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HAL Id: hal-01054801
https://inria.hal.science/hal-01054801

Submitted on 8 Aug 2014

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Virtual Technologies have enabled us all to become publishers and broadcasters. The world of information has become saturated with a multitude of opinions, and opportunities to express them. Track 2 "Virtual Technologies and Social Shaping" of the 9th Conference on Human Choice and Computers (HCC9) explores some of the issues that have arisen in this new information society, how we are shaped by it, and how we shape it, through i) two papers addressing issues of identity on social networks (Pearson and Burmeister), ii) two papers about the glut of information now available on the web and strategies for dealing with it (Lenarcic et al. and Westwood), and finally iii) a paper on the tricky problem of virtual property theft (Patterson et al.).

In the first pair of papers, Erika Pearson's "Making a Good (Virtual) First Impression: The use of visuals in online impression management and creating identity performances" argues that visual elements are becoming an increasingly important component of identity performance on social networking sites. Working from a narrative approach to identity, this paper explores how images on SNS are used both as part of an impression management strategy to present identity, and as signs that others on the site can read and interpret as they develop an understanding of the identity of others. Drawing on interview data conducted with users of the Livejournal SNS, this paper argues for a growing visual literacy among users of social networking sites. Oliver Burmeister, meanwhile, in "Virtuality improves the well being of seniors through increasing social interaction" argues that virtual social interaction amongst seniors is strengthened through face-to-face contact. While confirming previous studies that have shown the strengthening of virtual friendships result from physical meetings, this study also showed that virtual face-to-face meetings have a similar benefit. As more seniors around the world are encouraged to stay at home longer, rather than enter institutional care, virtual sociability is being shown to provide the necessary social inclusion benefits for particularly mental well being, that has been identified in psychological and sociological studies of seniors.

The democratisation of the web brought about by the social networking phenomenon and the associated web 2.0 tools enabling easy web publishing for the masses not only brought about the blogosphere, but additionally the phenomenon of 'dead' blogs, and the primacy of search – and its greatest purveyor, Google – in the day-to-day use of the web. The first of these issues is explored by John Lenarcic and Pradipta Sarkar in their paper, "The Tragedy of the Virtual Commons as manifested in the Death of Blogs." The life span of weblogs is investigated with reference to Lanham's view of the "Economics of Attention" and Hardin's conception of the "Tragedy of the Commons." It is advanced that the unfettered buildup of inactive blogs is leading to a surfeit of information that effectively disables potential readers due to an excess of choice. One factor indicating healthy activity in a blog is

postulated as being sufficient feedback from readers that leads to the emergence of an ongoing social network. This is viewed as an example of a virtual technology shaping social groups. Research-in-progress is outlined that refers to observations of various film music blogs derived via the case study method, featuring a focused commentary on one that has subsequently been a victim of death in the blogosphere. In this case, the forced extinction of a blog is taken to be an example of human foibles influencing the download spiral of one instance of a virtual technology.   Sean Westwood, explores the second issue, Search, in his "How to measure public opinion in the networked age: working in a Googleocracy or a Googlearchy?" The rise of the internet has transformed information acquisition from a top-down process originating from media elites to a process of self-selection and searching. This raises a fundamental question about the relationship between information acquisition and opinion formation: do the processes occur in parallel or as part of a self-directed feedback loop? That is, do we look for information to make opinions, do we look for information to support our opinions, or do we do both simultaneously? Analysis using Google search and polling information from the 2008 US presidential election suggest that public information queries are reflective of polling data and election outcomes. The sheer quantity of search data on political terms also suggests that public information desires may surpass standard assumptions of public political sophistication.

Finally, in this virtual setting where we are all publishers, the tricky issue of ownership, and intellectual property, is address by Nicholas C. Patterson and Michael Hobbs in their paper,   "A Multidiscipline Approach to Governing Virtual Property Theft in Virtual Worlds." The crime of virtual property theft has become a serious problem in virtual worlds in recent years. Players of these games are repeatedly falling victim to this crime, with little or no repercussion for the offender. Virtual property often has a substantial real world monetary value and the theft of such items impacts greatly on victims. The problem of virtual property theft is complex, involving many legal, regulatory and technological factors. As such, trying to address this problem in a single dimension is not sufficient, each factor need to be addressed with a multidisciplinary approach. In addressing this problem, this paper provides a model for describing the issue of virtual property trading and the issues associated with virtual property theft. The paper also proposes an approach for handling virtual property theft based on improvements to laws related to virtual property and theft, improvements to the virtual world software components and better regulation from governments.