Chapter 1


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ABSTRACT

In this chapter, Second Life is conceived as an open space and symbolic world of user-driven co-creation of content. The questions asked concern the ways in which the actors of three case studies design, mediate, and remediate their Second Life projects and how the choices they make contribute to user-driven content creation and possibly to innovative practices. To answer these questions, concepts of innovation, in particular closed and open innovation are introduced and motivations for engaging in co-creation are identified. It is suggested that we understand user-driven innovation in a world like Second Life in terms of symbolic reorganization of conceptual frameworks and meaning-making. Subsequently, the concept of remediation is suggested as a way to conceive of mediation in the cases studied. It is shown how difficult it is for actors to co-create, mediate, and remediate thus to generate user-driven innovative practices in two Danish business projects (Wonder DK and Times) and in one public service project (Literary). To conclude the analysis of the case studies, it is suggested that methods of creative co-creation and innovative practices can build on the concept of remediation borrowed from research on new media and redefined in virtual worlds.

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INTRODUCTION

Virtual worlds may be seen as built of symbolic bricks of signs and shapes; they are symbolic worlds of meaning-making and semioses (Matthusitz, 2005). Questions and ideas are likely to emerge when we experience new meaning-making flows (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996) in non-tangible virtual worlds that even question the very idea of what a world is. Questioning what is taken for granted often mobilizes creative energy, rethinking, and reinterpretation of agencies and engagements. In the case of Second Life, the Linden Lab firm’s marketing of their product emphasizes that it is a tool for building a new world unbound by the tangible and physical (Au, 2008); a symbolic world which allows us to create shapes and signs “not possible in real life” in a compelling, surreal, and dream-like world to be experienced together with other residents accompanied by their avatars.

A virtual world like Second Life may thus be seen as a window of opportunity for mobilizing its residents’ creativity of mediation and innovation as the content has to be provided and created by the users; creative qualities, which are often presented as a distinguishing feature of Second Life as compared to multi-user online role-playing games such as e.g., EverQuest and World of Warcraft. In Second Life there are no built-in storylines and no system of quests, experience points, classes, and roles as is the case in many role-playing games. In principle, everything in Second Life has to be provided by the residents who have chosen to settle, socialize, run business, attend cultural events, or just to have great in-world fun (Au, 2008; Boelstorff, 2008; Malaby, 2009). Let us therefore note that Second Life not only inspires but the general idea of the design actually requires the co-creation by the residents in order to make it a compelling and attractive experience. Therefore, to introduce Second Life to the market, a critical mass of residents is required to actually design and make the world. Yet obviously, for residents to run a project, a business, or a shop, it is also required that they can attract the attention of other fellow residents to visit and partake in the activities of their projects, places and islands.

Thus, the user-driven content creation can be seen as a comprehensive experiment with user-driven innovation. Moving into Second Life, residents have to generate design ideas and realize these ideas whether they are running a business, conducting a series of talk-shows, arranging cultural events, producing machinimas or just travelling around the world to chat, socialize, go to ball-rooms to dance, or visit sex clubs. All of this may be seen as engagements, which entail communication and co-creation of new social agencies, norms, digital places, and environments. Only if the residents themselves can manage to design places, arrange events, and run a business can the world offer interesting and exciting in-world experiences.

QUESTIONS OF ANALYSIS

In this chapter, the practices of the user-driven content creation and user-driven innovation of the Second Life symbolic world is critically examined by analyzing three case studies of projects and actors who engage with or have been engaged with Second Life. The agencies of the Wonder DK, Times, and Literary projects are analyzed as seen from the perspective of mediation and innovation. Thus, in the analysis of the case studies, the ensuing questions that are dealt with are: In what ways do actors of the chosen case studies design and mediate their Second Life projects? And, how do their choices contribute to user-driven content creation and possibly to innovation in this symbolic world? To answer these questions, first, the concepts of innovation and remediation are introduced. Secondly, the three case studies are presented and then analysed, and finally some answers to the above stated questions are suggested.