

Title: Social networks and the space of bookselling

Bio: Eben Joseph Muse is a researcher at Bangor University specializing in the nature of space and place in a digital age, UK. Associate editor of the Journal of Gaming and Virtual Worlds (e.muse@bangor.ac.uk).

Abstract

This paper will present the initial findings of a study into the strategies and tactics used by booksellers to create an on-line identity as a public space of ideas, culture and especially community. Algorithms and procedures of a social network platform shape the norms of behavior, of connectivity and of content on that platform. In other words, the strategies and tactics that facilitate the practice of everyday life in a shop are unlikely to be as effective in an on-line environment. Laura J. Miller has documented the attempts of booksellers to transform their retail establishments into "vital community institution[s]" (1999), a process used by independent bookstores. They used traditions from the 18th century printing houses as a way to compete with the chains and superstores that arose in the second half of the twentieth century.

The rise of on-line book selling that has been led by Amazon and the ebook has forced independent bookstores and bookseller associations to rely heavily on this discourse and commodification of public space, while at the same time requiring them to re-articulate it in the on-line spaces of their web sites and social networks. This articulation of the space on-line, in text and images, provides an opportunity to read the text of community; the creation and maintenance of Facebook pages and web sites requires the store owners to inscribe an identity which previously was often informal and emergent. As they move it from a geographic social sphere to a virtual one they must remediate themselves, often needing to server two communities and facing sometimes divided loyalties.

This research project aims to understand how booksellers perceive the social network space and their attitudes toward both social networking and the discourse of community. The study is being conducted through critical analysis of the Facebook pages and web sites maintained by independent Welsh bookstores. The analysis will be informed by interviews with bookstore owners or managers. The research is being conducted in partnership with the Welsh Books Council.

Title: “What are you reading?”: unraveling social networking sites on books

Bio: Renata Prado Alves Silva is a Professor at the Faculty Estacio de Sa of Juiz de Fora, Brazil (renata.prado@estacio.br).

Abstract

The use of social networking sites is growing in the world, pointing to a worldwide trend in the interest of people to communicate and exchange all kinds of information in social platforms. The type of social capital present in social networking sites is due to both the ownership of the system by social actors as the characteristics of the tool (the site itself). Apart from influential sites like Facebook, there are specialized, niche or theme social networking sites, which provide new means of expressions and connection, mixing private, public and commercial spaces to exchange information. The aim of this study is to present social networking sites about books, identifying and classifying its role in the discovery and selection of books as well as its ability to converge readers, writers and publishers. This research is motivated by the need to understand the role of online sociability in the discovery and selection of books as well as its ability to connect readers, authors and publishers in promoting reading habits and book choices.

We start from an exploratory research focused on the most significant social networking sites devoted to books such as Goodreads, Shelfari, Librarything, Bookish, Anobii and Skoob. These are the sites analyzed in this study. This choice assumes that the relevance and influence of these sites is linked to its popularity and its position in the world ranking of websites by number of hits. Through the survey of the characteristics of social networking sites about books, also called social cataloging platforms, we will draw a frame of reference to determine, through a comparative analysis, what are the similarities and differences between the studied sites, intending thereby better understand the object of study. The interfaces of the presented social networking sites on books were analyzed, and its features were related in order to ascertain what are the main features offered by these sites to their users, as well as specific tools that aim to encourage reading habits. This analysis also sought at first to recognize the features of these sites and then point to their presence or absence in each of the systems studied. The preliminary results of the analysis point to the fact that social networking sites about books have specific characteristics with regard to their tools, contents and forms of use, each having similarities and differences in the promotion of reading through sociability in the web.

Title: Social Media and the Creative Industries

Bio: Jan Simons is Associate Professor in Digital Culture at the Department of Media Studies, University of Amsterdam, The Netherlands. Head of Creative Industries Research Center Amsterdam, part of the Faculty of Humanities at UvA (J.A.A.Simons@uva.nl).

Abstract

Computers and the Internet have had a tremendous transformative impact on every aspect of life in just a few decades. These effects created a public image of computer and Internet pioneers as Schumpeterian creative entrepreneurs: the ‘wild spirits’ who drive innovation and economic development. This figure has much contributed to the now celebrated image of the creative entrepreneur that has become a trope in the creative industries policies of many Western countries. This public image of the creative entrepreneur has effects of its own. It suggests that it only takes a ‘killer app’ to join the ranks of Jobs, Gates and Zuckerberg, and it reinforces a techno-deterministic slant in creative industries policies. Today’s creative entrepreneur looks more like a technological – and financial -tinkerer than an artist.

Social transformation is not just brought about by heroic entrepreneurs nor does it consist of a one-off, deliberately orchestrated dramatic overhaul. It comes from multiple sites and interventions, is incremental, tentative, contingent, and emergent and produced by the uses made of, the meanings ascribed to, and experiences afforded by technological devices and infrastructures. Here is or ought to be the realm of value creation by creative industries in a cultural, experiential and economic sense. Social media provide creative workers with a field for experimentation and research. They are hired by corporations to assist in developing public relations and advertisement strategies on mainstream SNS’s. Along these SNS’s there is a wealth of games and apps developed by self-employed designers or small companies (SME’s) that experiment with new ways of building social networks, making contacts, communicating with ‘friends’, accessing local information, annotating sites, etc. Some of these apps are more successful than others, but together these are likely to incrementally and often surreptitiously transform social and cultural habits and attitudes.

Creative industries workers set up digital networks to share and exchange information with peers, make themselves visible to potential commissioners, and to develop new ways of (co-) working. SNS’s are not only the (virtual) results of their deliverables, but are also being developed as an integral part of their production process. Finally, it is to a large extent up to the creative industries to experiment with viable business models for social apps and games.

In spite of the spectacular sums for which SNS's have been sold lately, nobody knows as yet what their real value is. It is up to the creative industries to figure that out.