Social Media as Resource for Involving Young People in Museum Innovation: A Cultural Studies Approach to Co-Design

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ABSTRACT

This paper takes root in how social media represents a new framework and form of communication and how designing for the meditated encounters with these media require interdisciplinary perspectives from both cultural studies and interaction design. The authors argue that involving young people with social media as a participatory tool requires that designers take into consideration how visual interpretation, social semiotic, semantic and spatial practices are inherent in everyday social media usage. The authors report from a design research project where the media sharing software Instagram was used to explore how everyday users in an urban environment would relate to cultural heritage data. The authors propose a cultural studies based focus on the semiotics of mediation as a potential design based research methods that fit with participatory practices with social media.

Keywords: Communication, Distributed Museum, Instagram, Social Media, Youth Participation in Design

1. INTRODUCTION

Engaging young people with social media through co-design means to understand their cultural practices. The call for a realignment of “digital,” “media” and “design” literacies to accommodate this new generation are manifold (Burdick & Willis, 2009; Giovannella, 2012; Prensky, 2012). Social media has garnered special interest because of its sharing means, inviting to question how
social software may serve to inform experiences of living in neighborhoods, communities and cities (Hochman & Manovich 2013). Young peoples cultural and social practice and how it relates to new forms of meaning making, learning and identity shaping has brought new perspectives into social studies and educational sciences (Ito et al 2010; Baym 2010). However, these same social practices also challenge aspects of technology development, innovation and design. Social media illustrates the ubiquitous integration of technology into people’s everyday life. This requires innovations in public institutions, museums and initiatives for young people to involve perspectives and understandings from multiple disciplines. The active use of these media, the negotiation of meaning ongoing in these media and the changing relationship between producer and viewer are part of cultural and social practices that change the landscape of design (Sanders & Stappers 2008). This calls for perspectives that particularly have been raised from cultural studies.

In design, these mediated aspects are requiring designers to re-think methods in parallel with social media as a means for including users in design projects. It has been argued that user participation should be understood as both the means and the outcome when designing venues for usable and meaningful interaction and participation with media (Lievrouw 2006). Thus, designers have to master an ongoing communication practice so that the design set up is performed in ways that engages younger audiences and serves to motivate participation (Lowe & Stuedahl 2014). This shifts design beyond a focus on social media as simply tools for engaging users and into exploring agency and cultural expressions as motivations for younger audience engagement (Mainsah & Morrison 2012). The aim of this paper is to explore how designing with, and for, social media use is a highly cultural endeavor requiring multidisciplinary approaches to address these aspects. We focus specifically on cultural expression and discuss how perspectives from cultural studies may be valuable for design projects aiming to engage young people’s participation.

We describe here a co-design experiment exploring the use of the photo sharing application Instagram within the setting of museum communications. The research project’s overall objective was to examine how the distributed museum (Bautista & Balsamo 2011) could relate to young people within the context of the city, how young people would relate with museum content with their mobiles and how future mobile communication may be designed. The experiment made a principle choice of using existing platforms that already gather young people, to secure that the project grasped the context of their everyday life. Instagram was chosen as a design space to explore how future mobile museum communication may be connected to everyday activities, based on the amount of already shared images from the city on this platform. And especially from the Akerselva River our location for the experiment.

The design experiment thus was challenged by questions concerning how a design space could be set up to engage
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