Chapter 13

Are Web Designers Resisting the Inclusion of Social Cues when Creating Website’s User Interface?

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ABSTRACT

Using the resistance literature as an underpinning theoretical framework, this chapter analyzes how Web designers through their daily practices, (i) adopt recursive, adaptive, and resisting behavior regarding the inclusion of social cues online and (ii) shape the socio-technical power relationship between designers and other stakeholders. Five vignettes in the form of case studies with expert individual Web designers are used. Findings point out at three types of emerging resistance namely: market driven resistance, ideological resistance, and functional resistance. In addition, a series of propositions are provided linking the various themes. Furthermore, the authors suggest that stratification in Web designers’ type is occurring and that resistance offers a novel lens to analyze the debate.

INTRODUCTION

Web site design is often portrayed as a key tool in attracting users and in providing sustainable competitive advantage to online firm (Dailey 2004; Eroglu et al, 2001). In turn, web design is part of the world of online communication that has recently been the subject of dramatic changes with the introduction of social media (e.g. blogs, Facebook, Twitter, Delicious, LinkedIn). While most of the online marketing research has tended to concentrate on deterministic aspects of website design such as navigation, search, payment,
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convenience and generic atmospherics like colors, questions remain over (i) what are social cues online? (ii) who ought to be driving social cues inclusion? (iii) what are the benefits for website designers of introducing social cues? (iv) what are the risks associated with social cue inclusion? And (v) is there any resistance and lack of explicit legitimacy for such inclusion? This chapter tries to answer the last part of this wide area of research namely: Are web designers resisting the inclusion of social cues as they create website user interface? In other words, our paper analyzes: how web designers through their daily practices, adopt recursive, adaptive and resisting behavior regarding the inclusion of social cues online and shape the socio-technical power relationship between designers, clients and users.

The importance of effectively dealing with socially oriented design variables and social capital has been proven to naturally increase international market share as demonstrated by several studies (Constantinides, 2004; Klein, 2003). Nevertheless, this broad literature pays only limited attention to the resistance web designers face while choosing to include or not social capital cues. In particular, social acoustic legitimacy as a multi-dimensional concept ought to be established by all stakeholders prior to designing other more functional website drivers (de Kervenoael et al, 2009). An overall definition of social capital cues has yet to emerge from the literature. As a generic theme social cues are often defined as “a resource that actors derive from specific social structures and then use to pursue their interests; it is created by changes in the relationship among actors” (Baker 1990, p. 619). Another closely related aspect is the process by which social capital is characterized as “the brokerage opportunities in a network” (Burt 1997, p. 355). In our specific context of ICT and web design, social capital can be understood as the bonding [of potentially] similar people and bridging between diverse people, with norms of reciprocity (Dekker and Uslaner 2001; Uslaner 2001). A general definition of social capital and social cues in an ICT context can then be described as the sum of web experiences including for example: (i) aesthetics, art, (ii) association to user lifestyle symbols including norms, posture, etiquette, gender, politics, religion, and (iii) environmental, personal, cultural grounded reference points. This definition goes beyond the technical aspect of web design and reflects a multi-disciplinary approach. Recent articles in executive management journals have emphasized the critical impact of learning and social networks in driving improved supply chain performance (Postman, 2009; Stuart and Deckert, 1998; Bessant et al, 2003). In practical terms, social cues can take different forms ranging from: sound and music, rich media including photographs and video, icons, apps, RSS, widgets, plug-ins, add-ons, and unfiltered and unmassaged spontaneous information content often including socio cultural traits of minorities, religious factions and political groups. These tools lead to recognized authenticity, transparency and immediacy being attached to the site design interface. In turn, users get a feeling of active engagement in shaping the site strategy, by being listened to and cared about. In particular, these bring about a revolution in participatory communication understanding. In turn, web developers ought to be given a far more central role in the creation and maintenance of the site.

Taking into account the chapter aims, two partial gaps have been identified: first published work often remains at macro level. Setting aside the methods and models of management science, we utilize a micro level practice perspective (Jarzabkowski et al. 2007) that reflect more appropriately the everyday life of web designers. Practice is composed of three interrelated concepts (i) practitioners investigating what people do individually or in group, (ii) practices which represent the large array of tools and mechanisms used to implement day to day strategy and (iii) praxis representing the stream of activities (Whittington, 2007; Palmer & O’Kane, 2007; Jarzabroski et al, 2007). We listen to practitioners in their ac-
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