

Book Review

Analyzing Digital Discourse and Human Behavior in Modern Virtual Environments

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It is common knowledge that the prevalence of technologies makes our daily lives more convenient and simpler than in the past. Virtualization technology is a tool that has significantly changed the outlook of human communication with virtual conferencing and instant messaging. It can blur the boundaries among school, workplace and home domain, and enable people to keep connected with their friends, family members, colleagues, even teachers and students without face-to-face contact. However, there may be some aspects of virtual technology negatively affect our lives. This book aims to explore the differences and challenges that develop when humans communicate virtually and how this impacts learning, working and living.

A total of 12 chapters are thematically divided into two sections. The first five chapters are grouped into Section One, namely “*Working and Learning in Virtual Environments*”, and Section Two, consisting of the other seven chapters, is titled “*Human Behaviors and Discourse in Modern Virtual Environments*.”

At the beginning of this book, Chapter 1 points out that a virtual team will not succeed without strong leadership. As we know, leadership is crucial to drive success. A number of studies have outlined the concept of leadership in past decades. However, the traditional concept of leadership may no longer fit in today’s information-rich, technology-driven society, because members in a virtual team communicate by using a variety of information and communication technologies, such as email, groupware tools, and also video conferencing tools. Therefore, the definition of leadership in a virtual environment should be redefined. Virtual team leaders may face some challenges, including maintaining communication, establishing strong relationships, and managing conflict. In

view of this, the “Five Practices of Exemplary Leadership” model was developed, which identifies five practices and behaviors of successful leaders: Model the Way, Inspire a Shared Vision, Challenge the Process, Enable Others to Act, and Encourage the Heart. Chapter 2 highlights that perception research contributes to figure out how stimuli interact with learners’ sensory systems. Communication plays an important role in learning, which influences learners’ feelings and expectations, and also motivates them to study. Thus, combining instructional strategies with appropriate learning theories, principles, methodologies, and teaching procedures could foster learners’ perceptual systems to be re-shaped through perceptual learning.

Chapter 3 introduces the relationship between technology and healthcare workforce development. Specifically, the author suggests healthcare staff write blogs or web log because this kind of communication can promote increased compliance with quality measurements, update the relevant information that staff need to understand, such as the changes in healthcare policies and procedures, and provide educational resources anytime and anywhere. Chapter 4 provides three case studies, and illustrates the theoretical framework of using Second Life. This chapter mainly focuses on knowledge creation as well as creative collaboration, which can be regarded as part of the design innovation process in the virtual environment. It is found that virtual worlds provide the opportunity for people to creatively collaborate, but also builds a conducive ecosystem that is helpful for design innovation. Chapter 5 demonstrates that global virtual teams widely exist in industry domains, which is important because it may lead to organizational innovation and creativity. In addition, this chapter offers a case study to explore creativity within a global virtual organizational context. It is found that most of the participants expressed their concern about the state of creativity in the organization, while technologies, individuals, tasks and organization-related factors were also found to influence creativity at work.

Moving on to the second section of the book, Chapter 6 describes the communication revolution from face-to-face tradition to voice, and even texting, and aims to figure out why many people would rather send text messages than talk face to face. Today, more and more electronic devices such as mobile phones, computers, and tablets have been widely used to communicate with others through the wide range of increasing social networking sites, chat rooms, and online platform, which affect user behavior as well. This chapter also mentions that a user’s personality, identity and anonymity may also change their virtual behavior.

Chapter 7 presents the process of how users participate in an online virtual environment known as Second Life®. Information literacy is important for all the people; librarians are no exception. In this chapter, when librarians get involved in the online virtual world, many people actively post their positions, which could facilitate them brainstorming with partners to lead the profession to explore new avenues for library service, to revise key elements to support improved social dynamics and system modifications about and within the virtual space. Chapter 8 first defines collective intelligence as the capacity of a group to learn, think, and create collectively, and then provides a wide perspective on information, collective intelligence and its elements, virtual environments, and theories. People are communal beings who cannot live without a social group. The massive information from social media not only lowers the barriers of time and space, but also brings together different expertise and perspectives, further gathers and organizes knowledge and resources that leads to more informed decisions and actions. Particularly, it also provides instant feedback that can be looped back into the discussion so that much larger groups can participate. In this chapter, the author suggests that, before engaging in virtual environments, members must be able to physically access the relevant technology, and encourages users to have technical and intellectual expertise to use the technologies effectively as well as basic operational skills.

Chapter 9 starts from the historical rise of the Internet parallels in China, and demonstrates the perspective of sociological theory that reveals the basic need for social connections. The authors indicate that in China there are three types of applications, including instant messaging, social networking sites, and microblogging. QQ is one of the most widely adopted social media in China, and its features are a member-only participatory space, with instant messaging services via text, audio,

video as well as P2P file-sharing, file transfer, storage and email functionalities, which also allows users to create online discuss forums and file-sharing space accessible only to members.

In Chapter 10, it is mentioned that cyberbullying has become an important issue in online environments; thus, providing informational and socio-emotional support is necessary. From the beginning, the authors illustrate the definition of informational and socio-emotional support; the former refers to individuals who share ideas or make suggestions that are related to specific needs or problems, while the latter represents provision of concern and help to people who are going through physical, mental, or emotional hardships. Indeed, teenagers often seek online support from peers by posting status updates in order to find ways to ameliorate their stress; they want to be esteemed, valued, and loved by people. The benefit of virtual support is that online spaces enable users to choose anonymity, while members can see previous posts to help them know more about the topic and feel better equipped to help solve their personal challenges.

Chapter 11 introduces users' attitudes, behaviors and reflections when using mobile communication and devices. Mobile devices, such as mobile phones have become a necessity of human's daily lives, to help stay in touch with people one cares about, remind one to handle daily tasks and even participate and share in collective issues. However, these devices have been criticized for the mixing of the public and private, intimate and personal spheres. Privacy depends on the ability to control the use of these devices, as smartphones or other electronic devices have intruded into people's private lives. Hence, if people have more control over smartphone applications, they can keep themselves from being disturbed. Therefore, this chapter is summed up with some strategies to reduce disruptions and filtering participation and content.

Chapter 12 records the economic advances brought by the digital game industry. Despite the growing role of digital games in reshaping human experience, this is often overlooked in academic research. Indeed, when users play Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Games (MMORPGs), they can interact and communicate with others in the virtual environment. This could blossom into a full-blown research topic, for instance, to explore the users' online behavior, social interactions, cognitive aspects, self-identity, belonging, collaboration, and engagement. In this last chapter, diverging from the traditional research methodology, the authors adopt a newly-developed theoretical concept, hybrid interactive rhetorical engagements (H.I.R.E.) to discuss these experiential digital discourses generated from multimodal persuasive interactions during gameplay, which mainly focus on structure, design, reception, and aesthetic of the games. In addition, H.I.R.E. can investigate and analyze what players are likely to experience and how they feel from the interaction and interplays of textual, aural, as well as visual rhetorical elements when they are playing digital games. It is found that MMORPGs is important to digital game scholars in that players may have intense gameplay experiences in an immersive environment, and sustained interaction with others.

This book mentions that virtual worlds provide the opportunity for virtual teams to creatively collaborate and share knowledge. However, when learners are involved in an online learning community, they may feel isolated, and may find it hard to resist seductions such as online games or chatting with friends. Thus, the reviewers suggest that the authors could illustrate more about how to solve these kinds of problems in future editions. Besides, it is a pity that Chapter 6 mentions very little about online communication software. With the advancement of communication technology, more and more people using Internet to text, communicate, and interact with others has become a trend. It would be better if the authors could further discuss the use of online communication software (e.g. LINE, WhatsApp, WeChat or BlackBerry Messenger) to find out how use of these and mobile devices change people's communication behavior. Another weakness is found in Chapter 9, where the authors discuss an old communication software named "QQ". These days, WeChat and Weibo are much more popular and widely used in modern Chinese society. Therefore, we suggest that the authors can introduce the newer applications in the next edition.

The advance of virtual environments provides open resources, and web-based platform has greatly expanded access, communication, and speedy processing. This volume, *Analyzing Digital Discourse*

and Human Behavior in Modern Virtual Environments, makes it explicit that virtual environments change our daily lives, and offers readers extensive knowledge on the role of virtual environment implementations, especially in the education, healthcare, workplace, library, online community, and game domains. After reading this book, we are convinced it is appropriate for audiences who are game developers, researchers, technology developers, and government officials, but anyone with an interest in this issue that impacts human behavior will find this text enlightening and relevant.

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