger legal ramifications.

Keywords

CONSUMER GENERATED CONTENT • MEDIA • ONLINE REVIEWS • INTERNET

Introduction

The internet has not merely changed the way consumers make their purchases via online channels, it has also changed the way they make their purchasing decisions. There are now innumerable sources to consult on the web, which allow the consumer to collect as much information as they require before they purchase. Websites have been specifically created so that people can provide their ratings and opinions on services, products, business

practices and brands. This is an online form of word of mouth known as consumer-generated media (CGM). This can be found in many forms such as photos, video clips, and text anywhere from blogs to social networking sites to individuals' websites (Blackshaw and Nazzaro 2006).

A report by Rubicon Consulting (Bruce 2008) found that consumer generated online comments and reviews are now the second highest influence for purchasing decisions for all web users behind word of mouth. Personal reviews are even more influential than official reviews posted by a website or magazine, or information by a manufacturer (Bruce 2008). Although online reviews have been found to have less influence than the views of friends and families, they potentially have further reaching impact as there is only a limited audience in traditional word of mouth, whereas on the internet there is the potential to broadcast your opinions to an audience of millions.

Why should we trust this content? Is there any truth in these reviews? The report by Rubicon Consulting found that about 70 percent of the user-generated content on the web, including comments and questions, is created by less than 10 percent of web users. So, who is creating this content and how do we determine if they are trustworthy or credible?

This essay will discuss the reasons why online reviews have had a major impact in the context of changes in traditional media. The travel industry is an industry where online reviews have affected consumers' purchasing decisions dramatically. It will investigate how users determine whether the information is trustworthy and look particularly at the case study of the travel review site, TripAdvisor, the most popular third party review site in Australia (Hitwise and Experian 2009) and the problem of fake reviews.

Changes which have influenced how consumers make purchasing decisions

The Internet has revolutionised many aspects of our day-to-day lives. From email to search engines to online shopping, many internet technologies have impacted heavily on the way we live our lives. This also includes purchasing decisions.

Prior to the internet, the main sources of information for consumers were friends and family, advertising and the media. The media was traditionally seen as an authoritative source of knowledge. Matheson (2004) purports that this is because the profession of journalism has a range of shared values, which include public service, objectivity, autonomy, immediacy and ethics. That means traditionally when a journalist gave a report, the reader felt a sense of trust in the journalist's opinion due to the ideology entrenched in the

profession. However, in the early 19th century the media became commoditized and more recent technological, economic and cultural changes have had a profound effect on the role of the journalist. Borden (2007) argues that journalism has now become increasingly indistinguishable from other kinds of mediated communication, resulting in a loss of legitimacy.

On the other hand, with the development of internet technologies over the last two to three decades and the increase in access to these technologies, it has become easier for people to come together to share their thoughts and experiences with others. Now almost anyone can create a blog, post a comment or chat with strangers about whatever they are interested in. This has caused a major shift in the way journalism is viewed and has given rise to 'citizen journalism' whereby members of the public play an active role in reporting news content (Deuze, Bruns et al. 2007). To some extent this is what CGM is about. The user generates the content rather than the content being created by a journalist in a magazine or newspaper. People are receiving information directly from a source. This works particularly well in the case of travel, because these are highly personal, experiential products (Gretzel 2007). In the Rubicon Consulting study, the influence of online communities on travel was only second to buying consumer electronics.

In addition, it can be noted that more often than not, the journalist is not an unbiased source in consumer travel-related stories. Their evaluations are almost always gushingly in favour of the travel service they are meant to be evaluating. This is because they normally receive the service they are meant to be reviewing for free. It would be difficult to remain objective on the basis of a free holiday.

To look further into the change in the media's role in purchasing decisions, these third party sources of information, such as magazines and newspapers, now rank lower than online reviews in terms of influence. This may be the media's own doing as they have traditionally sought opinions from the public on these things, which are of a more personal nature such as shopping. On matters which affect the public sphere such as politics, the public are given a more passive role (Allan 2005). Therefore, we have been already conditioned to accept the personal views from non-journalists when it comes to making purchasing decisions. Whilst in matters which affect public sphere such as politics – the opinions of the public although available online, have had less effect.

Travel Reviews and the case of TripAdvisor

The case study of TripAdvisor demonstrates the growth in popularity of online reviews. It is a site set up in 2000 specifically so that users can review travel services, mainly hotels but, also attractions, restaurants and flights. It allows users to write a personal review, rate the service on a set list of criteria and post photos or videos of the service to the site. TripAdvisor will then rank the service according to the ratings, alongside other services in the same category and within a set geographical area such as a city or town. On its website TripAdvisor claims to have over 30 million travel reviews and attracts nearly 45 million monthly visitors. In Australia, by far it is the most popular website for seeking accommodation (Hitwise and Experian 2009).

Who are the users and the reviewers?

As stated previously, 10 percent of users on average across all online communities make up 70 percent of the content (Bruce 2008). On the other hand, it is interesting to note that in a 2007 survey of TripAdvisor users (Gretzel 2007) which was conducted independently but sponsored by TripAdvisor, 83 percent of those surveyed claimed that they not only read reviews but also write and post travel reviews. Those surveyed were on the majority between the ages of 35 and 64 years old. In the Rubicon survey, it showed on average the most frequent contributors (those posting at least once a day) were between the ages of 19 and 25 and overall those most likely to post any comment (regardless of frequency) are between the ages of 31 and 40. These do not necessarily contradict the TripAdvisor report. It implies that the audience for TripAdvisor is different in comparison to the average contributor in online communities across the web. It has an older audience of more active contributors. Indeed, on its website TripAdvisor states the most number of users are between the ages of 45 and 54 years old (TripAdvisor 2010). These differences in demographics effect how users judge a source to be credible. In a number of online studies it has been found that younger people are more likely to believe news and information found on the internet and it is also the user's familiarity of the site which determine its credibility (Yoo, Lee et al. 2009).

Why use TripAdvisor?

In the 2007 survey conducted on TripAdvisor users (Gretzel 2007), most online review readers perceive other travellers' reviews as being more likely to provide up-to-date information, enjoyable information, and reliable information compared to content posted by travel service providers. Almost all agree that travellers' reviews help them learn about

a travel destination, product or service; help them evaluate alternatives; help them avoid places they would not enjoy and; provide them with ideas. Over 80 percent also agree that reading other travellers' online reviews increases confidence in decisions; makes it easier to image what a place would be like; helps reduce risk/uncertainty; makes it easier to reach decisions and; helps with planning pleasure trips more efficiently.

The issue of trust and fake reviews

TripAdvisor is obviously a valuable tool for users but it has also become a valuable marketing tool for businesses. TripAdvisor does not allow you to book services directly from the site, but it links you through to third party booking sites. However, it does receive revenue via advertising dollars from the travel services which users rate in their reviews. This creates a clear conflict of interest balancing its need for advertising dollars with the needs of its users to receive truthful reviews.

Trust is therefore a major issue in the influence of online reviews. Trust can be viewed in a number of ways, McKnight and Chervany (2001) measured it on the attributes of fairness, goodness, strength, ability, benevolence, honesty and predictability. Egger (2000) developed a model of trust for electronic commerce (MoTEC). This was made up of prepurchase knowledge based on prior opinion or reputation, interface properties including familiarity with the system and, thirdly, informational content referring to the information the vendor provides about financial risk, transparency and cooperation. Trust in travel reviews has been further investigated by Yoo, Lee, et al. (2009) who outlined three actors in the trust relationship: the user, the website and the source.

In the survey of TripAdvisor users, the respondents indicated that there were several ways in which they evaluate an online review. This included having a detailed description, the type of site where the review was posted and the date in which it was posted. A reviewer's credibility is judged on the reviewer's travel experience, similarity in terms of activities engaged in during the trip, trip purpose and the manner in which they write, as well as the demographics factors such as age, as mentioned previously.

As the site has increased in popularity, the likelihood of users posting fake reviews has also increased. This is most likely to come from businesses wanting to increase their ranking on TripAdvisor or businesses posting negative comments about their competition. TripAdvisor will not publish specifically how they and their automatic screening tools search for what they deem as inappropriate and fraudulent content. Inappropriate content could be where a user is badmouthing another reviewer in their review. Fraudulent content

is considered to be by an owner or friend/relative of the owner writing a review, paid or coerced reviews. In an interview, the Communications Manager at TripAdvisor stated that the integrity of TripAdvisor reviews is protected by specialists who read every post prior to posting, as well as automated tools, spot checks by TripAdvisor and the online community of users themselves. With over 30 million reviews, even TripAdvisor admits that there may be some that slip through the cracks (Schmollgruber 2007).

With the need for advertising dollars, it raises the question on whether the site is acting enough. In one case of a review of the London Hotel, NYC. a user reported on a TripAdvisor online forum (TripAdvisor 2007) that they believed a review of the hotel by a certain member was fake. Other users agreed that it was because of the way it was written and the language used, as well as the reviewer not having any other posts, forum contributions or any other material on TripAdvisor. The material was reported to TripAdvisor but the content remained on the site a month later and only after much publicity was given to the forum discussing the potential fake review, it was taken down. The message on the site was that the review was 'removed at the original author's request'. Normally reviews that are suspected to be fraudulent will have a large red notification on their page from TripAdvisor stating that it is suspected that this hotel had fraudulent reviews (TripAdvisor).

In the incidence of the review of London, NYC. this did not occur. It is worth noting that the London, NYC. is part of a larger hotel chain which advertises on the TripAdvisor site. The fact that the site is a profit-generating business puts a question mark on who's best interests they are acting in. This is one case in a much larger issue, in fact, TripAdvisor has admitted that there are companies specifically set up to increase the rankings of hotels which may be using fraudulent methods. TripAdvisor clearly need to protect their credibility as an impartial website or otherwise users will lose trust in other reviews on the site.

TripAdvisor are not the only ones that have been affected by fake reviews. Apple has had to put added barriers to users reviewing after dealing with a large quantity of fake reviews on its App store (Corvida 2008). They now require a user to have bought the app before they can post a review. In another case, Belkin, a peripheral and networking manufacturer was forced to issue an apology after one of its employees was found to be offering payment for people to post positive reviews and ratings about its products on Amazon (Meyer 2009).

When someone writes a fraudulent or negative review there appears to be less perceived ramifications of this online. This may be due to the fact that users can post as an anonymous

person or under a pseudonym. Whilst TripAdvisor appears to try and deter people from doing this, there are ways around it. In the offline media, the laws for defamation have long been established. On the internet, these issues are still being resolved (EFA 2006). Online cases of defamation have had to balance between freedom of speech and reputation protection. It seems more and more likely, that websites have to take more responsibility for the information that their users post online. Take for instance, the recent case of Google in Brazil where it has been fined for a defamatory anonymous comment that one of its users posted on a page in a Google owned social networking site. Although, not a large amount (\$8500 USD), it opens the door for more of these cases coming to a head and puts the onus back on the websites to monitor and moderate its users' words (AFP 2010). Although there are some cases of online defamation in Australia, there are not as many precedents in this area of law.

Conclusion

The proliferation of the internet has given rise to CGM and online reviews, as new influences for people making purchasing decisions. Now anyone can post their opinion online and share it with a large audience and people rely on these reviews to make an informed decision. The trust embedded in these reviews has a historical and cultural context as traditionally the main influences were friends and families and, the media. The large majority of the users who post reviews online may be giving an honest review and have the best interests of other users in mind. However, the cases of inappropriate or fake reviews bring about a need for sites such as TripAdvisor to have more stringent control over what is posted on their website if they are to maintain credibility amongst their users. Furthermore, there may be legal ramifications for the sites over the content that their users post, therefore it is the responsibility of the website to monitor and control the content on their site on a continual basis.

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I Blog. You Buy.

How bloggers are creating a new generation of product endorsers

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Abstract

In this age of Web 2.0, a number of bloggers have reached a higher level of trust and recognition within their peers. They have transformed themselves from ordinary writers sharing their thoughts on the Internet, to opinion leaders. Some may have comparable or even more influence than celebrities and other prominent personalities in society, nowadays.

This article will explore how marketers are now utilizing this newfound status of bloggers as a way to reach their target markets. What is involved in identifying and deciding which blogger to approach and form a partnership with? How different is it from hiring celebrity endorsers? Is it truly effective or a short-lived and fleeting tactic?

This article shall also look into how being empowered may possibly be changing the way bloggers write and communicate with their readers. Are bloggers worthy of having this much influence? Do their readers see them as endorsers? Blogs, Bryanboy.com and NotQuiteNigella.com, and their respective authors will be used in this article to examine these ideas.

Keywords

BLOG • BLOGGERS • PRODUCT ENDORSER • PRODUCT ENDORSEMENT • CELEBRITY
ENDORSER • MARKETING • OPINION LEADERS • BRYANBOY.COM • NOTQUITENIGELLA.COM

Nike is a brand that understands how celebrity endorsements work. From building a successful product line with Michael Jordan (Roll, 2010), to using the scandal currently being faced by Tiger Woods to its advantage (Lu, 2010), Nike has shown how brands and products can benefit from being promoted and recommended by celebrities.

Endorsement is a tool of brand communications wherein a celebrity is hired to be the spokesperson of a brand, and guarantees whatever position or claims that brand has. The celebrity extends his or her character and reputation to the brand (Roll, 2010).

Opinion Leaders

The need for product endorsers stems from the concept of opinion leaders. Opinion leaders are individuals within a reference group who hold influence over others due to knowledge, personality or special skills (Kotler et al., 2007). A person uses reference groups as basis for comparison in shaping one's attitude or behavior (Kotler et al., 2007). Endorsers then act as opinion leaders of specific reference groups – advocating brands and products as tools that will allow others to be more like them. This strategy is usually effective since previous studies have shown that consumers use brands and products as means of expressing a particular lifestyle or projecting a social image that is usually connected to a reference group (Wanke, 2009).

It seems that the power of celebrities may not have the same impact on consumers, nowadays. Surveys show that in choosing the source of information on a product before making a purchase, consumers rely on family, friends and people who they consider are like them (Fraser and Dutta, 2008). With this being the case, and the way society is shaped today, determining who opinion leaders are is less predictable than before – they can practically be anyone (Laughey, 2009). One tool that enables people to reach that stature, in this age of Web 2.0, is by blogging.

Blogs and Bloggers

A blog, derived from the term “web log”, is a website comparable to an online journal, as entries are displayed by date, with the most recent blog post at the top of the page (Newson et al., 2009). Bloggers frequently update their blogs, which contain opinions, information and web links to other sites, about various topics that interest them (Kirby and Marsden, 2006). As of January 2009, blog directory, Technorati.com, has indexed 133 million blogs since 2002 (Singer, 2009). Furthermore, an average of 900,000 blog posts are made over a 24-hour period, with 81 languages being used in the blogosphere (Singer, 2009). Among active Internet users, 77% read blogs (Singer, 2009), while at the same time, majority of bloggers make an effort to attract visitors to their blogs by engaging in various activities, such as linking to and commenting on other blogs and having their blogs listed on blog directories (Sussman, 2009). A wide and diverse list of topics is discussed by bloggers, including politics, sports, entertainment, food, business, and fashion among others (Newson et al., 2009).

Due to the breadth and inherent quality of blogs to build and be part of networks (Berkman, 2008), companies, brands and businesses have realized that bloggers can be

tapped as additional channels in communicating and reaching out to their consumers. As bloggers have a ready audience interested in specific categories, companies can be confident that their message will be transmitted to a niche market. This is a reflection of “Personal Influence” discussed by Laughey (2009), wherein information is passed on from the media to opinion leaders, which they subsequently share to passive consumers in their groups. Bloggers now stand as opinion leaders, imparting influential opinions to their readers, though these readers may not all be passive. Blogs encourage interaction through comments and feedback, which can prove to be as important as the blog post or content (Newson et al., 2009). This could be a valuable tool for companies to have instant access to the reactions of their consumers on their products or services.

The disposition and newfound stature of bloggers empower them to be alternatives to celebrities – a new generation of product endorsers. However, it is of course essential to determine which blog and blogger is influential within the target group of the company, before appointing a blogger as an endorser. The influence a blogger holds can be established by observing reactions of his or her readers, or even those who are familiar with him or her (Berkman, 2008). The following are two bloggers, who write about two different fields that exemplify this new role and identity.

Bryanboy (www.bryanboy.com)

Bryanboy is a Filipino blogger based in Manila, who attracts up to 180,000 readers a day to his blog (Wells, 2008). This openly gay, flamboyant character began his blog in 2004, initially as a travel journal (Tighello, 2009). However, due to his enthusiasm for fashion – posting pictures of himself in haute couture, over-the-top outfits; sharing his latest extravagant shopping jaunt; declaring his love for fashion models, designers and icons; reviewing the season’s latest trends – not only has he established a growing number of followers, but he has attracted the attention of the fashion industry as well.

Various publications have acknowledged and praised his presence in the blogosphere. The New York Post named him one of the nine hottest celebrities on the Web (Lo, 2007). Teen Vogue claims him to be their favorite fashion blogger (Samson, 2008). News.com.au declares that he is Fashion 2.0’s biggest superstar (Huntington, 2008). And Style.com regards his blog as a “cult read in fashion circles” (Tighello, 2009). In addition to these, Bryanboy’s fans from all over the world regularly send him photos of themselves doing the “Bryanboy pose” or holding up signs proclaiming their love for him (Huntington, 2008).

His clout in the fashion industry is reinforced further with how he was given a seat in the front-row, an area usually reserved for fashion editors, actors and actresses and other well-known personalities, in prominent fashion events such as the Australian Fashion Week (Wells, 2008) and Milan Fashion Week (Nguyen, 2009). The March 2010 issue of Vogue Magazine in the United States, where Bryanboy was featured in the front cover with other select bloggers (Spot.ph, 2010), is another contributing factor to Bryanboy's growing reputation.

Due to the fame he is enjoying, the recognition given by other reputable individuals in the industry, and the vast amount of readers he has, it is no surprise that a number of brands and companies choose to be associated with him. Hudson Jeans, an American apparel brand has recently invited Bryanboy to the photo shoot of their latest advertising campaign and blog live from the location (Bryanboy, 2010). A chain of high-end department stores in Canada, Holt Renfrew, used Bryanboy as the main theme of its window displays (Tighello, 2009). He has been gifted with fashion items from luxury labels Prada and Dolce and Gabbana (Bryanboy, 2010), which he freely reports to his readers. He promotes sale events and product launches of retailers (Bryanboy, 2010) as well.

The most significant of all these was when fashion designer Marc Jacobs named a bag, the "BB", from his collection in honor of Bryanboy (Teen Vogue, 2008). The blogger constantly professed his love and support for the designer, which eventually got through to Jacobs. This instantly made Bryanboy the designer's personal muse. Marc by Marc Jacob print ads released in 2008 was inspired by and resembled the blogger (Fashionologie, 2008). Both Jacobs and Bryanboy reaped benefits from this affiliation. Jacobs was able to connect with the blogger's following of fashion-savvy readers and create publicity for himself within the industry, while Bryanboy was able to affirm his influence and reputation.

It is evident that Bryanboy can be considered an opinion leader and an endorser for various brands with the success of his blog, even outside the blogosphere. However, his constant referral to living in a third-world country, having to starve himself in order to pay for his newest indulgence, and realizing how lucky he is, still enables his readers to identify with him. The continued support from brands, readers, and the rest of the blogosphere that Bryanboy receives could stem from how he is a pseudo-celebrity – recognized and trusted but without the big, fat paycheck.

Lorraine Elliott a.k.a. Not Quite Nigella (www.notquitenigella.com)

Lorraine Elliott is an Australian food blogger who refers to herself as Not Quite Nigella (NQN). Her blog, which she began in 2007, highlights her favorite recipes usually paired with a demonstration, restaurant reviews, coverage on events related to food, and interviews with chefs (Evangelou, 2009). The name of her blog pays homage to celebrity chef, Nigella Lawson, whom she adores but she believes she can never emulate (Sean, 2010). Elliott is regarded as one of Australia's top food bloggers (Liss, 2010) and her blog ranks number 45 in a list of the Top 100 Australian Blogs as of April 2009 (Tsiasmis, 2009). The blog has 95,000 unique readers and 275,000 page views per month (Elliott, 2010). NQN is also only one of two blogs, which was featured in The Sydney Morning Herald's 2010 edition of The Foodies' Guide to Sydney (Elliott, 2009).

With the reach and reputation earned by NQN, Elliott is fully aware that companies and businesses will see the potential in using her blog to communicate with consumers. Toyota is one of those companies who partnered with Elliott in promoting the new model of the Prius (Elliott, 2009). A brand new car was loaned to the blogger to test drive as well as experiment with cooking food on the car's engine. Reading through the comments section, not only was the post highly interesting for NQN's readers, but Toyota gained a character boost as well. As one reader commented, "...kudos to Toyota for lending you the car!"

Elliott also regularly holds contests for her readers. As of this writing, there are five contests running in NQN, with prizes sponsored by different brands and companies. Prizes range from a class with celebrity chef, Tetsuya Wakada (Elliott, 2010), to a case of Sauvignon Blanc by the brand Jed (Elliott, 2010). The latter currently has 236 contest entries from the blog's readers.

Even before her blog became widely read, Elliott engaged in reviews of restaurants. However, as chefs and restaurateurs learned to appreciate her status in the blogosphere, Elliott now is occasionally invited to dine in a restaurant with the intention of having the establishment and its food be reviewed and featured in her blog. Commendably, she makes this transparent to her readers by ending her post with a disclaimer, such as "NQN and Mr. NQN dined as guests of Emmilou Lounge and Tapas Bar" (Elliott, 2009). But regardless of her readers knowing this, the same support and praise is extended to her, as seen through the comments she receives.

A webpage is actually devoted to Elliott's guidelines in accepting advertising, sponsorships, product placements and free meals. Though she is happy to entertain requests, she asserts

that she will only write about topics and products she personally finds interesting and that she will be very honest in her reviews, which can include negative feedback. Furthermore, as NQN upholds editorial integrity, Elliott declares that anything she accepts for free will not affect the outcome of the article (Elliott, 2010).

An argument is raised that food bloggers are not involved or concerned with how they can impact or influence the food industry. Their priority is to satisfy their readers (Lees, 2008). Though this may be the case for some food bloggers, Elliott recognizes that they do make an impact with what they do (Evangelou, 2009), and this is evident in her personal standards when she reviews a product or a restaurant.

NQN's success rests in how Elliott combines the interests of advertisers and her readers. Her blog simply reveals her love for food and how she would like to share that with her audience, but at the same time, blogging is an attempt to earn from her passion as well.

Conclusion

Bryanboy and Lorraine Elliott are indeed part of a new generation of product endorsers. The term "new generation" does not only pertain to the time they emerged, but also to the new way they operate, the goals they want to achieve, and the beliefs they uphold.

Celebrity endorsers hired by companies are bound by contracts that stipulate not only how much money the endorser receives, but how the endorser must maintain a certain personality that suits the brand, and how the endorser must never fail to believe in the brand. With bloggers, these conditions are not always possible. It is in the nature of bloggers to provide every point of view on a subject and be open to feedback from their readers (Fraser and Dutta, 2008). Their goals may not always be to profit from their blogs, but just to use this medium to express their thoughts.

This is the risk that companies and marketers take when forming partnerships with bloggers. Bloggers decide on what they endorse, and they make their endorsements in the manner they want. The endorsements may not be solely composed of praises and admiration, and companies must be ready to accept criticism from someone they chose to approach.

On the other hand, companies will benefit from the ability of bloggers to publish posts on their products instantaneously, and receive feedback immediately as well. Partnering with bloggers is also less expensive than celebrities, and companies will be able to measure the impact of their strategy by tracing links and comments connected to the blog post.

In Deuze's *Towards Professional Participatory Storytelling in Journalism and Advertising* (2005), new media, such as the Internet, gives way to a "new era of producer-consumer interaction". Consumers are not just audiences anymore. They are now active participants in the production of content that was formerly exclusive to companies. Bloggers and their blogs are a testament to this. Hence, the evolution of bloggers into product endorsers appears to be a natural occurrence.

Furthermore, as consumers tend to trust people they associate with themselves more in terms of deciding what to buy, bloggers may prove to be more efficient than celebrities as endorsers. Blogs use a "one-to-one" approach (Research Recap, 2008), resulting to an "empowered consumer" – one who eludes the clutter of mass media and gets to use his or her own agency (Deuze, 2005).

The rise and influence of bloggers is expected to carry on. With each day that a new blog is developed, a possible future endorser is also created. It is now the task of marketers and companies to catch up and adapt to the blogger's ways.

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‘Will 2020 still be a Great Year to be a Fashion Blogger?’

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Abstract

The instant, extensive audience base of successful blogs is undeniable, and for this reason it seems that blogging will surpass the ‘just a fad’ premise. In this article I will examine the role of the fashion blogger within the fashion industry, and what sort of ramifications this new media approach, has had, and may have in the future on some of the industry fields, such as magazine publication, online retailing and ecommerce, and the creative works of designers themselves. Will the immediacy and the conversational style of bloggers communication upend the mainstream media? And as online retailing continues to gain popularity, the concept of ‘seeding’ blogs and blog monetization will also be something to consider. Fashion bloggers have gained newfound pulling power amongst fashion heavyweights and traditional media professionals alike, will this newfound power create changes to how designers both produce and distribute their design? Using the case study of blogger Brayanboy and ‘The Satorialist’, we can begin to speculate on what future blogger/designer collaborations may entail. Where the future of blogging lies however is not so easy to ascertain. Are these bloggers really offering any unique expertise or vantage point that will significantly alter the fashion industry’s way of currently doing things?

Keywords

DIGITAL MEDIA • PUBLISHING • NEW MEDIA TECHNOLOGY • ONLINE MEDIA • FASHION

Introduction:

The multi billion-dollar fashion industry juggernaut is ‘up to its earrings’ in web 2.0’s tools of user-generated content. Fashion, by definition is ephemeral, an elusive target that keeps on moving (Crewe 1992). Trends and fads are over in the blink of an eye and it seems blogging has offered one portal quick enough to keep up with them. This paper seeks to examine the role of today’s fashion blogger, and the power that they now wield within the industry in both fashion publishing and fashion retailing/advertising. I will also look at the power they have gained amongst these old ‘top down’ formulas of the fashion establishment. In terms of publishing, fashion blogs are so popular as the subjective nature of fashion encourages endless discussion; also considering fashion is so visual, the photo diary style of blogging also suits it very well. Will blogs become the new ‘Vogue’ magazine for today’s fashion readers? If this is to be the case looking at blog monetization and bloggers as avenues of

revenue and commercialization are also of great importance as their role begins to shift, at times perhaps unwillingly, from online diarist to the promoter.

Huage in his 2006 'Gatekeepers' essay suggests that knowledge arrives via 'pipelines of information'; 'gatekeepers' build these communication channels strategically and with conscious hard work. These gate keepers then hold the power and influence into what goes along these pipes and out to the masses. Applying Huage's arguments to fashion blogging, successful fashion bloggers have become the 'gatekeepers', and their blogs, the 'pipelines'. Fashion publishers, retailers and even designers all want to associate and do business with these innovators because they have positioned themselves in an economically enviable place. These people, Huage (2006) argues become the innovators and its these innovators who have the power and can then carry more weight in their roles as agents of information/knowledge diffusion of fashion content.

Despite what 'build your own blog' websites say, standing out among the estimated 2 million (Technoratti, 2010) fashion blogs is no small feat. Entwistle (2005) states that this point of difference is also difficult to learn. She says 'you've either got or you haven't', and particularly in cultural industries such as fashion where the value is often on a certain 'je n'ai ce quoi'. Bloggers experience, instinct and subjective fashion knowledge need to co-exist alongside formal business strategies.

To gain a greater understanding of the role of the blogger one needs to first briefly examine who they are and what their blogs say. The essence of blogging is to openly and organically share ones opinions thoughts and ideas with like-minded people whom you can then continue to network with via comment fields and user-to-user web conversations. Jorn Barger is commonly credited with coining the use of the word 'weblog' in 1997 for the kind of web sites we now regard as blogs. Peter Herholtz is credited with splitting the word in 1999 into 'we-blog' and extracting out 'blog.' (Scherlen, Allan (2008)). Fashion blogs more specifically invite the curiosity and envy of its audience. Bloggers actively seek images and discourses to present their idealized selves (Schau and Gilly 2003).

A fashion blog can describe a blogger's new purchases. The blogger writes about the process of buying an item and discusses how they fit in with the latest fashion trends, what to wear it with etc. Fashion blogs can document the blogger's fashion collection, usually with images of their favorite possessions or new purchases. Artistic photos of what adventures take place whilst wearing these items can follow. Lastly fashion blogs can consist of images of dream products that would be bought if the blogger were not constrained by money. Such

blogs are usually packed with pictures that the bloggers found from advertising posters, fashion magazines, and various online resources. Other popular fashion blogs capture the essence of city dwellers within their urban environment. Spontaneous street snaps often capturing the 'trendy' at fashion shows or exhibits. These have proved to be so in demand it has given birth to a new sub category of fashion blogs- street style blogs.

Xin Zhao in his paper on Consumer desires (2006) suggests that writing blogs provides an opportunity for consumers to internalize the symbolic meanings embedded in products. Bloggers by taking pictures of what they already have and passionately discussing them on their blogs allows blogs to become a possession ritual through which the cultural meanings and value of products are transferred to the blogger. With mass followings, these bloggers hold power to decide what others should and shouldn't like. To keep blogs updated, bloggers apparently need to go shopping more often and constantly post new acquisitions. The same clothing is rarely posted again and an item is symbolically abandoned in the blogosphere once it is made public. The blogger always sets out to find something new and the audience even leaves comments requesting updates. The bloggers are thus under pressure to symbolically divest the possessions and to search for novelty. (Zhao, 2007).

Due to the basic medium of blogging, the blogger by definition becomes the publisher. However, What is happening is the casual informal use of language is no longer confined to the traditional rules and criteria's of publishing (grammar, spelling and even social appropriateness). Allen (2006) suggests that the conversational nature of the blog communication coupled with the immediacy of the transmission means there is limited care taken over the construction of the message. In theory this should mean that traditional publishing mediums need not fear as surely readability and professional articles will uphold their echelon and demand. Bloggers value informal conversation, egalitarianism, subjective points of view, and colorful writing over central control, objectivity and filtered prose and as the influx of these stylings overwhelm us, society is becoming blind

The sheer quantity of blogs in cyberspace means that quality control relies on both the passing of time and the commitment of the fashion blogger to slowly build up a publishing track record, much as any news publication does when it starts out. Reputation filters whereby bloggers gain the respect and confidence of readers based on their reputation for accuracy and relevance begin to develop circles of trust in the blogosphere, which then help weed out the undesirable and unpopular ones.

Fashion bloggers benefit from creating an 'ideal user/reader' for their blog similar to the way that fashion labels construct their archetypal consumer through branding and advertising. Allen states that the tyrannical nature of the fashion industry, traditionally communicated through the fashion magazine is now facing the challenge of the oppositional view being put forward by blogs. Consumers are now not being told 'what's hot and what's not' by superior like Vogue Editor Anna Wintour, but being offered and partaking in suggestions by blog cohorts.

We are the broadband, -immediate information now- generation. For retailers it may soon make more sense to advertise on blogs that are getting over 12 000 hits a day versus \$100 000 thousand dollar double page spreads in a print magazine.

Continuing with the discussion of online retailing and ecommerce and blog monetization and seeding. The pursuit of making money from fashion blogs is something that will increase exponentially in the years to come. The total combined audience for the top 50 fashion blogs is over 14 million visitors a month. "What's more these are decided views," says senior Konector analyst, Brett Norval.

"The majority of people accessing these sites have made an active decision to view the page. Not curiosity, not advertising, just genuine interest in the content. Fashion companies can get their brands in front of those targeted consumers from day one, they can then monitor the conversations on a regular basis and gather all the feedback."

Huage notes that the position at the interface between the retail business and the consumer has become ever more important. Fashion buying has an economic function, but it also demands sensitive and detailed cultural knowledge as well as social skills (Huage, 2006). These being skills fashion bloggers have mastered- up to the minute knowledge on designers combined with a broad audience base with whom to engage with socially. This is an audience of consumers who will eventually be purchasing/wearing the designs.

Bloggers are now in a position to take on another role as advertiser and retailers and It may explain why, in recent months, the most popular style blogs have attracted retailers and fashion brands as advertisers. Although part of the appeal of blogs is their amateur free thought style, which is obviously not governed by particular brand allegiance, or so one would think. The spectrum of blog advertising is wide. The spectrum of successful blog advertising is less wide. A Blogger may opt to feature banner ads hyperlinked for click throughs back through to retail online shopping sites. Advertiser clearing houses like Google AdSense can generate choice of advertisers for these types of advertisements, by

placing advertisers onto blog pages with related content. When a reader clicks on a link, the blogger gets a small commission. (Ruth La Ferla, 2005) Retailers are also tapping into the social-networking phenomenon like Facebook, whereby they can 'befriend' the consumer. Although apparently a very person centered approach to convert online contacts into sales, when one befriends a brand name there is hesitancy that it's an advertising trick, and there isn't a real person on the end of the message.

Furthering this, ads are ads, and our consumer culture has gotten very good at shutting out spam and not paying attention to frustrating drop down banners that clog our online experience daily. Bloggers on the other hand are increasingly powerful weapons to advertisers and it is not surprising that affiliate programs and sponsored posts have proved to be a more tactful advertising approach. As far as retailing success go, where the products are sold and what other brands that are alongside them is very important for the brand value. There has to be a tight balancing act between exclusivity and accessibility. Bloggers are retail marketers and advertisers dreams come true, because when is an ad not an ad? When it comes straight from the keyboards of a trusted blogger. The consumer intimacy created with the blog aesthetic is something that big retailers just can't compete with. When you are seeing photos of blogger 'fashion toast' painting her toenails 'tiny taupe' shade from the 'privacy' of her bedroom. The trust and feeling of being privy to something and the appeal of perpetual fresh content is addictive.

Although obviously monetary gains from blogging have seen the role of a blogger rise to something sought after and strive for, [Manolo from Manolo's Shoe Blog, has confirmed he earns a six-figure salary through blogging (Rowe, 2005)] There are however, other successes that have pushed bloggers into newfound stardom. Fashion blogger Romy Neely from blog 'Fashion toast' for example has been picked up by a model management agency and is now the face of American street wear brand RVCA Autumn/Winter 2010 collection; her blog statistics too powerful for the fashion industry to ignore (many of her daily comments hit triple figures). Streetstyle photographers Garance Dore and Scott Schuman 'The Satorialist', have also turned their blogs into further industry opportunities; Scott having photographed two seasons worth of DKNY Jeans campaigns and (although a detrimental twist to my earlier online publishing argument), has also had his blog published into a book, also known as a 'blook'. Garance Dore has been asked to shoot editorial photos for Glamour Italy and guest blogs for online French Vogue, based on her photographic skills seen only via her blog.

Case Studies:

Bryanboy and Marc Jacobs.

Bloggers gain another axis of power again, this time being looked to as stylists, and fashion trend forecasters by the very people they may have originally looked to themselves. The last string on a bloggers bow is to become influences and influencers to the designers they follow and flaunt in their blogs. These style bloggers are becoming powerful brand advocates that fashion houses trust and respond to directly.

Fillipino blogger BryanBoy, who came to notoriety for his enthusiastic approach to all things fashion on bryanboy.com and, consistent with the theory that bloggers are the new celebrities, is now an international fashion commentator visiting festivals and fashion shows around the world. His cyber-musings led for him to be praised as 'a cult read in fashion circles' (Style.com).

BryanBoy's link with Marc Jacobs jumped off the screen in February 2008 when Jacobs created the 'BB bag' in BryanBoy's honor and featured it in his Fall 2008-09 collection. Responding directly to BryanBoy via his blog, Marc Jacobs commented, "I give you a 10 for effort... love your passion for fashion, after all, where would designers be without enthusiasm like yours?"

Conclusion

The Internet has not revolutionized the way we communicate, but the advances in communication technology have facilitated the evolution of our communication practice (Allen, 2006). Fashion blogging has helped to logistically change the fashion landscape and their communication practices. Bloggers are now responsible for how the content is published and offered to the consumer and thus are also the 'gatekeepers' of what things are now being published and suggested to the consumer. With this knowledge comes power, and as the fashion industry continues to move online, there is an amount of certainty that bloggers will hold increasing currency within the marketplace. As Barb Palser suggests, 'The enlightened way to regard the advent of the bloggers would be to accept them as part of an evolving media scene rather than treat them as an invading force.' (Palser, 2007) However I think it is reasonable that given the examples in this discussion they will rise to greater heights and become quite the invading force.

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The Necessity for Social Media Plans in Business Strategies

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Abstract

The integration of social media plans in business and marketing strategies cannot be disregarded anymore; it has become necessary to survive in today's fast moving marketplace. An ordinary website is no longer adequate enough to keep a corporation ahead of competition on the Internet.

Social media can be defined as a mechanism that provides two-way communication; it does not only allow the business to provide information to their consumers, it encourages and enables consumers to interact with the corporation and their associates. In Web 2.0 terms social media is a website that engages consumer generated content. Social media grants many benefits, provided that it is used in the most efficient and appropriate manner that is best suited for a business culture, and also the brand personality the business aspires to portray. Social media can have significant influences on brand awareness and popularity when it is employed in an effective manner. It has also become a popular instrument for gathering data and information for analysis to improve and attain business objectives. Social media is a fast developing tool that corporations are exploiting to provide customer satisfaction, execute sales and marketing strategies and enhance collaboration and product innovation.

Keywords

SOCIAL MEDIA • WEB 2.0 • BRAND STRATEGY • BRAND PERSONALITY • BUSINESS OBJECTIVES
• INFORMATION SHARING • INTERACTIVITY • CUSTOMER SATISFACTION • COLLABORATION •
PRODUCT INNOVATION • SOCIAL NETWORK

Introduction

The influence of social media continues to swell and businesses are finding it difficult to keep up with the fast-moving market without the integration of social media plans in their business and marketing strategies. Traditional media such as newspapers, radio and television are limited in the sense that it only provides one-way communication, but with the rise of social media, businesses are now able to communicate through a many-to-many broadcast model. Social media is a sophisticated broadcast model that enables businesses to interact with their employees, partners, suppliers and most importantly their customers. Social media can be described as an “online tool or platform where individuals are able to share opinions, insights, experiences and perspectives”.⁽¹⁾ In Web 2.0 terms social media is

a website that engages consumer generated content. It is a powerful mechanism that allows businesses to present information to their customers but also encourage them to interact and engage with the business and their online social network. Many companies are finding it critically important to form online communities in order to provide customer satisfaction, execute sales and marketing strategies and enhance collaboration and product innovation. Social media has flooded the Internet around the world and almost every demographic group is connected with it. It is therefore considered a valued tool for businesses that wish to compete and survive in today's competitive and fast-moving market. Despite the size of a social network, the most fundamental aspect of social media would be the level of engagement and the behaviours that take place within a social network. Businesses should use the most efficient and appropriate social media plan that best suits their culture and brand personality. The larger or more complex a corporation is, the greater the need for a well-thought-out social media strategy that can be executed and maintained by all parties involved.

The Benefits of Social Media for Businesses

Social media tools have become a strategy accelerator that businesses are finding necessary to employ in order to survive and compete in today's aggressive marketplace. The key aspect of social media is that businesses do not hold entire control over the published content; instead, the individuals who use the platform have the greatest influence. The power of social media enables anyone to connect and join online conversations without a great effort of investment or personal time. Accessing the network is almost effortless and communication is essentially free. Many individuals around the world are establishing online communities and are actively engaging with others who obtain the same interests; they are all sharing, talking, collaborating, creating and socialising with one another. In saying this, social media is a powerful mechanism that facilitates businesses in connecting with their consumers, build relationships and accomplish their business goals faster than ever before. It has initiated a new revolution of business communication that profoundly influences the way businesses augments customer satisfaction, execute sales and marketing strategies and enhance collaboration and product innovation.

Enhancing Customer Satisfaction with Social Media

Social media strengthens the connection between businesses and their consumer. Businesses are now part of the broader public conversation rather than remaining the core foundation of information for their consumers. They are able to connect with their customers, build relationships, establish trust, share, collaborate, serve and be of

assistance to their customers in a more efficient and inexpensive approach. Constructing online communities can successfully reduce the overall cost of customer support and relationship management. Customer satisfaction is a key element for building strong customer relationships. Businesses are always probing for methods to gratify their consumers and the only way to do this is to offer products and services that satisfy their customer needs, wants and desires. In order keep up with the latest consumer trends, it is vitally important for businesses to stay connected with the conversations their customers are having on the social media platforms. Social media is highly interactive as it generates ongoing conversations between multiple individuals. There are many individuals who tend to share their purchase experience with their online communities. Businesses must remember that every individual is a customer of a product or service, and each and every one of them are conversing with online communities where they are constantly sharing their opinions, insights, experience and perspectives. When a person posts something online, it is automatically available for all web users to see. It is important for businesses to monitor the conversations about their products because it is obvious that one negative feedback from a dissatisfied customer could spread radically and cause a great deal of disruption to the business and its reputation. But in saying that, a business should take this as constructive feedback and use that information to improve their product, satisfy that unhappy customer and find a way to restore the company's reputation. It is important to note that both positive and negative feedbacks are fundamental for a business to improve their degree of customer satisfaction. Every information they gather enables them to improve and better their product and service. A great example is how Starbucks uses their "My Starbuck Idea"⁽⁴⁾ website to collect consumer feedback by directly asking them for their wants. This customised website enables users to submit their suggestions for other Starbucks consumers to vote on and the most popular suggestions are then highlighted and reviewed. Starbucks uses social media to strengthens their campaign, get a better handle on their consumer feedback and are then able to "add a personal touch to coffee."⁽⁵⁾ Customer satisfaction continues to escalate as businesses utilise social media to gather feedback from their consumers. Social media enables businesses to reach their customers rather than wait for the customers to approach them.

Executing Sales and Marketing Strategies with Social Media

Businesses are encouraged to incorporate social media in their sales and marketing strategies. The sophisticated communication model in social media provides businesses valuable information about their consumers as it collects and distributes information about each connected individual. Unlike the inefficient push marketing strategy used

in traditional marketing, social media demonstrates the power of pull marketing with extremely large audiences. Facebook, Twitter and Blogs are only three examples of social media platforms where businesses can exploit pull-marketing techniques online. The key to pull marketing is to encourage people to talk about a product and persuade others to purchase it. Viral marketing or word-of-mouth is the most powerful form of marketing because people are more inclined to listen to their peers and friends before they trust what a salesman says or recommends. As consumers converse about products, businesses are able to listen and observe the feedback from their valued customers and target those group that may fall in the same category. The great thing about the two-way communication model in social media is that it makes it possible for businesses to interact with these customers and directly request for their needs, wants and desires in relation to their product. Because social media enables the building of relationship between the business and its consumers, it makes it much easier to extract consumer feedback in real-time and collect customer profile information. This generates a database of potential customers and in doing so, drives revenue and increase market share. The database of potential customers is a valuable asset for businesses because it allows them to target specific individuals who want their products and there is almost no need to promote a product to someone who needs or desired it. For example, the advertisements on Facebook are displayed according to the information posted on a user's profile – if a user was to change their status to 'engaged' a range of wedding advertisement will ideally display in their advertisement panel as soon as they login to their Facebook account. Advertising with social networks is actually effective because social media is regarded as modest advertising.

"In a 2008 survey by Razorfish, 76% of the 1,006 people surveyed said they didn't mind seeing advertisement when logged into Facebook, MySpace and other social media sites. Razorfish also found that 40% of the respondents said they made purchases after seeing the advertisements."⁽²⁾

So rather than casting their product to the entire world, social media has enabled businesses to target specific groups that may be interested in what the businesses has to offer. An effective social media plan enables businesses to expose their brand to communities and groups that are interested. Social media marketing does not necessarily need to be expensive; in actual fact, social media requires far less monetary investment than traditional media. If businesses choose to embrace the web and its new technologies, they do not require an immense marketing budget. Sometimes creating a funny or original video on YouTube can help make the sales. The structure of media has changed and businesses need to learn how to structure their sales and marketing strategies to fit

the new revolution. The opportunities are vast and overwhelming, but the expenses for marketing can be used more efficiently than ever before. Businesses are still required to plan and develop well-thought-out corporate sales and marketing strategies, but it is important to take into account the social media groundswell. They are encouraged to incorporate a community-building component into their strategies in order to adapt to the change in how customers, partners, suppliers and competitors are interacting.⁽³⁾ Leading edge businesses that take advantage of social media will find that they are spending less on marketing and collecting more in return.

Using Social Media to Enhance Collaboration and Product Innovation

Business realise that examining the social interactions between their customers, experts, employees, partners and competitors are most important for collaborating ideas for the development of new innovative products. During a product development cycle, businesses have the benefit of interacting and collaborating with their consumers to collect views and opinions as they establish and design products. Consumer input during the product development cycle can assist businesses to develop new and improved products best designed to benefit consumer requirements. Prior to social media, businesses based their products on what they believed would satisfy their customers; therefore, they were based on assumptions and no genuine or recent information. Today there are a range of social media tools available to assist businesses in monitoring customer feedback and enables them to observe their customer's experience after their purchase. Twitter Search is a great example because it enables businesses to monitor and keep track of consumer conversations. Collecting such information facilitates businesses to understand their customer's needs and want and can therefore aid them in developing products and services that will resolve their customer's desires. It is important to note that both positive and negative feedbacks are fundamental for a business to improve the quality of their product line. Each information and data they gather can be used in the product development cycle for generating innovate products and services that the population demands. Communities are able to contribute to the product development cycle and achieve common goal together through the ongoing interactivity of social media.

How Should Businesses Start to Use Social Media?

Many businesses are aware that entering the social media arena is crucial for administering a successful business, but many are unsure of where to begin. Before stepping into the social media environment, businesses are advised to start small, think big and scale quickly. They should plan their online brand personality then set up a profile, observe

the activities online and listen to the conversations before flooding the social network with information. This initial process enables businesses to target the individuals and communities they wish to connect with. It is important for organisations to understand its culture and its willingness to initiate social media activities. The business culture can have a profound impact on the overall strategy, as there may be privacy policies and corporate guidelines that might need to be carefully considered. To be successful, an organisation's social strategy and presence needs to correspond with their culture and values. Culture and values are imperative issues that businesses are required to factor into their social media strategy because such strategies need to be customised to fit the business and their vision. There are definitely both positive and negative characteristics of social media, but the benefits far outweigh the risks. The most important point about social media is that everything accelerates, so if a negative comment is made about an organisation it could rapidly spread through the social networks and cause an amount of grief to the company. But on the contrary, if businesses were not out there to detect these negative statements they would not be aware of what is being said and will lose the chance to respond. Engaging and responding to criticism in a respectful manner will in fact win customer loyalty. Social media allows businesses to inform their consumers in real-time of how they are reacting to their activities and feedback. Being able to process and access constant information make it possible for businesses to prevent a negative story from going viral. When a business decides to enter the social media environment they ought to learn the fundamental and just experiment with what they believe works best for them. Experimenting and combining different social media platforms may be the best solution for a business when searching for the most powerful and effective media. But it is important to know that businesses have to be flexible because social media tools and activities are constantly evolving and new things are being introduced everyday. Businesses must pay attention, partake in conversations and observe the nature of social media as it continues to advance.

Conclusion

The social media phenomenon is here to stay and will continue to have an impact on business decisions. Customers are demanding evermore interaction. Conversations and information about businesses and their products are continuing to circulate the online social networks and there is no way of avoiding the social media revolution. Social media is not going to vanish and for that reason and businesses cannot ignore the necessity to formulate an effective social media plan in their business strategy. Social media brings with it the power of community as people share, talk, collaborate, create and socialise. It is a powerful mechanism that allows businesses to connect with individuals and groups to

create relationships and reach business goals better than ever before. It has introduced a new revolution of business communication that heavily influences the way businesses augment customer satisfaction, execute sales and marketing strategies and enhance collaboration and product innovation. The integration of social media plans in business and marketing strategies cannot be disregarded anymore, it has become necessary to survive in today's aggressive and fast moving marketplace.

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