Interrogating Mediated Youth Drinking Cultures: Locating and Studying the Digital Audience

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Overview

Flaunting it on Facebook: Young adults, drinking stories and cult of celebrity
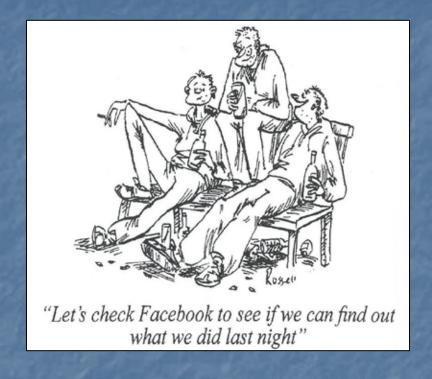
- Ø Project background

Exploring 'Audience' Issues

- Ø Blurring boundaries

Studying the 'Audience' Online

- Ø Conceiving of and studying 'users'/ 'audiences' of SNS

Flaunting it on Facebook: Young adults, drinking stories and the cult of celebrity

"Let's check Facebook to see if we can find out what we did last night"

Project Background

An analysis of three themes:

1. Young people & drinking cultures

2. Identities in 'late modernity' (ties to pervasive celebrity culture)

3. Rapid growth in use of social networking sites (SNS)

The study of 'mediated youth drinking cultures'

Project Background

1. Young people and 'drinking cultures'

Ø *Normalised* practices around (heavy) drinking

Ø Involving fun and being sociable

Ø Drinking stories told & re-told

Ø Identity construction, maintaining friendships

Ø Commodification of pleasure: 'cultures of intoxification'

Project Background

2. Identities in 'late modernity'

- Reflexive project of performing the self

- Discourses of individual freedom, self-expression

- Neoliberalism: 'Free' choice to become whomever we want to be, consume what we will

- Enthusiastically endorsed by business practices of branding/marketing

- Not just young people: manifested in broader 'culture of celebrity', self-commodifcation and excess

Project Background

3. Rapid growth in use of SNS

Ø Especially young people. WIPNZ (2010) 82% of 12-19s

Ø Most popular in NZ Facebook (75%), Bebo (18%)

Ø Broader research reveals...

Ø SNS 'sticky' technology (visited frequently)
Ø Extend face-to-face relationships
Ø Graphic images (photographs/video) significant & continuously rejuvenated
Ø Visually privilege social connections and offline socialising
Ø Blur private/public space, private id/public persona

Project Background

Focus today... what happens when young people's drinking cultures go online?*

* Moreno et al (2010)*: 225 of 400 (56.3%) 17-20 year old SNS profiles contained in total 341 references to alcohol.

Moreno, M.A., Briner, L.R., Williams, A., Brockman, L., Walker, L. Christakis, D.A. (2010) A Content Analysis of Displayed Alcohol References on a Social Networking Web Site, *Journal of Adolescent Health*, in press

Exploring 'Audience' Issues

What 'digital audience' issues are raised?
- Ø   *conceptualising* and *studying* the use of SNS

Entails dealing with 'blurry boundaries'
- Ø   Users/navigators vs. 'audiences'
- Ø   Public vs. private (networked publics)
- Ø   SNS vs. 'mainstream' media (newspapers, television)
- Ø   Interactive cultures vs. commodified consumers
- Ø   Empowerment vs. dis-empowerment

Exploring 'Audience' Issues

1. SNS users as users/navigators of new media

SNS = <u>interactive</u> space for young people

<u>Active producers</u> of a mediated culture embedded in day-to-day life & <u>'tailored' to their needs</u>

<u>Identities</u> performed & <u>social relationships</u> developed

<u>Celebrate</u> and celebritise their lifestyles

<u>Empowerment</u> (young people highly value SNS)

Exploring 'Audience' Issues

2. SNS use creates complex 'networked publics'*:

Persistence

ø   Recorded for posterity

Searchability

ø   Search and discovery tools (find like minded selves)

Easily Replicated

ø   Contributions copied from one place to another

Invisible audiences

ø   Impossible to fully ascertain who might 'overhear'

* Boyd, D. (2007) Why Youth (Heart) Social Network Sites: The Role of Networked Publics in Teenage Life. In D. Buckingham (ed.) *MacArthur Foundation Series on Digital learning: Youth, Identity and Digital Media*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press

Exploring 'Audience' Issues

Unseen/invisible **audiences**...

- Ø   Employers
- Ø   Mainstream media (e.g. newspapers)
- Ø   Parents

... Can use the *same features* of networked publics that 'empower' users to surveil users

SNS providing copy for mainstream media

Blurred boundaries between private & public life

'Dis-empowerment' for users

Exploring 'Audience' Issues

Moral Panic?

Hubbard, A (2009) Mirror, mirror on the screen... *Sunday Star Times,* October 25 2009, p. A7

Exploring 'Audience' Issues

3. Routine 'performance of the the self' online mimics broader mediated & commodified culture of celebrity

Sustained by 'mainstream media': Source of profit.

'Users' of SNS embedded in this culture as an 'audience' of mainstream outlets

Exploring 'Audience' Issues

Exploring 'Audience' Issues

Britney Spears 'captured' drunk on Befuddle.co.uk

Exploring 'Audience' Issues

4. SNS as a new market 'place'

500m Facebook users (re)constitute a 'mass' 'audience'

But one which can be initmately, *individually* 'known' via data *users* themselves provide

Corporations (incl. alcohol corps) sophisticated SNS marketers; e.g. viral marketing

- Ø A new age of selling: tailored marketing that commodifies online culture. 'Brand you'.

Murdoch (News Corp) buys into Myspace

Exploring 'Audience' Issues

Victoria Ramson's software 'Wildfire' gains 'Tier One' venture capital funding from Summit Partners of Silicon Valley: NZ$ 5.6 million in May 2010

Exploring 'Audience' Issues

"Facebook is a big part of what we do. What we have created is software to help businesses with their social media marketing, so they can use our technology on a self-service basis to set up different campaigns they can publish to their Facebook page, website or twitter.

In a few easy steps they can set up a campaign that is actually an application living within Facebook…"

Victoria Ramson, quoted in *Dom Post Business Day* section May 2010, p.C5.

'Users' of SNS interpellated as 'consumers'

Exploring 'Audience' Issues

Blurry boundaries between user generated and marketing content

Exploring 'Audience' Issues

5. Power struggles over the social shaping of SNS technology

Cover of *Time*, May 31 2010

Studying the 'Audience' Online

We are faced with 'BLURRY' complexity

Ø   Audiences/users/navigators/consumers…

Ø   … that can be conceptualised at different 'levels' and from different perspectives

So…How is the project studying use of SNS?

Ø   What participants, methods etc?

Studying the 'Audience' Online

Participants: young people 18-25 living in Aotearoa/NZ

Ø   Local advertising, email requests, snowballing

Groups where drinking normalised activity

Initial sampling across ethnicity

Ø   Maori (15 groups of 3-6 participants)

Ø   Pasifika (15 groups of 3-6 participants)

Ø   Non Maori (15 groups of 3-6 participants)

Include different social classes, geographic locations, genders, ages

Studying the 'Audience' Online

Stage One: Friendship Group Discussions

Semi-structured

Major discussion themes…

- Ø   Social lives, dinking practices & behaviours

- Ø   Use of new technologies in everyday life (moibile phones, ipods, PDAs and SNS)

- Ø   What functions they serve, and how participants are using them (or not)

Studying the 'Audience' Online

Major discussion themes (continued)…

Ø Drinking stories about particularly memorable episodes encouraged: explore how these have been told

Ø How meanings about friendships, drinking & technology collaboratively made

Ø Transcribed & analysed thematically

Studying the 'Audience' Online

Stage Two: Individual Interviews with Online Access

- Ø 8-10 participants from each ethnicity, open & flexible interviews

- Ø Uses of new technology, particularly SNS

- Ø Use of digital images & video in sharing drinking stories

- Ø Space to voice views that sit outside group norms

Studying the 'Audience' Online

Stage Two: (continued…)

Ø   Provided with laptop: browse web & show sites, images, & videos they access & talk about

Ø   History kept on project laptop & interview/online browsing recorded by digital video

Ø   Interview 'audio' transcript thematically analysed. Browsing* = rich multimodal data: transcribed & analysed using multimodal discourse analysis

* May adapt Helen Wood's (2007) concept of 'flow' to convert video into descritpive 'viewing strip'

that can be juxtaposed to interview material

Studying the 'Audience' Online

Stage Three: Analysing Representations of Young people's drinking on popular websites

Ø 'Drunken Celebs'

Ø Commerical sites & campaigns

Ø Sites that come to attention from Stages One & Two

Ø Multimodal discourse analysis

Conclusions: Locating & Studying 'Digital Audiences'?

Use of SNS as complex and multifaceted

A three stage model that aims to capture some of this complexity

I'd be happy to fill in details if I've left any time

Exploring 'Audience' Issues

Online campaign against Rudd government's alcohol tax increase (members 68,813)