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Hermes, J.; Koch, K.

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Joke Hermes, Karel Koch

Participant design: towards sustainable marketing in an age of conflicting media logics

Summary

The media are an integral part of how advanced societies are controlled. After almost a century of 'broadcasting', a new media logic can be seen to have emerged. It is not centralized, nor does it appear to depend on manipulative power (such as the priming and framing of news and thereby the agenda of political discussion; or 'advertising' as a way to influence consumers to buy particular products). It is the logic of 'networking' that is not about producers and consumers but about redaction and multipliers.[1] Media content in this logic may in an archeological sense be seen as having an author or a point of origin – but the routes it takes and the way in which it spreads offers new means of community building, identity construction and meaning making which are of much greater interest. In this paper we take a double perspective (business and critical) to assess how the old and the new media logics are both relevant today and what terms are best used to work with and in the media, and to reflect on them. While producers and consumers are the senders and receivers of broadcasting in the age of the nation-state, networking logic has little use for these terms: it also moves away from marketing terms such as eyeballs and stickiness to terms such as spreadability and multiplication and redaction. The perspective of what used to be known as 'qualitative audience research' can prove useful to innovative and sustainable marketing and to critical reflection on media culture. Here its restyled form will be called participant design. It suggests that strong marketing respects and co-opts potential customers in much the same way that relevant media criticism is, not given from an external and possibly paternalist but from an inside perspective that highly values self-reflexivity.[2]

Introduction

What can we expect to happen in and with the media in the world of tomorrow? The current situation is, to say the least, paradoxical. The social media have been introduced successfully as community platforms for individuals. Twitter and Facebook can be seen as 'me-media' and as new and successful 'light communities'. The cloud has become the new 'grand storage' which suggests enormous faith in technology and social stability on the part of institutions, companies and individuals while only a little paranoia is needed to see how security protocols, and the uneven division of technological know-how are major threats to the current equilibrium. We seek reassurance (nothing presumably will get lost once it is stored in the cloud) by turning a blind eye to the greater risk. Institutions, companies, countries and individuals are now storing such huge amounts of information moreover that there is no return to a situation in which everyone keeps to their own vault. Whether small of big players, when it comes to media and information technology we have all become individualist communitarians or high-risk safety-seekers. The balance is precarious. We value our freedom by tying ourselves more tightly into more and more social networks. The only obvious rationality here is that human beings like to make irrational choices.

Likewise when it comes to the media broadly, we see that the development of new media does not destroy older media (as Bolter and Grusin already noted), although old media change as a result of

1 Grant McCracken, "'Consumers' or 'Multipliers': A New Language for Marketing?" post at This Blog Sits at the Intersection of Anthropology and Economics, November 10, 2005, http://cultureby.com/2005/11/consumers_or_mu.html

2 All references to websites last seen on April 22, 2012.

the introduction of new ones.[3] Broadcasting, after a century of dominance has changed in cross-media activity that allows for a limited amount of non-scripted interaction. Interestingly, the oldest broadcasting institutions (the radio and television broadcasting organizations), were always, in a way, narrowcasters, catering to specific audience groups, while the commercial broadcasters - allowed entrance to the system in the Netherlands in the late 1980s-, were broadcasters in a sense truer to the word and appealed to wider audiences. Both however, have always operated from strict control over what was transmitted, and a very limited range of options for those receiving media content. The current state of technology, and the availability of shared platforms via the internet, as well as an increasing level of media literacy and producerly competences have undermined the monopoly of the old media institutions. Audiences (derived from the Latin for 'listening') and consumers (which also comes from Latin and translates as devouring) are hardly adequate terms for how individuals and groups use the media.

At Inholland's LABM we are interested in the entire ecology of the creative industries, with some emphasis on what used to be called 'media and communication'. In this paper we will inquire into the social and media developments that we feel are crucial to take into account when training young media professionals to work in the creative industries, either as a free-lancer, as entrepreneur or as employee. We differentiate between the magic of the media (the entertainment industry, the star system, our 15 minutes of fame, the reference most of us in daily life still have for established mass media institutions such as television and the press), critical awareness of the social consequences of new media systems and developments and professional reflexivity: how does what I do as a media professional make a difference and who will benefit from that difference in what way? We do not value either a critical or a business perspective but believe a young professional needs to be 'fluent' in both.

A. The new world of internet-based media now

Media content is no longer exclusively 'owned' by identifiable companies and individuals. Individuals use the storage capacities of Gmail or iCloud. By using Gmail or iCloud we say: *In Google/Apple we trust*. We surrender our digital existence to Apple or Google. Companies and institutions likewise are moving into cloud computing to allow for new regimes of working and maintenance of archival and current resources. This in itself is a development that has enormous consequences for work cultures: the always-and-everywhere available employee will need respite from work pressure or adapt to a new mode of digital slavery which in The Netherlands is also known as *Het Nieuwe Werken*,a highly relevant concept to the authors of this paper who are writing it on a rather nice Sunday afternoon. From a management perspective GPS-based control systems will be of interest as will 'light' work-related games that ensure a sustainable work logic. Employees may well find new ways of resisting work pressure, or, at the very least, will need to find new partners in achieving ever-higher company goals.

Likewise, the consequences of cloud computing for public culture are enormous. The shift to streaming video has opened up a host of archive (from public broadcasting to museum collections) that extends into media-user controlled domains of bootlegged content but also into commercial for-hire or for-sale types of content that is immediately available. A now lost short notice in a morning newspaper speaks of a recent experiment in Norway that makes Norwegian literature immediately available via internet to all Norwegians (March 2012). New forms of usage of controlled circuit surveillance cameras (cctv) are another example that show the other side to these developments:

> *A social media surveillance assemblage is composed of multiple agencies taking advantage of a staggering amount of personal information. As well, information on social media becomes even more trans-contextual. Haggerty and Ericsson point to how CCTV footage becomes material for entertainment. Social media further exemplify that kind of reconfiguration, as personal exchanges become material for investigations. Social media also furthers a "disappearance of disappearance". Abstaining from Facebook is a diminishing possibility when users upload information about peers who avoid an official presence on the*

3 Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin (2000) Remediation. Understanding New Media. Cambridge MA: MIT Press. See: http://mitpress.mit.edu/catalog/item/default.asp?ttype=2&tid=3468 (contents and sample chapters)

> *site. [...] A converging audience enables a convergence of social contexts. Personal relations are more closely linked to commerce and the workplace. Henry Jenkins (2006) describes convergence as content flows that are more liberated and volatile, notably through the rise of user-generated content. This imagery supports a leak-based view of Facebook. While information leaks were formerly exceptional and unforeseen events, Facebook's exponential increase of leaks amounts to a kind of convergence of social contexts.*[4]

On the agenda we see a new question breaking the surface: where is content located, who controls is, what does centralized content storage imply for the input and possibilities to use the stored materials for the general public, for different types of users (entrepreneurial, political activists, governments, institutional users but also for researchers and academics or indeed marketeers). CCTV controls and disciplines us, and now also provides us with entertainment. Not an easy mix to evaluate.

The 'old' versus the 'new' internet

The 'old' internet (90s) was characterized by a free and, at times, revolutionary spirit: it knew no hierarchy and was anarchist to the bone. No rules applied to how content and knowledge were used: cut 'n paste was perfectly OK. Knowledge belonged to all, could be free-floating and was not so much unimportant or low in value but certainly low in consequences. As a result there was little sense of responsibility other than to maintain the open cut 'n paste happy-go-lucky culture. Collage, amateurism and intuitive use are all key words. A minority of discordant voices issued advance warnings: there would be consequences to internet culture, its freedom might be illusionary. The freedom to reinvent identities might shortly come to an end.

Andrew Keen (*Cult of the amateur* 2007)[5] is worried about the way in which amateurs and the user-generated content they produce will ultimately break for instance the newspaper and professional news gathering. At worst, internet's vast spread will allow for witch hunts with immeasurably graver impacts than any type of slander that came before. The internet after all does not process and compost waste: almost all content will remain available forever. Others, such as Geert Lovink (*Dark fiber* 2001) point to new types of disciplining and identity politics that internet-based 'media' give rise to. At a recent seminar Lovink suggests that we might want to be 'unliked' and set free from the controls of today's social media which are very different from the earlier massive online multi-player role playing games (MMORPGs).[6]

The central idea of the 'old' internet is that experiments are good – we do what we want to do, because we can. If we like we reinvent ourselves and experience with our identity. The 'new' internet (in the new millennium) has become serious business, whether it regards politics, money (advertising income; online sales) or reputations. Political interests have become enmeshed with internet as a domain and internet as a range of platform and storage technologies. Although formal politics were recognized in the period of the 'old' internet, these were fringe politics, mostly critical left-wing but also minor fractions of right-wing groups could be found (Hermes, 2006)[7]. Today's internet has a vastly different relation to politics. Political voices from across the board feel they need to be heard: the Dutch prime-minister tweets. Obama's victory in the presidential elections in the USA in 2008 is often quoted as a starting point for this new internet era. Small donations became a major part of his campaign funding. They were raised via email-lists and other internet means. All in all, the conclusion is warranted that internet today is a domain in which, not only amateur but also highly professional

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4 Trottier, Daniel. (2011) A Research Agenda for Social Media Surveillance, Fast Capitalism, 8(1). Retrieved from http://www.uta.edu/huma/agger/fastcapitalism/8_1/trottier8_1.html. (Downloaded april 21, 2012)

5 Partly the book is available online: http://www.amazon.com/The-Cult-Amateur-Internet-Killing/dp/0385520808#reader_0385520808

6 Unlike Us #2, March 2012, Amsterdam: Understanding social media monopolies and their alternatives. See: http://networkcultures.org/wpmu/unlikeus/2-amsterdam/

7 Joke Hermes 'Hidden debates' in Javnost - the public, Vol 13 (2006), no. 4, pp. 27-44 (http://www.inholland.nl/NR/rdonlyres/B34065B0-BDDD-4F9C-8784-BE1230E494DF/0/HiddenDebates.pdf) or Hermes and Adolfsson, 2007: http://www.inholland.nl/NR/rdonlyres/C44C3CAE-ECB0-41A5-8912-221DBA56D308/0/MultiplerealitiesofculturalcitizenshipPDF

reputations are built and broken, in which racism, social criticism, entertainment, marketing and news all go hand in hand.

Whereas the old internet can be characterized as 'cut 'n paste' , the new internet is much more 'shift 'n shape'. Internet use needs to be strategic, aimed at building a desired image or influencing public opinion. Internet has become an integrated part of several policy and market-relevant fields, such as political marketing and communication. But most of all internet has changed the older authoritarian relation between senders and receivers. As MacCracken has it: media users have become multipliers.[8] What we like we retweet, or broadcast in our own little networks, whether a Facebook group or an old-fashioned email list. The motto of the multipliers is, according to Jenkins and co-authors (C3 white paper)[9]: if it doesn't spread, it's dead. The paper deals with how value is created in what they call a 'spreading marketplace'. The issue involved here is whether it still makes sense to query the media for how they (either or not) manage to manipulate us, and are able to make us think or behave in certain ways, or whether we need to focus on what kind of media content spreads and what does not. And, thirdly, whether we need not revisit our ideas about how media content has meaning. Context is not only a relevant word for specifying how a particular media text may have meaning at a particular moment in time and so on, context may well be what shifts and shapes media texts, which makes transcontextuality a central concern.

The Brat Pack Mashup *– The original dance-scene images of The Breakfast Club (John Hughes, 1985) surfaces in 2009 on YouTube remixed by Avoidantconsumer with the typical '80s retro track Lisztomania (2009) of the French band Phoenix[10]. Brooklyn-based artist collective Goddamncobras respond and literally localize the Brat Pack Mashup (BPM) by "covering" the dance-scene themselves in a Brooklyn setting[11]. In this media circuit (Hall and Du Gay, 1996) they are users and participants in the flow of the web, but also co-designers and knowledge-builders via teaching, learning and research. This mashup is the start of a long list of more than fifty Brat Pack Mashup videos produced in local setting around the world – that build on knowledge of Hollywood history ('Brat Pack' refers to a group of young actors in the 1980s) and media production and criticism. In terms of spreadable media this series of videos is a typical example. But the BPM is adopted and remixed in other contexts as well. By Curtin University (Australia) student thecrtlfreak to visualize how viral get spread by social media[12]; by Mr. Kimmi in Kansas (USA) to introduce remix video to his 7th grade pupils by setting up a Skype-call with the Goddamcobras[13]; by republican lobbyist Julian Sanchez (Cato Institute) to plea for remix as traditional folk culture[14] and finally by Harvard professor Lawrence Lessig to plea for Creative Commons in Brazil[15]. All of them shift and shape the BPM into their local context and at the same time invite the greater BPM community to spread and respond, by posting their remix on the Internet.*

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8 Grant McCracken, "'Consumers' or 'Multipliers': A New Language for Marketing?" post at This Blog Sits at the Intersectiion of Anthropoly and Economics, November 10, 2005, http://cultureby.com/2005/11/consumers_or_mu.html. Quoted in C3 White paper: Henry Jenkins, Xiaochang Li, and Ana Dom, http://convergenceculture.org/research/Spreadability_doublesidedprint_final_063009.pdf quoting Grant MacCracken (2005), see footnote 1.

9 Courtney E. Martin, "From Young Adult Book Fans to Wizards of Change", post at The New York Times online, March 12, 2012, http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/03/21/from-young-adult-book-fans-to-wizards-of-change/?emc=eta1

10 http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dq741YqlP7w Original remix by Avoidantconsumer is removed by Youtube because of copyright infringment. This is a link to one of many responses to that removal: Youtube users keep on publishing it.

11 http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U1ywFh2AZLg

12 http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uqJfdcV77m4

13 http://vimeo.com/15367748

14 http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4BZ06Kwbi5s

15 http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TadjlMDQdG4

Henry Jenkins (*Convergence Culture*, 2006) predicts a major battle around creativity and rights. One of his examples concern the many fans of Harry Potter. Fans were prosecuted legally by Warner (holder of film and image rights) for using Harry Potter images and terms on their own website. The more clever company builds a relationship with highly vocal prosumers (e.g. Jeff Jarvis, *What would Google do*, 2010), mutual benefits are a distinct possibility.[16] The learning curve is bound to continue upwards: the newest generation Harry Potter fans shift and shape using HP in such a way that they have become politically active as The Harry Potter Alliance.[17]

Shifting, shaping: new internet-related strategies, or more accurately media-related strategies can be found in the world of entertainment (fiction and non-fiction) and in the worlds of teaching and research and in those of politics and journalism. Here the interplay between journalism and transmedia is of interest (see the work of Mark Deuze on 'liquid journalism').[18] Again, in the same way that our old markers for producers and consumers are no longer valid, it is more difficult to ascertain what might be quality news, what might be 'true' facts and productive interpretations? Can we, and do we want to hold on to strong notions of truth? When it comes to human rights for instance, that would be preferable over the alternative. On the other hand: truth, or perhaps knowledge, has long been and still is a powerful weapon of inclusion and exclusion.

One of the formats to become strong in times of the 'old' internet is the blog. It was initially felt to be a major competitor to 'old news institutions' as a vehicle of civic journalism. [19] Today's expectations should be a little more temperate. We can expect the 'traditional' blog to transform to more image, more collage and shorter text units that are more easily used on mobile media – but mostly they appear to make room for the shorter and faster tweet as a news carrier. Whether the blog will remain as a reflexive format remains to be seen. We may well come to call what used to be essays in current affairs journals and opinion weeklies 'blog' and 'vlog'.

In as far as there is a trend it is towards faster, shorter and more humour – rather than towards more content. Counterexamples such as Kony 2012, a documentary that went viral and that was neither short nor humorous but shocking, point to how a 'trend' is an oversimplified image. In as far as predicting trends makes sense then, we are bound to see technology develop towards a range of control functions (both of populations, for governments and other institutions and for the use of individuals who may want to follow their children or start domestic appliances while physically elsewhere). Whether these possibilities will be used in open and democratic ways or whether they will be disciplinary and restraining remains to be seen. Most probably both strains will develop further alongside one another. Also, the strongest forms of control that will develop will have us disciplining ourselves. Because we believe in ourselves, -these are after all individualist times-, we are attuned to resources that help us be stronger, better, smarter or better looking. All these resources depend on forms of self-disciplining. If we continue to believe in 'truth' and 'scientific evidence' this too will be a non-government produced means to control populations: via policy instruments but also via popular media advice.[20] Even in our entertainment we train ourselves to be workers of the future: monitoring the controls in World of Warcraft is a good way of acting swiftly on multiple sources of information and to work in a team. When we network the former divide between our public and private lives becomes so vague as to be non-existent: today's friends could be tomorrow's partners, clients, customers. At the very least we work on our self-presentation and decide how we want others to perceive us.

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16 Available on googlebooks: http://books.google.nl/books/about/What_Would_Google_Do.html?id=rA-DNwAACAAJ&redir_esc=y

17 Courtney E. Martin, "From Young Adult Book Fans to Wizards of Change", post at The New York Times online, March 12, 2012, http://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/03/21/from-young-adult-book-fans-to-wizards-of-change/?emc=eta1

18 Mark Deuze (2006) 'Liquid journalism' in Political Communication report 16 (1), available online: http://frank.mtsu.edu/~pcr/1601_2005_winter/roundtable_Deuze.htm

19 Dan Gilmor (2004) 'We the media. The rise of citizen journalists' in National Civic Review 93 (3), pages 58–63.

20 See Sean Mitchell (1999) Governmentality. Power and rule in modern societies. London: Sage

B. Media of the future

Will social media still be hot in 3 to 5 years from now? Will they be 'hotter' or more integrated in our everyday lives? Today, so much is clear, they are very present. Old media, such as newspapers write about the social media, popular television programmes such as the prime time VARA television show *De wereld draait door* (*DWDD*) imitates them by showcasing Youtube and other audiovisual materials that viewers have found on the net.[21] Institutions, governments and commercial enterprise are all wondering how best to use the newest social media. Facebook and Twitter are often named as examples. A host of 'how to' books have been published. They offer 'golden rules' and portraits of these new media, the media in general and what the meaning of these new media might be from the perspective of audiences.[22] By using the perspective of users (ranging from the student user, the home user to the professional user) these books make clear what the value is of a non-institutionalised perspective. To use the new social media convincingly, it needs to be in tune with audience, consumer or citizen experience and sense of these media. A critical audience perspective in research then becomes an obvious route to how to use and evaluate the new social media, and also, possibly, the best route to future media development, both regarding technology, usability and content.

The use of critical audience research as a perspective may come as something of a surprise (critical research has tended not to care much for administrative or commercial needs). It is not a tradition that excels in providing hard figures and facts. It has however built extensive expertise in making sense of audience experience and processes of meaning making that include the pleasures that media have to offer to those using them. Such pleasures are incremental to whether or not new media, or new technologies will 'catch on'.

The audience perspective is an insider perspective that starts from daily practices of media use. The network logic, it is clear is one that shifts away from older broadcast authority (You Must See This and nothing much else will be made available), to a logic of courting: there is plenty on offer after all and all media content has to vie for attention. Apart from courting and the family of metaphors it conjures up, we need to adjust from push (broadcast) to pull (network) media. We may even have to give up on recently introduced terms such as stickiness because they themselves are stuck in broadcast logic. Stickiness needs to make room for spreadability and plasticity and transcontextuality. This is not to suggest that there are no differences between institutional and individual users-producers: the playing field has changed but is hardly level. Some communities of content spreaders are far more powerful and effective than others. Of interest is how the different types of use 'afforded' by media texts still is a one-way street: politics turns into journalism and may turn into cabaret. The other way is less likely and only in terms of restrictions and restraint (can the prime minister be satirized in a cartoon? The Danish cartoon incident). Old-style, broadcast-type authorities will, from time to time assert themselves. Children and the media are a case in point: ranging from good parenting to the war on child pornography.

The mix of broadcast and network regimes requires new forms of research and awareness for the media critic and the media professional. Cooperation and co-ownership (sustainable market research) beats old-fashioned surveying and advertising every day. Surveys have dramatically low response, and while we can measure brand recall it remains difficult to see the extent in which advertising converts viewers into buyers. Sustainable market research like media criticism can and must be relevant and contextualized in meaningful ways: they need to become more open practices that allow

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21 Full episodes are on 'uitzending gemist' websites, on the VARA's Dutch public broadcasting site but also on YouTube and torrent sites: thepiratebay.se/torrent/7181221/De.Wereld.Draait.Door.12.04.2012.NL.x264-SHOWGEMiST: it is content that spreads widely.

22 T.P. Bakker & P. Bakker (2011). Handboek Nieuwe Media; Digitale Technologieën begrijpen en gebruiken. Amsterdam: Kluwer. Koelewijn, Huib (2011) Twitteren op je werk. Amsterdam: Kluwer. enz.

for the input of future spreaders and buyers. From the business perspective this will require new models of calculating cost and income: Anderson's 'long tail' is a strong example.[23]

Apart from transferring to courting, an insider perspective and recognition of long tail possibilities, the option of radical recontextualisation can also be used in more ways than it is now. Currently, the popular public television show Wie is de Mol has transmedialised (cross media: print campaign, the show itselves links to radio programmes and a website, that offers extra information and, subsequently extended gameification). The jump to make would be further use of the brand (*Wie-is-de-Mo*l trips) but why not turn *Wie is de Mol* into a radical format to understands politics and journalism, The show deals in evaluation of limited amounts of information and character assessment: quite close to what various forms of political journalism do. This would constitute a deep remix. Professionals who would want to try and undertake such a remake of what used to be a broadcast logic programme would need to be design thinkers and open networkers, willing to invest in a whole new type of partnerships to make such a transcontextualised format work. It is doubtful that such a thing will happen. It goes against the responsibility felt by professionals who operate in broadcast logic, and it is the wrong direction in broadcast's one way street: entertainment cannot become journalism easily.

If it were to happen, it would also mean a deep rewriting of professional identity. Not only would the public media professional be asked to work according to broadcast rules of public responsibility, they are also required to open up their identities to entire new groups of participants and co-owners. A near impossible feat to achieve and therefore exactly the kind of challenge that 'governmentality' poses. A challenge after all is what a true professional loves best. The very mentality required of a professional will make her or him retrain and discipline themselves.

Media criticism and marketing face like challenges. Both would like to have a sense of quality, and of what would be public goods and strong brands. What they get are powerful communities that hold an uncanny power to break what were thought to be unbreakable brand names, Witness how telephone producer Nokia today is in dire straits. Sustainability will continue to be at war with commodification – and quite possibly a new set of moral codes will develop if given half a chance. Corporate players may well intervene before this happens and look for short-term control rather than long-term brand allegiance.

Although something of a jump: the same applies to teaching and learning. Like today's marketers, companies and journalists, the modern teacher needs to be a multi-media performer in tune with a new culture of learning (Thomas and Seely Brown, 2011) that others have dubbed connected learning.[24] The challenge here is to be both a coach and an expert. Sustainable marketing invests in these forms without entirely leaving older, authoritative and manipulative models behind. The trick is not to mix the two and to take into account that: playing fields have leveled (spread only those ideas you feel are really worth spreading; use the long tail and its endless storage and accessibility possibilities but also be aware of the dangers this poses), and work towards the translatability between platforms and languages. Meanwhile, participant design provides one of the best ways to learn how to listen for what matters.

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24 Connected Learning is a collection of offline and online research and network activities initiated by (amongst others) Mimi Ito, David Theo Goldberg, Katie Salen and Howard Rheingold. See: http://connectedlearning.tv , http://clrn.dmlhub.net/ and http://dmlcentral.net/

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