DIGITAL ALTERNATIVES with a cause?

BOOK TWO
TO THINK

edited by
Nishant Shah
& Fieke Jansen

THE CENTRE FOR internet & society

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Digital (Alter)Natives with a Cause?
Book 2 – To Think

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PREFACE

In the 21st Century, we have witnessed the simultaneous growth of internet and digital technologies on the one hand, and political protests and mobilisation on the other. Processes of interpersonal relationships, social communication, economic expansion, political protocols and governmental mediation are undergoing a significant transition, across in the world, in developed and emerging Information and Knowledge societies.

The young are often seen as forerunners of these changes because of the pervasive and persistent presence of digital and online technologies in their lives. In popular discourse and practice around these young people and their digitally-mediated lives, there has been the imagination of a digital native – somebody who is born 'with' technologies. This idea of Digital Native has been helpful in looking at the new practices of knowledge production, community building, sharing, participation and collaboration that have emerged with the rise and spread of digital and internet technologies. However, more often than not, these young people are imagined as inhabiting certain bodies – White, middle class, educated, English-speaking, (mostly) male elites who live in environments of portable and pervasive computing. Their practices and engagements with technologies are taken as the norm by which the policy and research in other parts of the world is also framed.

The Digital Natives with a Cause? is a research inquiry that shifts the parameters of this imagination and uncovers the ways in which young people in emerging internet and communication technology (ICT) contexts make strategic use of technologies to bring about change in their immediate environments. Ranging from personal stories of transformation to efforts at collective change, it aims to identify knowledge gaps that existing scholarship, practice and popular discourse around an increasing usage, adoption and integration of digital technologies in processes of social and political change.

In 2010-11, three workshops in Taiwan, South Africa and Chile, brought together around 80 people who identified themselves as Digital Natives from Asia, Africa and Latin America, to explore certain key questions that could provide new insight into Digital Natives research, policy and practice. The workshops were accompanied by a *Thinkathon* – a multi-stakeholder summit that initiated conversations between Digital Natives, academic researchers, scholars, practitioners, educators, policy makers and corporate representatives to share learnings on new questions: Is one born digital or does one become a Digital Native? How do we understand our relationship with the idea of a Digital Native? How do Digital Natives redefine 'change' and how do they see themselves implementing it? What is the role that technologies play in defining civic action and social movements? What are the relationships that these technology-based identities and practices have with existing social movements and political legacies? How do we build new frameworks of sustainable citizen action outside of institutionalisation?

One of the knowledge gaps that this book tries to address is the lack of digital natives' voices in the discourse around them. In the occasions that they are a part of the discourse, they are generally represented by other actors who define the frameworks and decide the issues which are important. Hence, more often than not, most books around digital natives concentrate on similar sounding areas and topics, which might not always resonate with the concerns that digital natives and other stake-holders might be engaged with in their material and discursive practice. The methodology of the workshops was designed keeping this in mind. Instead of asking the digital natives to give their opinion or recount a story about what we felt was important, we began by listening to their articulations about what was at stake for them as e-agents of change. As a result, the usual topics like piracy, privacy, cyber-bullying, sexting etc. which automatically map digital natives discourse, are conspicuously absent from this book. Their absence

is not deliberate, but more symptomatic of how these themes that we presumed as important were not of immediate concerns to most of the participants in the workshop who are contributing to the book.

The conversations, research inquiries, reflections, discussions, interviews, and art practices are consolidated in this four part book which deviates from the mainstream imagination of the young people involved in processes of change. The alternative positions, defined by geo-politics, gender, sexuality, class, education, language, etc. find articulations from people who have been engaged in the practice and discourse of technology mediated change. Each part concentrates on one particular theme that helps bring coherence to a wide spectrum of style and content.

The first part, titled *To Be*, looks at the questions of digital native identities. Are digital natives the same everywhere? What does it mean to call a certain population 'Digital Natives"? Can we also look at people who are on the fringes – Digital Outcasts, for example? Is it possible to imagine technology-change relationships not only through questions of access and usage but also through personal investments and transformations? The contributions help chart the history, explain the contemporary and give ideas about what the future of technology mediated identities is going to be.

In the second section, *To Think*, the contributors engage with new frameworks of understanding the processes, logistics, politics and mechanics of digital natives and causes. Giving fresh perspectives which draw from digital aesthetics, digital natives' everyday practices, and their own research into the design and mechanics of technology mediated change, the contributors help us re-think the concepts, processes and structures that we have taken for granted. They also nuance the ways in which new frameworks to think about youth, technology and change can be evolved and how they provide new ways of sustaining digital natives and their causes.

To Act is the third part that concentrates on stories from the ground. While it is important to conceptually engage with digital natives, it is also, necessary to connect it with the real life practices that are reshaping the world. Case-studies, reflections and experiences of people engaged in processes of change, provide a rich empirical data set which is further analysed to look at what it means to be a digital native in emerging information and technology contexts.

The last section, *To Connect*, recognises the fact that digital natives do not operate in vacuum. It might be valuable to maintain the distinction between digital natives and immigrants, but this distinction does not mean that there are no relationships between them as actors of change. The section focuses on the digital native ecosystem to look at the complex assemblage of relationships that support and are amplified by these new processes of technologised change.

We see this book as entering into a dialogue with the growing discourse and practice in the field of youth, technology and change. The ambition is to look at the digital (alter)natives as located in the Global South and the potentials for social change and political participation that is embedded in their interactions through and with digital and internet technologies. We hope that the book furthers the idea of a context-based digital native identity and practice, which challenges the otherwise universalist understanding that seems to be the popular operative right now. We see this as the beginning of a knowledge inquiry that incites new discussions, invokes cross-sectorial and disciplinary debates, and consolidates knowledges about digital (alter)natives and how they work in the present to change our futures.

Nishant Shah
Fieke Jansen

INTRODUCTION

We started the *Digital Natives with a Cause?* Knowledge Programme, with a series of questions, which were drawn from popular discourse, research, practice, policy and experiences of people engaging with questions of youth, technology and change. Our ambition was to consolidate existing knowledge and to look at knowledge gaps which can be addressed in order to build new frameworks to understand the role that digital natives see themselves playing in their own understanding and vision of change. Book 2, *To Think*, takes up the challenge of constructing new approaches and through case-studies, analysis and divergent perspectives, offers a novel way of understanding processes of technology-mediated citizen-driven change.

At the heart of all the essays, each located in a particular approach and analysing specific contexts, is the recognition of how traditional approaches of research and practice fail to capture the nuances, politics and negotiations embedded in digital natives' everyday life. The essays show how the rise and spread of digital and online technologies not only offer new tools and structures of functioning, but also elicit new methods of understanding and research. Drawing from technology-mediated practices of knowledge creation, participation, sharing and mobilisation, they look at popular practices online to see how they affect and shape new kinds of research practices. It is important to realise that while each essay is arguing for a particular method or approach, it would be fruitful to read them together as proposing a complex new methodology for researchers as well as practitioners to understand the world of digital natives.

Esther Weltervede's opening essay charts this out most eloquently, as she draws our attention to the dissonance between academic and popular research methodologies and the texture and form of digital objects that are studied. Weltervede expands upon a 'Digital Methods' approach that seeks to reformulate the relationship between objects of study and methods of inquiry. For her, the method of inquiry within any knowledge production needs to be structured and shaped by the objects that we seek to study. In other words, the traditional approach, where the methodology frames the object and retrieves pertinent data sets to inform its agenda, is flawed. Such a structure refuses to look at the life-spans, ecologies and contexts of the objects and only pays attention to the people and the content. In an analysis of Twitter hashtags – digital information sets which are new in the ways they code, carry and disseminate information – she demonstrates how the digital object resists earlier methods of meaning-making and opens up new insights when studied through approaches which learn from the structure and 'life' of the digital object.

This spirit of recalibrating different roles and relationships within the digital natives discourse is propagated by Marc Stumpel's provocative research that shifts the imagination of power and regulation within contemporary discourse. Stumpel critiques the larger practices that study usage, behaviour, adoption and content creation but fail entirely to look at the politics of design, code and protocol in digitally constructed environments. In a radical study of Facebook, he shows how understanding technology, not merely as a means of information dissemination and production, but as an actor that determines the very texture of knowledge and the structure of information, gives us new insights into the power dynamics and roles within Web 2.0 systems.

YiPing (Zona) Tsou's accounts of the Human Flesh Search in China and Taiwan concentrates on unpacking the biases and prejudices of digital natives discourse that are glossed over through lack of self-criticality. Tsou observes that there is a distinct celebration of the digital as necessarily bringing in progressive and liberal attitudes promoted by the rhetoric of globalisation. The expectation is that the spread of these technologies necessarily builds equitable, just and inclusive information societies.

The critique and caution that accompanies certain ideas like piracy, pornography, cyber-bullying, etc. are important but do not seek to destabilise these expectations in any form. The standard binaries that are produced are of community-based, individualistic initiatives which face resistance from older concentrations of power like the State and the Market. However, Tsou looks at the darker sides of mobilisation and participatory knowledge structures to see how the wisdom of the crowds can take the form of violence of the mobs, often reinforcing regressive and authoritarian ideologies.

Joanna Wheeler complicates this idea of participation by drawing from rich ethnographic work done in emerging countries of the Global South, where participatory video was introduced to different communities riddled with violence as a means of building dialogues of peace. Wheeler begins with a hypothesis that the introduction of digital technologies in particular contexts where 'voice' has been made invisible by different violent manifestations of power, can bring radical insights into the community's engagement with and alienation from social, economic and political processes of power. She takes us through various iterations of this hypothesis to show how contexts, legacies and histories shape processes of knowledge inquiry and how it is necessary to establish participation as the new trope of collaborative knowledge production.

Taking a different tone from the academic and conceptual essays in this book is Alaa Abd El Fatah, an activist and a thinker from Egypt who currently lives in South Africa. Fatah calls himself a reluctant anarchist, and with self-deprecating but poignant humour, brings out the dilemmas, ironies, contradictions and conflicts that he lives with as a digital native. To offer a critique of the content analysis that over determines digital natives' discourse, Fatah offers an affective account of how to understand things beyond words and writing. He narrates a story of the death of a young digital native in Cairo to see how it would be impossible to understand the dynamics of mobilisation and community formation without understanding the emotional and personal investments that digital natives bring to their engagement with power.

Maesy Angelina, who has played many roles in this knowledge inquiry, brings this book to an end, with her essay that examines the very ways in which 'change' is conceptualised within older institutional structures. Angelina's research is based on a case study of the Blank Noise Project in India. She proposes that being located in older development structures of collectivisation hinder our understanding of the networks and bonds that digital natives form in order to articulate and affect change. In great detail, through thick ethnography and structuralist analysis, Angelina puts forward the idea that our expectations of change need to be shaped by the people and the contexts we research. She shows how new forms of non-institutionalised, volunteer driven, technology-mediated communities and collectives that work at producing social change, entail the production of a new vocabulary and vision of what constitutes change, who has the power to define change, and what are the roles that individuals and collectives have in initiating processes of change.

Each essay in this book locates itself at intersections of theory, practice, analysis and research, showing why and how we can build new frameworks to understand the identities, actions and processes that emerge with the integration of digital and internet technologies in our everyday lives. They offer new models and approaches which question existing methods of researching technology-mediated change and recalibrate relationships between the different actors involved in processes of social transformation and political participation.

2.1 DIGITAL METHODS TO STUDY **DIGITAL NATIVES WITH A CAUSE**

by
Esther Weltevrede
ESSAY

Introduction

How does one study digital natives and the information ecologies they belong to? This writing aims to advance a research practice that learns from digital natives and the ecosystem in which they operate. Instead of following the dominant emphasis in digital natives research on user-experience, regulation, censorship and control (Shah and Abraham 2009),

I propose methods to study the information ecology, understood as the relationship between the nature of web technology and interaction with that technology.

This study focuses on how digital natives use the information ecology to produce accounts, organise voices, loosely interact or effectuate change. The effort is to try to understand digital natives by capturing and analysing the traces they leave in their wake.

After reviewing existing literature about digital natives, Nishant Shah and Sunil Abraham conclude that there is a knowledge gap between digital natives and academia that needs to be addressed. Most scholarship and research methodology engage with digital natives from a pre-digital perspective, which might be problematic as this disassociates the research from the information ecology within which digital natives operate. Such frameworks pre-define what it means to be political and what the processes are that lead to change. The consequence is that digital natives are not valued within their own practices but are rather captured in a static political landscape. The results are that they are often described with terms of non-engagement and inadequacy (Shah & Abraham 2009; Shah et al 2010).

Taking up the challenge posed by Shah and Abraham I seek to contribute to the Digital Natives Knowledge Programme[1] by formalising an academic practice that learns from digital natives, instead of imposing predefined categories and frameworks to their practice.

Importantly this work seeks to develop the methodological and analytical processes of the proposed research practice. Up until now, there

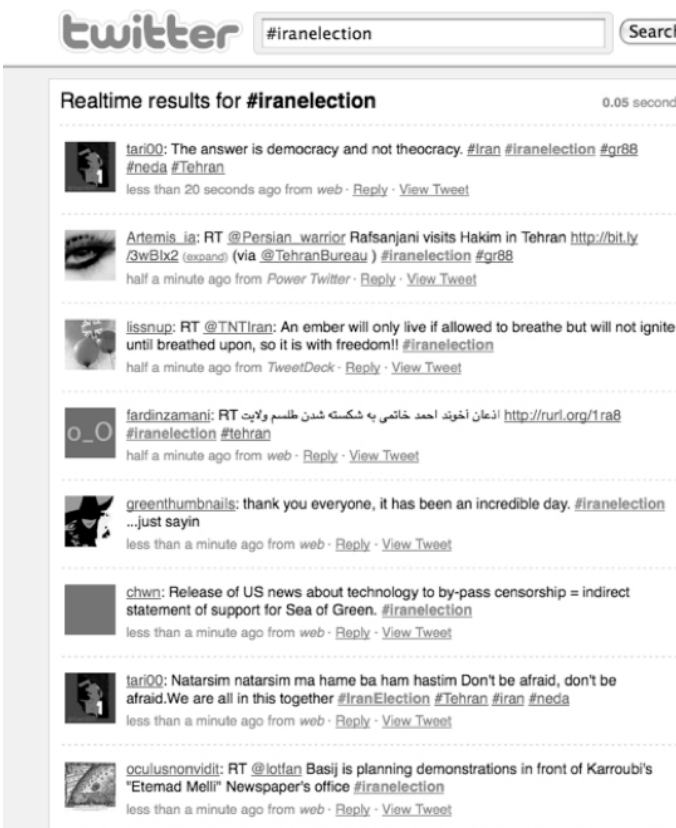
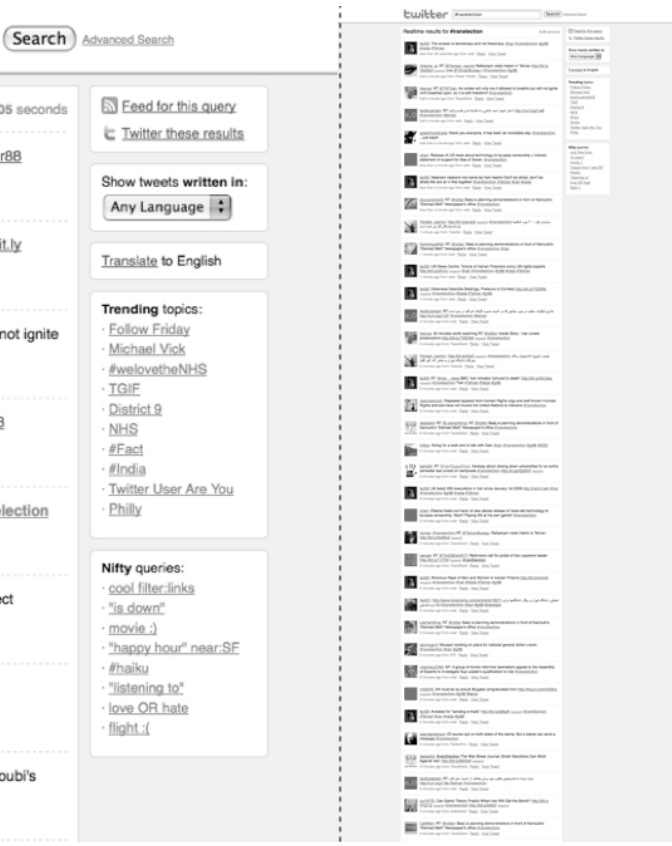


Figure 1: Real time Twitter results for the query #iranelection

has been surprising silence in literature on the methodological processes of research into digital natives. This piece seeks to address these challenges from the perspective of work done with the Digital Methods Initiative - a research program dedicated to reworking methods for internet research - and to construct an argument that addresses why digital methods are well suited to study the digital natives and their ecosystems.

In this paper I will use the micro-blogging platform Twitter as a platform with which to study digital natives and their practices. Allegedly, Ttwitter has played a pivotal role in the ongoing political movements in Iran. In fact, Iran's 2009 election crisis was dubbed the 'Twitter Revolution' (Berman, 2009), and it was this term that subsequently spurred critique about both Twitter and digital natives; Malcolm Gladwell's



Book 2, *To Think* of the *Digital AlterNatives With a Cause?* collective, explores different ways of re-conceptualising how we look at digital natives' activity. In our conversations with digital activists and digital storytellers we have found that vocabulary is important. We do not always have the same vocabulary to support and understand digital native practices, and so can see them as different or insignificant.

Simple phrases like 'political participation' have very different connotations in the digital generation. One of the participants of the Taipei workshop felt very defensive about her politically detached attitude. When we asked her if she was political, she answered no. She stated: "Honestly, the "politics" that I've been introduced to is more on the controversies surrounding political leaders, policy-makers, and corruption, street protests, and voting - in short, it's purely government. And I grew up believing that even if I loathed those "corrupt leaders" because in one way or another they are keeping mouths hungry, I couldn't do anything about it." In her conversations with other participants she realised that she was not apathetic, she was interested in gender inequality, public health, etc. In her own politics. She just did not care for governmental politics.

To cross these vocabulary boundaries and understand what digital natives care about and what is changing, we need to listen to them and create new lenses and frameworks. Esther Weltevrede's argument targets re-framing research practices. If you want to understand the impact of new information ecologies on societies your research methods should also be native to the digital.

In the scouting mission of the Digital Natives Knowledge Programme we soon realised that when people focus on youth growing up with technology, they see great potential and thus expect grand things. Literature and blogs refer either to superstars or frame the Y generation as lazy and apathetic. There is a constant need to explain how digital natives wield technology

Small change: Why the revolution will not be tweeted (2010) being the most referenced. In this work I will address some of the key critical points raised in the book and seek to provide an alternative research practice, one that will aim to give an account of the Iran election crisis as seen through Twitter.

Twitter has often been described as mundane and banal (Kelly, 2009), also during Iran's 2009 election crisis. However, looking at Figure 1, the result for a Twitter search for the hash tag #iranelection seems to tell a different story: It shows people reporting about what is happening on the ground, as well as calling for demonstrations, and reactions to demonstrations in addition to people having conversation. Could the hundreds of thousands of tweets with hash tag #iranelection be made into a comprehensible account of what has been happening on the ground as well as online?

The research presented here builds on a study into the Iran election crisis published in *GISWatch* in the section 'Mapping for Democracy'[2] The research regarded Twitter not just as a set of technical specifications (Boyd et al 2010), but rather as an entire formal apparatus; it investigated the totality of techniques and conventions that affect Twitter at a social level. Arguably, by debanalising Twitter the Digital Natives' practices were also debanalised. Following up on this study, I seek to provide insights into digital natives and their information ecology and contribute to a growing body of literature that aims to make use of Twitter as a source of data for social and cultural research. The question I seek to answer with this case study is: How can Twitter be repurposed to study how digital natives organise themselves and their causes?

Digital natives and the problem of the digital versus the real

In the collection of position papers *Digital Natives Without a Cause?*, a number of key problems with the term Digital Native have been raised (Shah et al 2010). Strikingly, one of the problems is that the term is a placeholder: it is not a name that is used by the digital natives themselves. Instead of just rejecting the term however, this paper seeks to contribute to its re-articulation, by engaging with an empirical perspective on digital natives and their native environment. Let me first address one of the core problems with the term in order to clear the way for its re-articulation.

The core problem with the notion of a digital native is that at first sight it seems a contradiction in terms because there exists a bifurcation between the 'digital' and the 'native', which has its legacy in thought that upholds the divide between the digital and the real.

'Native' refers to someone or something belonging to or originating from an indigenous environment, whereas the 'digital' is falsely made into the natives' antonym by associating it with the de-localised, abstracted, disembodied and de-naturalised. I say falsely because this divide is a legacy the digital has inherited from the virtual. The bifurcation has its roots in cyberculture studies as well as in early interdisciplinary work on the internet, which always made an explicit distinction between what is the virtual and what is real. However, the digital is not the virtual.[3]

In this article, digital natives are seen in the light of their information ecology - understood as the relationship between the nature of web technology and their interaction with that technology.[4]

The information ecology consists of all active users, as well as active digital objects in the environment with which users interact or create, such as the hash tag, the status update, and the PageRank.

Web technology is media, which means that the platforms contain content and channel meaning. These pieces of content can be acted upon (e.g. forward, delete, reply, copy, like, tag, save, update). Unlike most other media, web technology is

characterised by 'registrational interactivity', which is defined as a measure of the potential ability to register information from, and thereby also adapt to, a given user's needs and action (Jensen 1999; Rogers 2009). Besides giving rise to concerns related to surveillance and privacy, the registrational interactivity inherent to the information ecology also holds potential for understanding the digital natives and the ecosystem in which they operate.[5] The more these tools and technologies proliferate, the more capable we become of registering and analysing the worlds empirically. Moreover, the potential of the information ecology only takes shape when there is activity to be registered.

This study sets out to empirically investigate how digital natives make use of their information ecology by studying the traces of action and activity digital natives leave behind.

As might be clear already, the concept of the Digital Native will not be addressed in terms of age or youth, but more as someone, a user, for whom digital media is second nature. Second nature is a term that deals with the way in which life is made analysable and controllable from a distance, i.e. once everything is "the thing itself and its artificial semblance" (Galloway 2004: 88). In other words, when the distinction between life and information blurs. For my purposes, second nature additionally refers to the moment when users can engage in technology without reflecting on the technology itself or without making sense of it through comparison with earlier media formats. Put differently, the moment when the medium becomes second nature is when Twitter stops being "like SMS" and when it becomes tactically and socially useful.

In order for a piece of digital technology to become second nature, is when a certain level of collective agreement or trust is established. One of the presumptions raised by Gladwell (2010) is that social issues can only operate on deep ties of trust and personal relationships as opposed to the weak ties created on social media such as Twitter and an urge to see societal impact. We feel that this urge needs to be question. Is it necessary to only do extraordinary things with technology, or can it also be use for small and non relevant things? Technology is part of their everyday lives. One minute, they might use it to chat with their friends or download music, another minute, they might use the same technology to be part of a political flash mob or mobilise against injustice.

Ethan Zuckerman, in his formulation of the 'Cute Cat Theory' actually builds a strong case for recognising the power of the banal. Drawing from his experience as a researcher and trainer in the field of Digital Activism, Zuckerman realises that the only technologies that people will use in order to produce change, are the 'banal' technologies that they are already familiar with and use to share pictures of cute cats. This essay resonates with his argument in looking closely at quotidian practices of platforms like Twitter, not limited only to crises situations.

Anat Ben David (Book 1, To Be) takes the argument of the digital and the real even further. Digital natives do not differentiate between the on- and offline world and relate to both as a hybrid space. However the word 'native' assumes that they are expected to be native to a place that was already created and inhabited by others, which may explain the tension between digital and native.

Anat argues that a fresh look at digital natives might be one that: "shifts the weights in the definition digital natives from "being digital" to "being native", focusing on the geographies and places digital natives are native to – not as being surrounded by a media-rich environment, but as operating in a hybrid geography of physical and online spaces... digital natives have a granular dedication to their local places and local causes...." In this way we might be able to understand the complexities, heterogeneity and multiplicity of situated knowledges and practices that take place in hybrid geographical and digital spaces.

and Facebook. 'Trust' in the information ecology, I argue, goes beyond the ties between people and is instead invested in both the people on Friend and Follow lists as much as in the digital technology one is using. Trust in the digital ecosystem is in terms of whether it produces quality results (Shirky, 2009) or in terms of how using the media service handles privacy (either by selectively providing media companies with personal information or by 'trusting' the media company to protect one's personal information). Think, for example, of the benefit of disposable email addresses in Wordpress and the possibility to change usernames in FriendFeed. Thus the proposal does not imply a vision of second nature that is apart from technology and or one that distinguishes between the digital nor reality. Instead, this paper argues that it is more fruitful to approach relations with technology when the digital natives and the technology they interact with are studied on equal terms.

Furthermore, it is important to understand that the digital adds reality, rather than subtracts from it (Latour 2004). From this perspective, there is a not a reality to be discovered behind what happens on Twitter, but rather, every tweet and retweet adds reality to the situation.

The reconceptualisation I propose is not one that takes the information ecology as the backdrop upon which politics take place, but rather recognises that a digital native strategically makes choices and uses this ecosystem. Redefining the digital natives from an age and use-driven definition towards web users for whom technology is second nature, offers an alternative about those who are "Being Digital" (Shah 2010). As Nishant Shah argues, "Being Digital talks of a condition of 'Digitality' where it is the integration of digital and web based technologies – the aesthetics, the politics, the processes – into everyday life that is important." In other words, he continues, can we start to "think of the digital native as intrinsically bound to the idea of a cause?" (Shah 2010). I understand "cause" here as the realisation of the prospect inherent to digital platforms and devices. The strategic uses of the platforms and devices are varied depending on tasks at hand, personal skills, desires, contexts and causes (Shah 2010). As the position papers suggests, it is not about the latest technology and lead users, but about strategic use of technology that makes a Digital Native (2010).

If we accept the definition of digital natives as those for whom the digital ecosystem is second nature, and if we accept that the digital is the traceability of reality, then we need to qualify and quantify their significance by looking at the traces that are left by the digital natives with a cause.

Tracing the digital natives in the Twitter ecology

How does one study digital natives with a cause in Twitter ecology? I seek to advance a research practice that learns from digital natives and I put forward digital methods well suited to study digital natives and the information ecosystem in which they operate. Not necessarily to study the digital natives directly, but rather to study digital natives by researching the traces they produce, by making use of medium-specific ways to organise themselves and their causes (e.g. Sharing a hash tag to organise conversation, retweet to spread and give voice to a particular message). The focus is on the content digital natives produce to rearticulate them by the issues and causes that they put forward.

A research practice that learns from digital natives has to be interested in the mechanisms and techniques that are used to produce information. In the 1990s the Web, and indirectly its users, was criticised for a lack of quality because everybody could put something online and there were no editors (Marres and Rogers, 2000). Currently, the Web as well as digital natives are able to produce quality information, but instead of relying on an editorial understanding of quality, it is now found in the network effect (Weltevrede, 2009). Similarly, whereas content, users and web technology were often studied separately, digital methods see

them as part of an inseparable phenomenon. Being aware of the holistic nature of the web, digital methods are built atop of, and make use of, organising principles native to the medium. More importantly, digital methods seek to be a research practice, which do not try to bring organisation to the objects under study, but rather aim to "follow the medium"(Rogers, 2009), and to "follow the actors" (Latour, 1987). Thus, the current research strives to be one that follows digital natives in the information ecology in which they operate and give a voice to the causes that they pursue.

Whereas the digital natives are often criticised for their copy and paste culture (Bennett et al., 2008) and cut-and-paste practices (Baker et al., 1997), it can also be considered a productive and web-native practice to depend on machines and networks to do your work. Following digital natives' practice, I propose a move towards a copy and paste research practice where the researcher similarly depends on machines and networks to do their work. The benefits of such a practice is that the researcher can let the language used by the actors emerge and inform theory. In the following I will explain digital methods' research practices the digital methods principles in more detail by focusing on the language put forward by the digital natives and by focusing on two core organising objects in Twitter - the hash tag and the retweet. Both are described and methodological considerations are put forward with a focus on the value of the objects for digital native and the digital methods researcher.

The hash tag: Organise and demarcate

On Twitter, one common way to organise conversation is to use an agreed upon hash tag. Moreover, hash tags are used to organise conversations with people who are not necessarily on your list, as they allow the formation of a rather loose collective around a common topic. The difference in causes of a hash tag range from becoming a 'Trending Topic' to a gossip about a celebrity, or from providing a back channel during a TV show to organising specific stages of a revolution around different hash tags with distinct

In the offline world there are certain indicators which tell you if you can trust someone. Maybe the impression you get when you see someone face to face, the fact that they might be an expert in something (a doctor, professor or a specialist) or because the person is referred to you by others you trust. The concept of trust changes when you look at the online world and the changing geopolitical environments in which many digital natives live. As Weltevrede argues trust goes beyond ties between people, there also needs to be trust in the technology one is using.

In Book 4, To Connect there are two authors who look at both the ties between people and the role that technology plays in these relationships. Ivet Pieper looks at a group of digital natives who are challenging taboos through on- and offline discussion. They are not only putting their trust in their peers, they are also putting their trust in the tools that mediate their interaction with the audience. Technology gives them the opportunity to not only express themselves but also open up and connect to a wide community. On the other hand, Hernan Bonomo's contribution shows a distrust that people can have in technology. For participants of JAS10 it did not matter how native they will become in using the tools and platforms, as they are not the ones who develop and own these technologies. There is a certain amount of distrust about the purpose and promotion of these tools.

Depending on machines and networks to do your work is a typical characteristic of the digital era. Who has not heard of these expression "When in doubt just Google" or "Using the wisdom of the crowd to achieve something"? These new perceptions on work, knowledge, values and norms are redefining existing frameworks. Ben Wagner argues (Book 4, To Connect) that digital native norms are shifting the way societies think about certain basic values. These shifts might cause a great deal of conflict if we do not understand what is changing and what the implications are.

purposes (Jacobs, 2011).

The hash tag this case study will focus on is #iranelection. It was initially used to organise conversation around the Iranian elections but subsequently became used to report critically about and mobilise the aftermath of the Iran election. Because the hash tag is used by digital natives to organise conversation on Twitter, it is a preferred way to demarcate data set for the digital methods researcher.

To perform empirical research with Twitter, researchers collect data via the Twitter API or in some cases, scrape Twitter and subsequently run custom-written scripts or use analysis tools against data set to explore data and formulate answers. Colleagues and I scraped and archived the data set, which contains tweets with the tag #iranelection from 10 June 2009 till 30 June 2009 and consists of a sample of over 6,50,000 tweets in total.[6] The data is parsed, analysed and visualised using custom scripts, a spreadsheet and a visualisation software.

When taking the hash tag as the main demarcating principle of one's research corpus, it is important to consider what is *not* organised by hash tags: What is deliberately or un-deliberately left out of the conversation. Often a common hash tag is agreed upon and promoted either by an organisation (with a website) or emerges through the collective practices of Twitter users. However, in some cases there is no agreement reached over the hash tag, Twitter users are unaware of its existence, there is competition over hash tags, or there may be debates with multiple hash tags. Additionally, hash tags may lose their meaning, or have too many meanings invested in them. Finally, in some instances it is dangerous to use a hash tag as for instance in the #iranelection space, because the Iranian regime is notoriously known for hunting down dissident voices online (Opennet 2009).

The retweet: Forward and quantify

Retweet poses the second device that allows for the organisation and shaping of causes on Twitter. Within Twitter, retweet is a way to endorse or give voice to a message by forwarding the tweet to one's own followers. In aggregate retweet may be viewed as organising a collective editorial process whereby Twitter users decide for themselves whether or not a tweet has value. Retweet emerged as a practice in the Twitter community to forward interesting tweets and was used to pay credentials to the original source. The typical syntactical shape of the retweet is 'RT @user' placed before the tweet forwarded or 'via @user' after the tweet. Twitter later implemented a retweet button that automatically formats the retweet as RT @user before the tweet.

What is the account pushed forward by digital natives? Because retweet is a practice adopted by digital natives to forward, or give voice to a message, for the digital methods researcher retweet becomes a way to quantify and study tweets. Put differently, the collective of endorsed messages becomes a means of analysis for the digital methods researcher because it is a way to quantify the staggering amount of tweets in a way that pushes forward those messages that have value. The retweet has thus a "quantifying value" (Latour, 2009). Compiling an aggregate of the most retweeted tweets per day is a means to boil down the diverse set of tweets to a top selection per day. Although tweets are often described as mundane and banal, the retweet may be used as a Twitter-native means to crystallise tweets that have 'pass-along value'. In a study carried out by a market research firm in the United States called Pear Analytics, it was found that most tweets are anything but substantial. In fact they concluded that:

40.5% of tweets could be classified as pointless babble,
37.5% as conversational,
8.7% as having pass-along value,
5.85% as self-promotional, and
3.75% as spam (Kelly, 2009)

What is of interest here are the 8.7 percent of tweets that have a pass-along value. More specifically this study looks at how to capture that small percentage of tweets to turn Twitter into a

machine that can be used to produce the account put forward by digital natives.

The method proposed creates a rich and thick description of the digital natives' account, whilst being quantified by the Twitter-native retweet[7]. This is a radical different approach than following the "idea of the social movements as being run and orchestrated by a small set of superstars", which does "great disservice to the everyday supporter who actually becomes the wealth of the movement because there is strength in numbers" (Shah, 2010). Social movements no longer need to be thought of as an abstract idea represented by a small set of lead users. Online, different configurations of collectives consist of locatable configurations, which can be quantified one tweeter at a time.

For the ppl of Iran #iranelection RT

Interestingly enough, most of the tweets related to the hash tag #iranelection are in English and there are about 1,00,000 unique users participating in the conversation. In order to capture the substance of Twitter space, colleagues and I decided to filter the sample by selecting those tweets with pass-along value: the top retweets per day. Additionally, we did not present them in the reverse-chronological - or realtime - order as Twitter does, but we put them in chronological order. Figure 2 shows the top three tweets per day, starting with the run-up to the election, wondering whether there will be a Mousavi effect, the great expectations of change in Iran, to the actual day of the election on the 12th of June, to the question the next day of websites being down, SMS being down, Facebook being filtered, Mousavi placed under house arrest, a message from Mousavi himself, Neda is dead; there are calls to protests, accounts of police using pepper spray, first aid information available. The top tweets per day show the heat of the moment. They show in some sense what is happening on the ground as well as in social media.

Subsequently, we filtered out sub-story lines. How do digital natives respond when confronted with sabotage of their ecosystem? This particular project focuses on telling the story of censorship and more

Above Weltevrede argues that we should recognise that digital natives strategically makes choices and use the information ecosystem at their own discretion. Language strategies are one of the important decision that many digital natives make everyday. You might use different languages to reach different audiences. To talk to your friends you might use SMS language with smileys and abbreviations. To reach an international audience you would prefer tweeting in English over your native tongue. If you are living under a repressive regime, you might use a different language to escape censorship. In the People's Republic of China, Mandarin is more heavily censored than English. Therefore you might prefer writing in English or code to express certain political beliefs.

These digital natives strategies do not limit themselves to language, they also make deliberate choices on the tools and platforms they would use in certain situations.

Figure 2: Top three retweets per day with hash tag #iranelection

specifically on how digital natives tactically make use of the digital ecosystem (Figure 3). The effort to look into censorship is a way to investigate how effective micro-blogging tools are to circumvent the Iranian regime and to bypass various types of blockings to spread news at the local level and mobilise collectives for political action.

It starts with the notice on 12 June that SMS is down, then that Mousavi's website and Facebook are down and on the 13 June that the government has blocked Twitter. Subsequently the reactions can be read and other Twitter users offer proxies and calls for hacking of websites. On the 17th and 18th of June there is a solidarity action amongst Twitter users to change the profile location to Teheran so that the authorities can not track down who is tweeting from the ground. Around the 30th of June the sub story of violence emerges. There are reports about the Basij, the militia who is connected with the government; there are stories of government operatives hunting down dissident voices, followed by Twitter users in turn exposing fake-accounts operated by government agents. There are reports of tweeters going missing and instructions of how to install various softwares so that one's Twitter account cannot be traced.

Studying the aftermath of the Iran election through hash tags and retweets shows how Twitter and other tools are used by digital natives to circumvent regimes and bypass advanced forms of censorship in order to spread news and mobilise collectives for political action.

The case study demonstrates how information networks are able to attract global attention and support to local and national crises, which turns it into global phenomena. Information networks have the potential to organise participation of digital natives who are not in the same location but have similar causes.

Moreover, the case study suggests a number of types of causes put forward by the digital natives. First, information dissemination is one of the key forms of political engagement for a digital native.

Figure 3: Censorship retweets with hash tag #iranelection

Figure 3b: Detail of censorship retweets with hash tag #iranelection

Second is to mobilise groups for action, e.g. to protest on the streets or to collectively attack government websites. Third is the support and solidarity carried out by offering proxies, changing location settings to Teheran and colouring their profile picture green.

Conclusion

This writing has put forward a research practice that takes digital natives as part of their information ecology seriously. It seeks to contribute to the Digital Natives Knowledge Programme, and specifically respond to the call made for methods of understanding and analysing digital natives in their native environment, and to extend this methodology in novel perspectives. I have sought to describe the potential of digital methods in capturing the ecosystem in which the digital natives operate. This study proposes methods to research information ecology and, perhaps more importantly, how digital natives use their information ecology for various causes. I have sought to provide an alternative research perspective with an aim to contribute to the study of digital natives in three ways:

First, by promoting a research practice that learns from digital natives. Digital methods is a research practice that seeks to "follow the actors" and let language emerge from that. It is a process of crystalising the causes and activities of digital natives. By redefining digital natives through the traces they leave in their wake, digital methods seeks to learn from digital natives as they tactically make choices in and while using the information ecosystem, making use of digital objects native to their environment, such as the hash tag and the retweet. Because digital natives make use of medium-specific ways to organize themselves and their messages (e.g. sharing a hash tag to organize a conversation or retweet to spread and give voice to a particular message), they may be studied by the traces they leave behind in their native ecology.

Second, the developed research practice is natively digital and turns the device itself into a part of the analysis. The research design outlined for

How do digital natives respond when they are confronted with sabotage is not only a question that deals with governmental censorship, control and regulation. Marc Stumpel argues that social media also have their own rules and regulation and that there is also resistance within these tools and platforms. He looks at three different frameworks to understand how digital natives resist the power, control and regulation aspect within a social media platform like Facebook.

This approach to research has also been the central motif of the Digital Natives with a Cause? Knowledge Programme. When we first began the scouting and framework building exercise, we quickly realised that there was a problem in the traditional information retrieval research methods which the digital natives were quite vocal about. Of the many we tried to interview, most were tired of being subjects of interview, their words and their opinions easily molded in the researcher's agenda and voice.

The Knowledge Programme was hence designed to 'follow the actors' and learn, not only about their ideas but also their vocabulary and their processes, in methods that are more familiar to them. Which is why, instead of more traditional workshops where the young are 'taught' how to think, these workshops concentrated on providing open spaces within structured parameters – unconferences – for participants to architect their own ideas. The result is this book that veers away from most of the conventional problems attributed to digital natives. Joanna Wheeler in her work on video making (Book 2, To Think) also offers this as an important learning where the circumstances, contexts, language and structures that make and surround the actor of research (as opposed to the object of research) allow us better insights into how they operate and actualise the more abstract notions like citizenship, change, knowledge, etc.

the Twitter information ecology is in principle applicable to other web platforms too, and can be summarised by some of the core principles of digital methods research, such as using the medium's native organising principles and mechanisms to demarcate data sets and to quantify and analyse content.[8] The method proposed allows making a rich and thick description of the digital natives' account, whilst being quantified by web-native mechanisms such as the retweet.

Third, this writing has put forward the condition of the Digital Native as a web user for whom information ecology is second nature and I have subsequently sought to re-articulate the Digital Native by empirically tracing and capturing the causes they pursue.

[1] For more information, visit www.digitalnatives.in and www.hivos.net/Hivos-Knowledge-Programme/Themes/Digital-Natives-with-a-Cause

[2] "For the ppl of Iran #iranelection RT" is a production of the Digital Methods Summer School 2009. Participants include: Erik Borra, Marieke van Dijk, Richard Rogers, Kimberley Spreeuwenberg and Esther Weltevrede.

[3] One might take further cue from Simon Schaffer and London painter Adam Lowe's notion of "digitality", where the digital predates the computer. Most importantly they argue that digitality is actually a materialisation of signs and not a disembodiment of the sign (in Latour 1998).

[4] The "nature" of web technology refers to the possibilities of activities and uses that are embedded in the potential of the platform and smaller digital objects.

[5] The medium is often endowed with contradictory meanings, in this particular context, think of the discourse of the medium that always remembers (surveillance) versus the medium that always forgets (digital heritage).

[6] Apart from choosing the right hash tag, a second demarcation that needs to be made is in terms of time. There is no natural end to this hash tag because what started as a post-election uprising is an ongoing crisis. The set under study here expands a week beyond elaborate mass media attention and is when attention on Twitter itself decreases (measured by the number of tweets per day).

[7] With a similar technique, the researcher can also consider to quantify the top tweeted URLs or images and videos per day for image analysis to create a visual account.

[8] See the Digital Methods Initiative wiki for other research projects with other platforms at http://digitalmethods.net

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2.2 MAPPING THE POLITICS OF WEB 2.0: FACEBOOK RESISTANCE

by
Marc Stumpel
ESSAY

The emergence of Web 2.0 has driven the excitement about the new qualities of the Web as a platform (O'Reilly, 2004). The second stage of internet development gave rise to a plethora of web-based applications that are characterised by interactivity, collaboration and information sharing. Moreover, these applications enabled internet users to produce and publish so-called user-generated content with great ease. Users have become 'producers' or 'prosumers', which means that they simultaneously consume and produce information (Bruns, 2008). Web 2.0 platforms which facilitate the production and dissemination of information have been growing tremendously over the past few years. They allow for the involvement in participatory cultures to share individual expressions or creations (Jenkins et.al, 2005). Furthermore, people with similar interests and goals are enabled to connect with each other on blogs, social networking sites, video- photo- and music aggregators, social bookmarking sites and collaborative platforms, such as wikis.

The term 'Web 2.0' has been criticised for being a piece of jargon, whereas it also functions as a placeholder for a set of ideas. The Web 2.0 ideology is characterised by certain promises, such as increased democracy, openness, the end of hierarchies, the power of many, 'free' services, the rise of the professional amateur, and a rich and convenient user experience (Scholz, 2007).

Several concepts are often used by enthusiasts to promote these ideas, including folksonomy (Vander Wal, 2007), wisdom of the crowds (Surowiecki, 2004), crowd sourcing (Howe, 2006; Shirky, 2008), remix culture (Lessig, 2008), and produsage-based journalism (Bruns, 2008). However, instead of merely highlighting positive implications, this essay is concerned with critically engaging with the political dimensions of Web 2.0. It is high time to snap out of the dream in which Web 2.0 solely entails 'empowerment' and let reality sink in.

As the following anecdote about a Facebook user illustrates, it is neither the qualities, nor the promises, but the inadequacies that require critical attention. Christmas of 2007, Sean Lane purchased a diamond ring online for his wife as a surprise. Without his knowledge or consent, the following status update appeared on his Facebook profile: "Sean Lane bought 14k White Gold 1/5 ct Diamond Eternity Flower Ring from Overstock.com"[1]. Consequently, each of his Facebook 'friends', including his wife, knew about the purchase. Immediately she sent him an instant message asking who he had bought it for. She clicked on the link which appeared on his profile and saw the ring with 51 percent discount on it. Irreversibly, Facebook had completely ruined Lane's surprise.

This unfortunate scenario occurred due to the implementation of 'Beacon' in November 2007. Beacon was a controversial advertising system that sent user data from 44 partner websites to Facebook to allow targeted advertisements. If users visited one of the partner sites, some of their actions would be automatically published on their profile. Unsurprisingly, many privacy advocates voiced concern about the service. Although contemporary social media Web 2.0 platforms like Facebook enable their users to communicate and interact with 'friends' online, the example above shows how immediate changes implemented in these media

can easily have a negative impact on the users.

Moreover, it triggers questions about the possible means of resistance to the control and power in these networks to prevent such occurrences. The realm of social media is an emergent political field that is here to stay, given the continuous development and expansion of social media platforms. This has enormous implications for the millions of individuals who use social network sites (SNSs). Although social media enable users to interact in new, enjoyable and useful ways, they are also criticised for their privacy issues, constraints of their software, and the exploitation of user-generated content.

To better understand this field in terms of power and resistance, this essay sheds light on two different approaches which untangle the design and mechanics of power within social media. The idea is to study online platforms through conditions and environments within which they are ensconced, rather than depend on external structures of study. This essay addresses the following question: *How do social media exercise control, and how can this control be resisted?* This research question will be examined from different theoretical perspectives, each of which focuses on particular means of control and resistance in relation to social media, to generate valuable insights. In this essay I begin with Manuel Castell's ideas of network society and resistance in order to show new frameworks through which social networking sites like Facebook can be studied and understood. The intention is to move away from the simple user-based content analyses and draw from techno-social discourse.

Network-making power

Power is the most fundamental process in society, since society is defined around values and institutions, and what is valued and institutionalised is defined by power relationships (Castells, 2009: p.1)

There is often much confusion within discourse, when it comes to talking about a mashup like Facebook. For users, the experience is so

When one talks about digital native activities and their resistance to power, regulation and control through Web 2.0, one automatically thinks of the Arab Revolution or Anonymous' attack on Paypal after they withdrew their services to Wikileaks. We expect young users of technology to create democratic reforms through their smartphone or their networking skills. However Stumpel frames resistance of power, regulation and control within the paradigm of Web 2.0. He argues that social media is not only a tool for resistance to something outside, there are also various revolutions going on within social media structures. He uses two frameworks to discuss this internal Facebook resistance.

Stumpel argues that we need to snap out of our Web 2.0 dream, in which technology is the answer to all our geopolitical and social problems. We need to wake up and smell the roses or the power and control dynamics. YiPing (Zona) Tsou (Book 2, To Think) tries to reframe our notion of the Web 2.0 ideology, when she talks about the Dark Side / reality of the internet. In her explanation of the human flesh search one notices that the same processes and characteristics that are ascribed to the Web 2.0 ideology can also be used by the crowd to hunt down those deemed morally imperfect.

The question of who controls the internet is very relevant. The internet is one of world's largest multi-actor initiatives, where cross-country and cross-actor collaboration is needed to keep it running. If you look at the internet ecology you have the infrastructure, the access to the infrastructure (internet service providers) and the bits and bytes that flow through the digital world. Then there are content organisers and search engines that are the intermediaries and who filter through data. You also have governments, coders, hackers, crackers and users. In this multifaceted environment, questions of control, regulation or privacy are not easily answered.

In the *Digital AlterNatives With a Cause?* collection we talk about control and power and look at how

customised, that it is often difficult to find a one-size, fits-all definition. However, if we look at Facebook as a Network, we can look at its social and political implications and the ways in which power and resistance can be mapped. One of the main proponents of a particularly influential perspective on power and resistance in communication networks is sociologist Manuel Castells. In his book *Communication Power*, he is concerned with how power exists and is exercised within networks (2009). Castells argues that communication networks are the key fields of power in the network society.

Much attention has been given to how the social organisation of networked communication affects global politics, the relationship between individuals and organisations or their nation-state, and protest politics. Castells defines a network as a – (..) set of interconnected nodes (..) which are – (..)in complex structures of communication, constructed around a set of goals that simultaneously ensure a unity of purpose and flexibility of execution by their adaptability to the operating environment (2009: pp. 19-21). They are constructed around a set of goals that simultaneously ensure a unity of purpose and flexibility of execution by their adaptability to the operating environment. Within Facebook, thus, we do not need to merely look at the content of the users and their practices but actually concentrate on how the users connect to each other in various stages of communication. Moreover, the connectedness is not arbitrary but is defined by a series of goals that are shared both in their vision and execution within the Facebook environment.

In other words, the Facebook user is encouraged to remain contained within the Facebook environment and doesn't necessarily translate into real action. I point this out because popular discourse has concentrated on Facebook and spillovers of Facebook networks into the physical world. However, a look at Facebook as a network reveals that the design of Facebook is actually counter-intuitive to the resistances which are attributed to it. Even when there is a 're-programming' of the interests and values of these actions, the possibilities afforded by Facebook to its users are infinite only as long as they subscribe to the normative operating logic of its design.

Within the framework that Castells provides, the exercising of power in networks influence society and drives societal change (2009). Individual actors in the network society are nodes which can affect – but are also affected by – power relationships that are structured by networks. Thus, we need to focus not only on how the users shape Facebook and the various practices therein but also on how the interaction with Facebook affects the users themselves.

The Castellian framework helps us recognise that the construction of meaning is an essential task of contemporary media politics and that they significantly shape human minds through processes of image making. For example, when a large social networking corporation (like Facebook) introduces new features or makes changes to their SNS, it immediately becomes 'news' which is spread throughout the blogosphere. These news events are framed differently through different types of discourse. This discourse in return coerces the user to behave in a particular design within the Facebook environment. It might lead to mobilisation of networks to protest the change, but this resistance is contained within the Facebook environment and in fact increases the power capabilities of the network.

Network(ed) resistance

If all resistance, is thus, only granted by the network and is in fact influenced and shaped by the network, is there a way by which true resistance can be materialised within these networks? Castells offers the notion of counter-power – the capacity of social actors to challenge and eventually change power relations institutionalised in the network – as a solution. Castells suggests that power relies on the control of communication and counter-power depends on breaking of this control. Thus reprogramming needs to be understood, not merely as producing subversive content which adds to the power of the network, but

as a structure by which new goals and operating logic can be established within a network by engaging in discourse. This is to say, that plugging out of Facebook is not going to produce either a reformulation of these power relationships or breaking of the control that Facebook has on what can be done. What is needed is a way by which the larger power equations of Facebook (and Facebook-like networks) can be challenged, abused and reconstituted.

This framework is particularly useful in understanding digital activism. We need to look at digital activism as not merely a series of networked protesting campaigns. As Lance Bennett (Wim et al, 2004) argues, such a view of online activism only replicates the vulnerabilities that come with control, decision making and collective identity. They rely on the design of control within Facebook and are unable to stage real resistances. More concrete ways of orchestrating resistances within the network society is to fuel it using information and communication technologies. For instance, a class-action lawsuit may result in a temporary or permanent disconnection between power co-operating networks and show the slippery weak ties that are invisible in the illusion of power.

I would suggest that the mechanisms of discursive resistance through a complex flow of information within a media communication network can be useful for social actors to contest the actions of power holders. A Protocological Study, which looks at the mechanisms through code and software, helps strengthen this argument.

Protocological control

Code is the only language that is executable, meaning that it is the first discourse that is materially effective. (Galloway, 2004: p. 244)

As opposed to this sociological perspective of networks that deals with human agency in social and technical communication networks the software studies perspective focuses more on the agency of non-human actors in networks. Network theorists Alexander Galloway and Eugene Thacker are

movements use technology to shift existing norms and power. Maesy Angelina (Book 2, To Think) looks at the Blank Noise to understand how new movements are reframing concepts of activism and power. Hernan Bonomo and Adam Haupt (Book 4, To Connect) look at the relationship between the geo-political situation, power and technology. This essay shows how it is also important to understand the design and architecture of social media when you look at questions of power and control. Stumpel uses this as a starting point to look at resistance that are also born in this grey environment.

Peer Pressure does not limit itself to being on a particular platform or website. In our conversations at the workshop in Latin America, we also learned about the pressure to be incessantly connected. As 'Digital Natives', there is an overwhelming pressure on young users of technology to be connected to the internet all the time. From schools and universities, from employers, from parents and peers, there is an expectation that they would indeed live their lives 24/7 online. This places them in an accelerated time that is often stressful because the information requires attention and time that impinges on their personal off-line life. In the Information Kit, D:coding Digital Natives, we document some of the exchanges about the possible 'Right to Disconnect' that is becoming increasingly important for people perceived as native to the digital world.

As this essay points out, one more source from where these expectations and imperatives emerge is that of designs of our web platforms. Constant notifications, via email and cellphones almost coerce the user into replying quickly, being available around the clock as a bearer and recipient of information, and in fact, made to feel guilty if s/he does not perform this role as desired.

Maesy Angelina argues that digital activism or Facebook resistance is more than just Facebook. It is important to understand the different causes and frames that are being used here. When we look at a Facebook revolution, we either see it as resistance

particularly relevant for their theory about control and power in distributed networks. They conceive of the distributed network as a 'diagram': "A structural form without a centre that resembles a web or meshwork" (Galloway, 2004: p. 3). In order to understand Protocological control we have to understand Facebook as this diagrammatic network. Looking at relationships between the connections and the nodes, the non-human and the machine protocols, the gamut of techno-scientific rules and standards that govern relationships within the Facebook network gives more insight into the idea of power control and negotiations.

"Protocol is a way of understanding control within a decentralised distributed network like Facebook. Protocols together shape a new sophisticated system of distributed control.

> Protocol is twofold; it is both an apparatus that facilitates networks and a logic that governs how things are done within that apparatus. Protocological control 'brings into existence a certain contradiction, at once distributing agencies in a complex manner while at the same time concentrating rigid forms of management and control." (p. 31).

An important site where Protocological control meets the users is the User Interface (UI). Popular Web 2.0 social media facilitate dynamic user-generated content, feature rich interactivity, and have a 'user friendly' design in spite of their complex interfaces. New techniques to publish or produce content are easily adopted by the users, as the complex technical processes are simplified through symbolic handles (Langlois et.al. 2009). Buttons, tabs, scrollbars, and many others enable the user to interact through the software at the level of the user interface (Fuller, 2008: p. 149). However, the user interface should not be confused with term 'interface', which according to new media theorists Florian Cramer and Matthew Fuller refers to the means to "link software and hardware to each other and to their human users or other sources of data".

Thus , an interface should be regarde d as a distinct area of control, in which top-down changes to the medium's software and hardware connections can be made without immediately noticeable changes in the users' interface. The front end, visible to the user, is indiscreetly affected by the back end, which Galloway refers to as the "internal face" (2010). Most often the internal face is kept invisible to the user, but it is nonetheless always moving crossways within the medium itself, influencing the user's experience through the user interface. Complex back-end processes are made invisible to the users, as the internal face hides from the user's point-of-view (Galloway, 2010). However, part of the internal face, which often can be revealed in code, is the Application Programming Interface (API). Popular social media, like Facebook and Twitter encourage their users and third party developers to utilise their API - the specifications and protocols that determine relations between software and software. To understand how Protocological control is exercised through social software, the user interface and API should both be considered as control apparatus.

Software dynamically constructs models of its user as a character with certain rights, abilities and limits. In preferences, settings, or control panels, software users can manipulate the aesthetics and functionality of the software, resulting in a more personalised user experience. However, as media lecturer Søren Pold points out, the relations between the software's senders and receiver(s) or user(s) are defined, most often within very strict limits. In 'preferences/settings/ options/control panels', he argues that software interfaces are normally structured around principles which are set up by the sender(s), which allow the user to only change certain things (Pold in Fuller ed., 2008: pp. 219-220). Many changes in the interface and in the use of software can only be changed by the "higher powers in the hierarchy controlling the software - the technical department" (Ibidem). Control is exercised through predefined options, preferences, and possible actions which are imposed onto the user. As Master student of New Media, Annewil Neervens has put it, "there is freedom within social networking sites, but to a certain extent; it is only the sort of freedom that is allowed and regulated by the

senders (Neervens, 2009: p. 28)".

In her dissertation '(Re)constructing Social Networking Sites: Examining Software Relations and its Influence on Users', Neervens argues that the constraining of the SNSs software creates a so-called 'digital-lock-in' for its users. They must abide by the constraints of the software in order to use it. According to her, social software has the paradoxical nature of allowing users to create a personal place on the Web, while at the same time facilitating the conditions to expose the user. Furthermore, the digital lock-in is not limited to the use of a social networking service as a single space, because the use of the API by third-party developers or users possibly extends software constraints to third-party applications. Although the 'digital lock-in' of social media seems to conspicuously limit the users in their actions, the constraints in social software should not be taken for granted.

By critically examining instances of Protocological articulations, the correlations between protocol and the users' control, the user interface and particular techno-cultural conditions can be mapped. This framework helps us to analyse instances of Protocological control in social media and analysing how this type of control is implicated in instances of resistance. It gives insight into how Protocological control affects the ways in which users envision their own role within the technology-based visions of change and resistance.

Counter-Protocological resistance

The overwhelming power and control of the Protocological can sometimes be enervating. It seems as if all resistance to the system would eventually be co-opted by the system, through its protocological design. However, Galloway and Thacker present the concept of resistance which reflects protocological control. They call it the counter-protocological control. Contrary to the name, Counter-Protocological control is not merely an opposition of existing protocols; it is in fact the ability to push the protocol beyond its own logic and

that is mediated by Facebook or something as trivial as a click which is never as powerful as marching the streets. Maesy argues that it is the very processes of activism that change. One needs to look beyond the traditional concepts of activism and change and stop staring at the tool itself to understand these new dynamics.

Stumpel's interpretation of Facebook resistance shows that these movements are also more then just Facebook. There are users who are coming together to resist the control or economic interest that guide corporation to make certain decisions. However, making distinctions between the online and offline, or digital and analogue actually reduces these dynamics to tools and technologies. Which is why, a study of the design and the directives that emerge from technology interactions, become necessary.

When we talk about digital natives and what they access, we only look at the content they access and not the interface, the screens they use to access. The hardware ranges from laptops to iPhones to iPads - we do not talk about them or what they imply.

In the recent uprisings around the world though, we saw that hardware seems to be easier to control. It was easy for the authorities in Cairo to shut down Nokia phones and Blackberry services externally because the companies provide that feature in-built into the phone.

Of course, it was the very same reliance on hardware that also allowed for many phones to be 'alive' during the information blackout period. As we have subsequently learned, a lot of phones in Egypt are actually made in China. These phones, while they are compliant with the Chinese government's control and regulation policies, did not respond to the authorities in Cairo and hence, even during the blackout, they were functioning and relaying information which was otherwise sought to be controlled.

The interface, for us, is not just the screen. It is a metaphor where disparate, conflicting and

borders in order to expose new capacities within the network. Galloway and Thacker look at the notion of resistance as flawed because it doesn't necessarily disturb the order and logic of protocols. Hence, they use the idea of an 'exploit' – instances of Counter-Protocological control whereby the very elements of protocol that enable distributed networks are used against these networks. In other words, they are holes in existent technologies through which potential change can be projected (Galloway and Thacker, 2007: p. 81).

One of the most prominent examples of an exploit is a computer virus. The virus is able to use the very operating systems and protocols that enable computing in order to exploit the vulnerabilities of the system. However, the use of open-source Web browser plug-in called 'Facebook Beacon Blocker'[2] is probably a more useful example to understand Counter-Protocological control. The Beacon Blocker blocked the execution of scripts from Facebook to track the users' activities on websites in 2007, thus undoing the connection between Facebook's network and the network of partner websites. This plug-in can be considered to utilise an exploit, because protocol was implemented in such a way that the users' activities were neither tracked from partner sites, nor sent to Facebook.

Another example is Greasemonkey — a Firefox internet browser extension which allows users to install 'user scripts' to modify websites on-the-fly and automatically execute Java-script hacks. Without affecting the source of the website, or using coding skills, users can simply change how the page is displayed, permanently if they want to. Users can break out of the digital lock-in by changing the way in which Facebook works for them by implementing exploits in their browser. They can change the colour schemes and appearances of pages. They can change the ways in which different information elements appear on their pages. They can even change certain functions like adding a 'dislike' button to their user interface. Moreover, by experimenting with open-source software and browser hacks, the users of social media can potentially expand their freedom to make certain changes that originally are not allowed or made possible by the original software programmers. In other words, they might do away with certain software constraints.

If we start looking at these Counter-Protocological interventions as a new form of resistance, they provide us with a greater insight into the relationships that people have with digital technologies and the ways in which they can influence resistance to the larger designs and controls of technology. While Galloway and Thacker argue that these practices should not be anthropomorphised, I find it fruitful to remember that within the terrain of social media, human motivation is intrinsic to these practices and that new structures of empowerment and agency can be found.

Conclusion

The two theoretical perspectives discussed in this essay allow us to examine particular aspects of the politics of social media.

The perspective according to which networks are controlled through discourse can reveal how social media corporations and contesting actors enact processes of image-making through framing and agenda-setting, but it obscures how alterations in the technological architecture can influence the governance of social media. The software studies framework through which instances of Protocological control can be examined are helpful in revealing these mechanics. It should be kept in mind that an overly focus on protocol conceals how this type of control is authorised by and articulated in particular techno-cultural conditions.

Both perspectives offers new ways of understanding questions of power, control and resistance within social media.

Instead of looking at social media as mere tools by which resistance can be orchestrated outside of the network, it is fruitful to see different attempts

at control, regulation and containment that are at work in the usage of social media for change. It was the ambition of this essay to focus on control and resistance in social media, using Facebook as a prime example.

esoteric practices of power, regulation, control, usage, behaviour, transnational production and consumption, all merge to form complex designs affecting the spread and integration of technologies in the everyday life of a digital native.

[1] Nakashima, Ellen.. "Feeling Betrayed, Facebook Users Force Site to Honor Their Privacy". The Washington Post. Published November 30, 2007 <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/11/29/AR2007112902503.html> (accessed June 21, 2010)>

[2] Weiner, Nate. "Block Facebook Beacon - The Idea Shower". November 7, 2007.<https://addons.mozilla.org/nl/firefox/addon/10497> (accessed June 21, 2010).

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2.3 DIGITAL NATIVES IN THE NAME OF A CAUSE: **FROM "FLASH MOB" TO "HUMAN FLESH SEARCH"**

by
YiPing (Zona) Tsou
REFLECTION

The emergence of newly imagined communities

The dominant discourse around use of digital and internet technologies has been either mired in celebration or pathologisation. On one hand are the people who bask in the participatory power of Web 2.0 technologies, announcing the emergence of new public spheres and democratic spaces of engagement and expression. On the other hand are the detractors who remain sceptical of the 'newness' that digital technologies bring, often repeating the axiom of how, more the things change, the more they remain the same. In this discourse, even though the warring lines are clearly drawn and the dialogue is often fraught and tense, there is something that remains unexamined and unquestioned – In the imagination of either of the warring factions the users who remain at the centre of the discourse are identical.

Scholars and practitioners alike, whether they are hopeful all the way, waiting to witness the bright, promising future that the information and communication technology (ICT) is going to bestow upon us, liberating all the oppressed from the tyranny of the authoritarian regimes and repressive censorship, or skeptics who stay alert of "the dark side of internet freedom"and are addressing the issue with sentiment of disillusionment, mourning for the failed (or not yet fulfilled) promise of a digital utopia, presume that the beneficiaries and architects of this new public spheres are still well intentioned, progressive, liberal and tolerant users. Sure, there might be occasional exclamations at questions of piracy, pornography, bullying, etc. but it is always believed that there is something intrinsic in the nature of the internet that 'cures' the existing evils of our times. Even in the discourse around these subversive activities, there is a resilient hope that the 'user' of cyberspaces would necessarily be a civic-minded person.

However, as blogger and commentator Evgeny Morozov perceptively points out, no matter how wistful we are, social media and Web 2.0 do not always foster civic engagement and democratic reform. In effect, the very tools the revolutionaries use to undermine the authoritarian governments are just as likely to grant dictators with more powerful weapons to crush a popular uprising or any budding rebellious force. This essay tries to look at the 'other' side of cyberspaces to show that digital natives and the causes they espouse are not automatically desirable. These new generations of prosumers, who consume, produce, share and disseminate information in participatory and collaborative ways, can also mobilise their resources for regressive and authoritarian ambitions. This essay shows, how, in this age of ubiquitous computing, hitherto contained violences find greater supporters and audiences than ever before. The very platforms and techniques of user-generated content archives, collaborative production of information, peer-2-peer loose affiliations and an unregulated space for germination of ideas can also lead to the production of a digital native identity that can be dangerous and destructive.

It is not the intention of the essay to be steeped in paranoia and call for a censorship or regulation of the internet spaces. Rather it seeks to make us aware of the biases we hold when talking about digital natives by locating them only in progressive liberal contexts.

In the process, it also develops a new way of understanding contexts, which are not only about the geo-politics but also about the imagined histories and legacies, ambitions and aspirations that we attribute to digital natives.

In order to make this argument, I look at two significant processes which have emerged with participatory technologies, use the same technological impulses and yet achieve very opposite results. The first is the phenomenon of flash-mob – a viral networking mobilisation that calls for people who do not know each other but are connected with each other through the technologies and digital platforms that they consume, to come together in public spaces and perform a series of unexplained, often bizarre actions that subvert the logic and intended design of the spaces. Flashmobs have been used successfully as political statements, cultural innovation, social rejuvenation and a tool for mobilising large numbers of people to engage in civic and leisure activities collectively. The second is the phenomenon of "Human Flesh Search" (人肉搜索renrousousuo) that has lately gained currency in the People's Republic of China (PRC) and Taiwan – The Human Flesh Search is a peer-2-peer network that harnesses the 'wisdom of crowds' to search for people who might have offended a community or a collective but escaped the ire of the mobs by remaining anonymous online. Human Flesh Searches mobilise masses of people online or offline to identify certain violators of 'morality' that the community seeks to punish because the 'crimes' might not be punishable by the law. In looking at both these, I'd like to lay bare the grey area between the bright side of a cyber-utopia that would be attained through the egalitarian progressive valuesinbuilt in the prevailing discourse of ICT and the other side that we tend to overlook where the risk of alternative use, or purely abuse of the internet, lies in the name of a cause.

Digital natives with a thousand voices

With the advance of technology, the world seems to have become widely wired, operating on the common

YiPing (Zona) Tsou's contribution gives a fresh new insight into the other side / the dark side of the internet. It forces the reader to step out of their comfort zone when thinking about the power of technology and the ability to mediate the crowd for social good. She demonstrates that the dynamics that bring crowds together against corruption, political dissidence or cultural expressions also work when the crowd is mobilised to identify certain violators of 'morality' which the communities seeks to punish.

Her examples of the Human Flesh Search shows how power structures are shifting from the more traditional forms of police, law and penal system, to the crowd. She presents Chinese and Taiwanese phenomenon where the crowd becomes the judge and juror. The crowd becomes a form of online vigilante justice by naming and shaming those who misbehave online. In Book 4, *To Connect*, Ben Wagner also argues that digital native actions are destabilising existing discourse. The rise of technology is increasingly questioning the logic and legitimacy of established social and political boundaries. Generally, these changes are not of immediately sudden groundbreaking nature, like is the case in the Human Flesh Search, but rather they are shifts which occur in our values and governance structures. He argues that our normative frameworks are changing and gives the example of privacy and intellectual property which the pre digital generations found important to maintain in the digital world. For digital natives information is there to share and remix, which counters the notion of intellectual property right.

language of digital literacy. In this wired world emerged what the scholars called 'Digital Natives', which is still a highly contested term[2].

The *Digital Natives with a Cause?* Knowledge Programme began with each of us seeking to define and identify with the term Digital Native; however, the real journey started after all participants from different regions and cultures agreed to disagree that we do not wear the term Digital Native uniformly. Some of us proudly claimed the title of 'geek' and declared "geek is the new sexy" while others exclaimed "we are not all techies!"[3] Some members felt "staying offline" sounded worse than "committing suicide" and some believed in "the right to unplug" or "to lurk online".[4] Probably the only thing everyone agreed on was the fact that, apart from a very (un)privileged few, no matter what we do, most of people today can hardly operate outside the parameters of digital technologies.

"When in doubt, Google" is a motto virtually shared by all of us. Turning to social networking websites and mobile devices has become an everyday activity so embedded in our routine that we do not even feel we are "utilising" the digital technology. Surrounded by all pervasive digital devices as we are today, even though we do not claim or avow to be digital activists who aim for a radical, social reform, our concept of activity/activism is being so radically reformatted that we are constantly inventing new modes of engagement with public events, the much condemned "slacktivism" or "clicktivism" included.[5] Criticism aside, the dominant discourse tends to have a positive outlook on the emergent imagined communities shaped by digital technologies, attributing the recent progressive and democratic development to digital natives who speak the new-fangled language of this information age and hence are supposed to act upon a greater cause for the betterment of the world.

In fact, such discourse is quite powerful as shown by the comments after successive revolutions in the Middle East and North Africawhich are taking place in 2011 . The world seems to have witnessed the glory that is the "smart mob", a gathering of those who know how to utilise the communication technologies, and are able to connect and mobilise themselves, and successfully congregate in a physical space so as to make social impact in person.[6] The mass media and a vast array of commentators along with popular bloggers sing in unison, eulogising over these "smart mobs"who symbolise a new face of revolutionaries armed with their smartphones and other high-tech gadgets, and predict a latest wave of revolution employing tactics unseen before the advent of digital technologies.[7] Such success stories have set many other authoritarian regimes on high alert, including the People's Republic of China[8] that took quick steps to ensure that such mobilisations of masses questioning the authority of the government do not mushroom in the country.. [9]

The dark force of digital natives

The PRC government has been known for its strict control over the "internet freedom" (or more precisely, speech freedom both online and offline) while ironically, everyday civilian Chinese are among the most destructive and intrusive hackers that pose a serious threat to cyber-security all over the world (aside from China itself). However, these Chinese hackers, though not in direct association with the central government, are more in line with the Communist party politics than against it.[10] Their cyber-attacks are often instigated by nationalistic prompts and mainly targeted at the so-called offending countries instead of challenging the overriding ideology of the Communist Party, and rarely focus on the domestic public affairs within China.[11] In effect, some Chinese patriotic hackers even call themselves "red hackers" and are highly esteemed among the general public as they appear to set a model for the nation.[12] The acclamation for these hackers is akin to the accolade for the brave smart mobs, who purportedly aspired to "activate" a revolution via social networking sites and digital communication tools in an attempt to achieve democracy in the Middle East and North Africa(MENA) discourse. Of course, hackers are not equivalent of smart mobs in that they simply manipulate the systems so as to make a virtual

announcement of their existence without making a physical presence in public. Simply put, even though they may make an impact socially, in realitytheir faces remain hidden behind the screen.

The screenshot of Javaphile Hack (courtesy Scott Henderson)[13]

Locating digital natives in China helps us unpack the different presumptions that build the idea of a Hacker. They are not necessarily hackers, but there are undeniably some overlaps, and if the aforementioned mentality is any indicator, it would not seem so surprising when there is no serious attempt at a Chinese version of a "Jasmine Revolution" initiated by the smart mob in the PRC.[14] Moreover, if we know the socio-historical context of China, then there is no surprise at all why a smart mob has never become a driving force in the PRC that compels any political or social change so far. In effect, ever since the Tiananmen Square protests of 1989 (a series of students' non-violent demonstrations for economic reform and liberalisation) were met by a militant massacre (which was claimed to never have taken place by the PRC press and media)[15], the authorities concerned have been successfully suppressing any potential revolt with the aid of their 'Law of the People's Republic of China on Assemblies, Processionsand Demonstrations' enacted right after the Tiananmen crackdown.[16] Hence the political gathering in public could cause the participants a great risk of ending

Tsou argues that the dominant discourse on digital natives tends to have a positive outlook on the cause and the change. This discourse has now become more powerful since the Arab Spring, while the same technologies can mediate action that might not be for the good, like the Human Flesh Search. In Book 3, *To Act*, David Sasaki, questions this positive discourse from a different angle. While academics and scholars argue if the revolution could or could not be tweeted during and in the aftermath of Tunisia and Egypt, both the cyber-utopists and cyber-pessimist ignore the mayor question: What happens after all the protests and revolutions? Do social media powered revolutions yield stability? Social media might be very effective in the short term but be a hindrance in the long term. David dubs the protests in Tunisia, Egypt, Spain and Greece as anti-power activism. He argues that "indeed, in countries such as Egypt and Tunisia, the old political class must be removed in order to create spaces for new forms of accountability and participation to blossom. Too often, however, anti-power mobilisation loses its strength and unity once the old political class if forced out.

up in prison. Accordingly, any open gathering even just purely for fun, such as flash mob activity, is still few and far in between.[17] While the smart/flesh mob is somehow kept in check in the PRC, there is a curious collaborative cyber activity called "人肉搜索引*renrousousuo yingqing*," or simply *ren'rousou'suo*, literally and graphically translated as "Human Flesh Search Engine".

This Human Flesh Search Engine, according to James K. Yuann and Jason Inch, the authors of *Supertrends of Future China*, seems to share many of the characteristics of Clay Shirky'snetworked social collaboration: "Enabled and made cost-effective by technology, channelling an existing motivation that was not possible to act upon as a group before".[18] But whilethe types of group-formingthat Clay Shirky, in his book *Here Comes Everybody* describes as"flash mobs"have been staging certain anti-authoritarian demonstrations (such as the flash mob gathering in Belarus where people came to a public square in the capital Minsk to do nothing but eat ice cream together while the government agents still treated this as an illegal assembly and arrested some of the young participants[19]), such flash mobs are hard to spot in China. Even in the few successful mobilisations that attracted media attention, flash mobs in the PRC seem yet to have evinced any element of confrontation and have been often described as a whim of fashion to the public.[20] On the other hand, the Human Flesh Search, which basically deployssimilar tactics and mechanics, abddraws onthe wisdom of the crowds, crowd sourcing, Friend-of-a-Friend structure, and may well be deemed an alternative form of flash mobs, has virtuallyturned into a nation-wide operation that engages and mobilises a great and growing number of Chinese internet users (often referred to by the Chinese media as *'netizenwang min'* or 網民" who would stay online virtually all the time). Although similar occurrence of crowd-sourced virtual detective work has been seen in other countries, quite a few commentators claim Human Flesh Search is a culture-specific phenomenon that had started as early as the year 2001 in China and quickly spread to other parts of East Asia (Taiwan in particular).[21]

Witch Hunt 2.0– Digital natives with a chase

The allegedly first case of Human Flesh Search took place in 2001 when anetizen posted the Hong Kong actress Ziyao Chen's photo online and claimed her to be his girlfriend. This instigated the other unbelieving netizens to start a crowd-sourced detective network through Chinese forums and bulletin boards and discover her true identity - stripped off the vested interest and exposed the naked truth, the pure "flesh".But it was not until 2006 with the "kitten-killer" incident in which a video of a girl crushing a kitten to death with her stilettos was posted online, that *Renrou Sousuo* became a widely known and fast spreading phenomenon in the PRC.

Within hours of the posting of the said video, indignant Chinese netizens scrutinised the footage and traced back the unknown 'faceless' perpetrator in the video to her exact locale by mobilising human and digital resources aided by their smart gadgets. They initiated a project on Mop forum[22] calling for "hunting down the lady and the cameraman" which went viral on many popular forums and soon formed a nationwide network of "human flesh search" powered by a combination of computer networking skills as well as human connection. An anonymous netizen traced the original video link and revealed the video was posted by someone registered as Ganimas. Then the crowd followed up to conduct keyword search in Baidu (China's equivalent of Google) and quickly discovered many purchases of high heels (the above stilettos included) under the same user ID, and since online transactions need certain verification of personal information, Ganimas was quickly nailed. Meanwhile, another netizen identified the locale of the incident as his/her hometown in Heilongjiang province and provided similar photos featured on local government's tourist information website, which further prompted a Google Earth search confirming the locale. With this crucial information, a man who had done transactions with Ganimas and worked in a local TV station followed up on the leads. Four days after the search began, the

traditional media picked up the story, and people all across China saw the kitten killer's photoall over the TV and newspapers. And the lady, Wang Jiao, was soon identified by a netizen who lived in the same town and had seen her working as a nurse in the local hospital.[23]

In less than a week, the cyberposse exposed every single detail of this woman's life—including her real name, age, marital status, whereabouts (address of domicile as well as office), which resulted in constant bombardment ofthousands of malicious phone calls and even death threats, and eventually led to her forced suspension from her position and eventually she had to leave her hometown.[24] If there were a theme song for this incident, it would probably be "Ding-Dong! The witchis dead! Now let's go searching for other witches among us!" As we can sense from internet comments, media coverage and even official response, the majority seems to have taken this case as a "just"execution, which has probably spurred more netizens to take on a self-appointed mission to go on more of such "witch hunt" in ensuing years.

In fact, by the year of 2008, it had become so popular that Google even made a mock webpage of *Renrou Sousuofor* the April Fool's Day prank in simplified Chinese, recruiting experts with "aspirit of Gossipismand preferably a casual and cavalier style"along with volunteers as long as the applicant "owns a computer, a telephone, some chalks, a box

In Book 1, *To Be*, Anat Ben-David, argues that if we want to understand digital natives identities and initiatives we need to look at their history, legacy and environment. The context is what make the digital native. This argument is confirmed here by the notion that the Chinese history of Tiananmen Square protest of 1980 still affects current digital natives mobilisation.

of napkins, a whole set of 40 volumes T*he Charts of Popular Gossip* Figures, sixteenth edition (large print)".

The descriptions of this manpowered, all-powerful search engine are hilarious, especially when they proudly declare their mission statement, and no one can render it better and more poetic than the Google Translator itself:

As we can see from this passage, *Renrou Sousuo* does not have an inherent or consistent cause: "the truth behind a certain door", "public recognition of a moral position", "the most beautiful jungle girl", "the most touching Alpine herdsmen", "the most mysterious desert cave", "the most romantic encounter".... An infinite possibility seems to lies in such endless search for truth and justice, beauty and romance, and everything that touches a heart and strikes a chord with the audience. Poetic, isn't it? It seems to start out as such an innocuous and effective way of searching and sharing the information.

However, Human Flesh Search has gradually turned into a double-edged sword, cutting through the line between good and bad.[26] Tom Downey, *The New York Times* journalist, elucidates such a conceptual turn in his article entitled "China's Cyberposse," pointing out that "[t]he popular meaning is now not just a search *by* humans but also a search for humans, initially performed online but intended to cause real-world consequences.[27]

As the name suggests, the Human Flesh Search graphically depicts this kind of search that is conducted by human connections rather than machine-based algorithms to locate the sources of information as well as calculate the relevance of the data for the sake of ferreting out and hunting down the human target who has committed all sorts of wrongdoings, ranging from telling a lie (as in the allegedly first case), blocking the ambulance and flashing the middle finger,[28] refusing to yield the seat to the elderly,[29] abusing a cat,[30] sexually harassing a girl,[31] having an affair,[32] hit-and-run[33] to anything that is considered "immoral" or "improper" by the wide wired world which could virtually go wild in the name of justice and vengeance.[34]

As aptly put by Downey, "[t]hey [Human Flesh Searches] are a form of online vigilante justice in which Internet users hunt down and punish people who have attracted their wrath. The goal is to get the targets of a search fired from their jobs, shamed in front of their neighbors, run out of town."Kevin Bloom, a writer and critic based in South Africa, further points out that after the "kitten-killer" incident, what used to be "a form of harmless crowd-sourcing, suddenly became a network for fed-up social activists with a taste for non-conceptual blood."[35]

In a sense, the prevailing Human Flesh Search Engine feeds on flesh and blood of those who are accused of committing misdemeanours, moral vices or simply dissidence; in other words, it has somehow transformed into a man-powered censorship machine spontaneously run by the civilian netizens, operating "search and punish"mechanism.

Not only is the Big Brother watching you, but now that the little brothers and sisters join force to monitor all the aberrant and deviant who do not act in conformity with the societal norms, social mores as well as political ideology, a more effective surveillance has come in force from the bottom-up.

Hence, any case of aberrant behaviour, once spotted, recorded and uploaded online, could

trigger moral panic as well as mass hysteria and canlead to public shaming and lynching of the target by the angry mob.[36]

Human Flesh Search, in this sense, is just like an updated, modern and perhaps more 'civilised'" form of medieval witch-hunt, with the same self-righteous mentality, the modern cyberposse equipped with the new technology would sniff out "the witch" in no time. Once the human target has been singled out from a myriad of "open calls for human flesh search" [人肉搜索令], without so much as a trial but a persecution, the net vigilantes would go into great lengths to expose every single detail of the targettedindividual's personal life, flaying the flesh and blood alive, and condemning the privacy of the sought to a virtual death. In a grim case, such Human Flesh Search has even caused an actual death. [37] Despite grave admonitions some commentators put forward, warning us of the consequences of misuse of technology and privacy violation, the term "人肉搜索引擎 *renrou sousuo yingqing*" has become so trendy that the youth have started to use "Human Flesh *ren'rou*人肉" as a verb. Discussion forums are always inundated with "calls for human flesh search人肉搜索令"to the point that the expression "人肉他！*ren'rou ta*", literally translated as "human flesh him/her", has taken on an uncanny nuance of cannibalism.

One signature picture posted on Mop.com, from which the term "Human Flesh Search"originated, in which two girls are waving knives with blood on them, and the slogan at the right bottom reads "We are the chopper gang" [38]

Mob 2.0: Digital natives with/out a cause

Some scholars have taken positivepositions and made optimistic predictions about the Human Flesh Search Engine, thinking it could remedy deficiencies of the legal systems and redress the failing moral values in the Chinese society, such a mechanism of "search and punish" has a serious flaw when the issues it readdresses are not so clear-cut black and white. This is aptly pointed out by Bloom,

Nestling somewhere between the related concepts of "tyranny of the majority" and "the irrationality of crowds," said flaw was illustrated in June 2008 by the story of a young woman named GaoQianhui, who just wanted to watch her favourite programme on television.[39]

Gao became a target since she recorded a video to give full vent to her frustration about the three-day national mourning period for Sichuan quake that disrupted regular TV schedules. The video was clearly for her to rant and rave, but her remarks such as "Come on, how many of you died? Just a few, right? There are so many people in China anyway," triggered a Human Flesh Search to, again, hound down the "witch/bitch". Within hours, her

identity was exposed, and the next day local police came to arrest her, albeit without any legitimate reason to detain her.[40]

However, the "tyranny of the majority" and "the irrationality of crowds" are even more palpable in the case of Grace Wang (王千源), who was a freshman at Duke University when she tried to mediate the two camps between the pro-Tibet independence and pro-Chinese protesters in April 2008.[41] The netizens again reacted as one, mobilising the wired world to dig out her personal information in an attempt to punish her "treason" in siding with Tibetan independence. The Human Flesh Search instigated by the nationalist sentiment was so powerful that once her parents' home address was posted online, they had to flee from their house and go in hiding for the sake of safety.

It is not unheard of that "the wisdom of the crowd" could verge on "the noise of the mob",

which is probably best manifested by the innumerable edit wars on Wikipedia talk pages where people engage in heated discussion about certain edited page yet end up in fierce verbal swordplay and personal attack. In most parts of the world, fierce and brutal though such warfare of ideologies is, none has ever gone "physical" and actually attacked people beyond the virtual domain, which is not the case with a lot of "virtual wars" on discussion forums and bulletin boards that have gone "real", or rather, *real dirty* in the Human Flesh Search phenomenon in China.

Both cases demonstrate the ease and speed with which people can be mobilised for a cause, whether it is just or not, it would be justified by the mob mentality when "all becomes one". Just as the saying goes, "themob has many heads, but no brains". In carrying out a shared cause, the individual netizenscoalesce to form a vigilante group of some sorts, often bordering on a lynch-mob mentality. Thus, once the mob is formed by any sensationalised call for Human Flesh Search, the authenticity of the piece of information shared might not be of primary concern, and no one would actually go into length to first examine whether the poster is telling a lie. There has been a weird sentiment "we are in this together", so no one can really question whether the original poster has the right to initiate such search, and even if the mob got the wrong target, the cause is still *right*.[42] In fact, whenever such a cybermob is formed, "*right* is determined by a kind of process of consensus-building where the strongest, earnest, motivated voices may dominate," as Yuann and Inch perceptively point out.[43] Those who believe that internet and communication technology can serve as a power equalizer and has greater democratic potential may feel disappointed since the Human Flesh Search in China has proven quite the opposite.[44] ICT does not help equalisedistribution of resources, and by extension, power in the digital age. In some sense, it empowers people with tools and skills to begin with, and as the optimists expect, there have been indeed some successful cases of Human Flesh Search that exercise citizen surveillance. Yet most of the time, theyhave nothing to do with governmental officials but merely an ordinary someonewho used to be able to hide among the crowd. But now, as we can see from the miserable outcome of those who have become the target of the Human Flesh Search, they are forced to face a multitude of netizens, anonymous, gregarious and ubiquitous, executing many-to-one surveillance in perfect unison.

There is no way to hide from the public gaze when everybody is watching everybody, but don't panic, we have nothing to worry about as long as we "stay in line" both online and offline, we will live together in perfect harmony, happily ever after... Or at least, so says the Communist Party, stressing a utopian vision of a "harmonious society."[45] Under such a big banner, all the surveillance and censorship seems to be justified, and in some sense, these internet vigilantes, cyberposse or "norm polices" are in line with the "red hackers," working hand in hand with the dominant ideology, fighting against the enemy abroad while hunting down the enemy within who disrupts the "harmony". Freedom of speech? Personal privacy? Democracy? That's heresy of the West! When Mob 2.0 is mobilised, "the many" has become ONE (and

this ONE cannot be challenged) even in the so-called democratic society such as Taiwan.

Out of many, comes ONE

As soon as the controversial ruling of disqualification during the mid-bout of a Taekwondo contestant Yang Shu-chun from Taiwan when she was leading 9-0 at the Asian Games on 17 November2010 was announced, the whole wired world in Taiwan was immediately flooded with indignant posts and many started to investigate the "truth" by gathering information from different sources, uploading live recording of the match online.[46] Their coverage of the story appeared online almost instantaneously, if not faster, than all the mainstream media reports in Taiwan and overseas.[47] When our official association and government was slow in reaction, many digital natives initiated campaigns on Facebook and some even went to lengths to translate the incident into English to spread the word out.[48]

While all voices chanted in unison, targeting the Korean judge and Chinese officials, the dissidence stood out: A student posted remarks on his Facebook, declaring that he was "totally supportive of the Korean's ruling" and that he "felt great since Korean judge's hard-line dealing would give Team Chinese Taipei a good lesson"[49]. The reaction was immediate and sensationalised. The online community soon proved the old saying still goes: "Unity is strength" by executing Human Flesh Search to dig out every bits and pieces of his personal information and share it with the whole world. In no time, his blog was inundated by furious posts accusing him of being a "traitor", his cellphone kept receiving foul text and voice messages, and he claimed to be stalked when he walked home. Eventually he shut off his Facebook account, agreed to be interviewed and warned those who had harassed him that he had the freedom of speech and would file a lawsuit if they did not stop harassing him.[50]

It seems that the Human Flesh Search, though done in different regions and by different people, manifests exactly the same pattern and exercises a routine that hunts the hereticall the way from online to offline life. Of course, digital natives in the PRC and Taiwan claim they are doing this for a cause, and a noble one in their sense, to find and stop/punish the immoral, but exactly who lays down those rules and standards to judge and evaluate the 'morality','integrity' or 'patriotism'of someone whom we may never even know in person and meet in life? Who has the right to decide who ought to be searched or punished? How do we know whether the cause is justified and wouldn't turn into an excuse? When the multitude of voices becomes ONE, it could be a dangerous sign. Even though most of us start from the "right" side (or so we believe), it is hard to say we would never end up on the other side.[50]

The name of the cause

Clearly, there is no returning of this digital revolution, and the newly imagined communities that we call Digital Natives are of a thousand voices, fighting for a variety of causes, may not be all progressive, liberal and striving to make a change for the better. The ICT grant us a new set of powerful tools, but a social tool is only as good or as bad as the people who are using it.

No matter how "liberating" and "empowering" we imagine the tools to be, *a tool is a tool is a tool*.... Meanwhile, it does not matter what certain flash mobs or smart mobs have done in the past, digital natives all over the world are not of one face, there is an undeniably dark force breeding among us. On occasion, the changes could be violent and the causes could verge on or end up as excuses to exploit the ICT so as to hunt down any dissident or "peace-breaker"that disrupts "harmony".

The Causes that we espouse and the ambitions that we enable with the use of digital technologies and the tools that they provide, hence, need to be questioned. Merely the use of digital technologies do not make us digital natives – the impulses, the aspirations, the desires, the contexts, the impetus and the motivation, all add to understanding our

relationships with digital and internet technologies. It might be true that one becomes digital and is not born so, but before one becomes digital one wears many different identities. Not all of these identities necessarily endorse individual freedom and rights. The technologies that allow us to create processes of change for a just and equitable world are also technologies that enable massively regressive and vigilante acts that exercise a mob-based notion of justice. Maybe we need to add qualifications to our understanding of who a digital native is. Maybe we need to define not only the users, but also the politics behind their actions; And we definitely need new frameworks and vocabularies to account for a section of the population who might be equally skilled and fluent with these digital technologies but produce another kind of change, using the same tools and processes that we rejoice in.

[1] See the introduction of the The Net Delusion—The Dark Side of Internet Freedom. http://www.publicaffairsbooks.com/publicaffairsbooks-cgi-bin/display?book=9781586488741

[2] Marc Prensky coined the term digital native in his work Digital Natives, Digital Immigrants published in 2001. In his seminal article, he assigns it to a new group of students enrolling in educational establishments. The term draws an analogy to a country's natives, for whom the local religion, language, and folkways are natural and indigenous, compared with immigrants to a country who often are expected to adapt and begin to adopt the region's customs. (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Digital_Natives)

[3] Maesy Angelina's comment left on the art installation at the Thinkathon.

[4] The Digital Natives With a Cause?blog. www.digitalnatives.in

[5] Slacktivism (sometimes slactivism or clicktivism) is a portmanteau formed out of the words slacker and activism. The word is usually considered a pejorative term that describes "feel-good" measures, in support of an issue or social cause, that have little or no practical effect other than to make the person doing it feel satisfaction.

[6] Howard Rheingold's definition from Smart Mobs: The Next Social Revolution

[7] http://tribune.com.pk/story/122242/a-new-wave-of-revolution/ ; http://www.miller-mccune.com/politics/the-cascading-effects-of-the-arab-spring-28575/

[8] http://www.jamestown.org/programs/chinabrief/single/?tx_ttnews[tt_news]=37487&tx_ttnews[backPid]=25&cHash=91247dc039a331a186c9182ccd7317b2 ; http://www.insideriowa.com/index.cfm?nodeID=17818&audienceID=1&action=display&newsID=11615

[9] http://chinadigitaltimes.net/2011/04/jasmine-in-the-middle-kingdom-autopsy-of-chinas-failed-revolution/ ; http://www.miller-mccune.com/media/media-and-revolution-2-0-tiananmen-to-tahrir-28595/ ;http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/world/asia-pacific/uprooting-the-chinese-jasmine-revolution/article1987779/page2/

[10] In a 2005 Hong Kong Sunday Morning Post article, a man identified as "the Godfather of hackers" explains, "Unlike our Western [hacker] counterparts, most of whom are individualists or anarchists, Chinese hackers tend to get more involved with politics because most of them are young, passionate, and patriotic. [...] Jack LinchuanQiu, a communications professor at the Chinese University of Hong Kong who spent the 2001 hacker war logged into mainland forums, agrees. "Chinese hackerism is not the American 'hacktivism' that wants social change," he says. "It's actually very close to the state. The Chinese distinction between the private and public domains is very small."

[11] http://www.popsci.com/scitech/article/2009-04/hackers-china-syndrome?page=2

[12] "This culture thrives on a viral, Internet-driven nationalism. The post-Tiananmen generation has

known little hardship, so rather than pushing for democracy, many young people define themselves in opposition to the West. China's Internet patriots, who call themselves "red hackers," may not be acting on direct behalf of their government, but the effect is much the same."http://www.popsci.com/scitech/article/2009-04/hackers-china-syndrome# "A 2005 Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences survey equates hackers and rock stars, with nearly 43 percent of elementary-school students saying they "adore" China's hackers. One third say they want to be one." http://www.popsci.com/scitech/article/2009-04/hackers-china-syndrome#

[13] On May 20, 2003, a man named PengYinan, then known only by the moniker 'coolswallow', logged into a public Shanghai Jiaotong University student forum and described how he formed a group at the university's Information Security Engineering School that coordinated with other hackers to bring down whitehouse.gov in 2001. "Javaphile was established by coolswallow (that's me) and a partner," he wrote in Chinese. "At first we weren't a hacker organization. After the 2001 China-U.S. plane collision incident, Chinese hackers declared an anti-American Battle ... and coolswallow joined in the DDoS White House attacks." Later, he bragged, his group defaced other sites it considered anti-Chinese, including that of the Taiwanese Internet company Lite-On.

[14] http://chinadigitaltimes.net/2011/04/jasmine-in-the-middle-kingdom-autopsy-of-chinas-failed-revolution/ ; http://www.miller-mccune.com/media/media-and-revolution-2-0-tiananmen-to-tahrir-28595/ ;http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/world/asia-pacific/uprooting-the-chinese-jasmine-revolution/article1987779/page2/

[15] http://globalspin.blogs.time.com/2011/06/04/22-years-after-tiananmen-shadow-of-crackdown-looms-large-over-china/

[16] See http://www.ahga.gov.cn/falv/GAZHFLFG/FL/1083.htm ; http://reason.com/archives/2009/06/04/china-after-tiananmen

[17] There are indeed some fun incidents of youth dancing or playing a prank in public. Nonetheless, occurrences of a smart or flash mob that have taken place in the PRC are, demographically speaking, relatively insignificant and sporadic compared to the prevalent and vigourous happenings elsewhere. But they do have websites set up for flash mob gathering such as http://www.hlo.cc/, http://www.artmy.cn/ but there are few successful mobilisation drives known to the public. In effect, the coverage is few and far in between at its best.

[18] In their blog article "China's Human Flesh Search Engine - Not what you might think it is...",James K. Yuann and Jason Inch share a lot of insights on this phenomenon which they argue is unique in China. http://www.chinasupertrends.com/chinas-human-flesh-search-engine-not-what-you-might-think-it-is/

[19] See "Ice cream politics: flash mob in Belarus" posted by Howard Rheingold on October 3rd, 2006 http://www.smartmobs.com/2006/10/03/ice-cream-politics-flash-mob-in-belarus/

[20] Almost all of the flash mob activities that have successfully took place in the PRC so far have been staged like a performance, most people either sing a song or dance, or perform a skit at best. Here are the rare news coverage in English: "'Flash Mob' Puzzles Bystanders" http://www.china.org.cn/english/entertainment/220084.htm ; "'Flashmob' of 12 Proposed to One Girl in Beijing" http://english.cri.cn/3100/2006/09/03/202@134346.htm

[21] For an insightful overview of this argument in English, see "Human Flesh Search: Old Topic, New Story" posted on Friday, June 27, 2008 by XujunEberleinhttp://www.insideoutchina.com/2008/06/human-flesh-search-old-topic-new-story.html ; in Chinese, "Manpower Search: Cyber public space, Social Functions and Legal Regulations" [人肉搜索：網絡公共空間、社會功能與法律規制] http://cdn851.todayisp.net:7751/article.chinalawinfo.com/Article_Detail.asp?ArticleId=47680

[22] Mop Forum is one of the most popular social

networking sites in China. You can read more about it at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mop.com

[23] See Dongxiao Liu's Human Flesh Search Engine: Is It a Next Generation Search Engine?

[24] http://hplusmagazine.com/2009/06/02/search-and-destroy-engines/

[26] You can still access it at http://www.google.cn/intl/zh-CN/renrou/index.html. As the article "China's Human Flesh Search Engine - Not what you might think it is..." points out, "The fact that day was April 1st should tell readers it was meant as tongue-in-cheek (and may not entirely be a joke - a number of search engines have tried human-assisted search and relevance checking), but it put a name to a movement that has been happening online in China for some time: Online collaboration by Netizens to search via the power of China's massive 225 million Internet users." (http://www.chinasupertrends.com/chinas-human-flesh-search-engine-not-what-you-might-think-it-is/ posted on May 25, 2008 3:56 pm) A famous online magazine in Hong Kong dedicated a feature on this phenomenon entitled "'Human Flesh Search'—Is it a Demon or an Angel? 「人肉搜索」是惡魔還是天使" which has provided a comprehensive overview of this controversial issue. (http://hot.wenweipo.com/2008035/)

[27] http://www.nytimes.com/2010/03/07/magazine/07Human-t.html?_r=2&pagewanted=all; See the list among the most notorious cases in China: http://xzczkt.gicp.net/show.asp?id=205 ; http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Human_flesh_search_engine#Notable_examples

[28] "University student under fire for ambulance incident": This Human Flesh Search took place in Taiwan in December 2010 when a doctoral candidate at National Taiwan University allegedly blocked an ambulance that was rushing a gravely ill woman to the hospital and gave it the middle finger. The incident caused public outrage and the man was charged with causing bodily harm and obstruction of official business. (http://www.taipeitimes.net/News/taiwan/archives/2010/12/30/2003492244 ;http://www.taipeitimes.com/News/taiwan/archives/2011/02/02/2003495037). For the video footage and an English discussion on a Malaysian forum, see http://forum.lowyat.net/topic/1700216 For a detailed documentation http://zh.wikipedia.org/zh-tw/%E6%96%B0%E5%BA%97%E6%95%91%E8%AD%B7%E8%BB%8A%E9%98%BB%E6%93%8B%E4%BA%8B%E4%BB%B6

[29] Take the most recent case in Taiwan for example: a young woman refused to yield the seat to the elderly and got into a fierce verbal fight, which was recorded and posted online. http://www.nownews.com/2011/06/15/91-2720382.htm

[30] Such cases of animal abuse and cruelty have instigated many cases of international internet vigilantism and calls for web hunt, as in the case with "vacuum kitten killer" who suffocated two kittens in a plastic bag after sucking the air out with a vacuum, which had infuriated many animal rights activists, animal lovers, and Facebook users across the world to unite to hunt down the man and revealed him to be a 25-year-old bisexual porn star based in France. http://news2.onlinenigeria.com/odd/64590-Vacuum-kitten-killer-hunted-after-making-snuff-movie-suffocation.rss by James White 24/12/2010 ; http://teddyhilton.com/2011-01-13-boy-who-killed-kittens-identified-as-gay-porn-star

[31] "Chinese official shamed by 'human flesh' search engine'": A government official accused of molesting a girl in a restaurant has been fired from his position. (04 Nov 2008) http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/china/3377338/Chinese-official-shamed-by-human-flesh-search-engine.html

[32] See "Commit adultery in China, Web vigilantes will hunt you"by Greg Sandoval (posted on November 25, 2008. http://news.cnet.com/8301-1023_3-10107679-93.html) and "Human Flesh Search: Vigilantes of the Chinese Internet" (http://news.newamericamedia.org/news/view_article.html?article_id=964203448cbf700c9640912bf9012e05) New America Media, News feature, XujunEberlein, Posted: Apr 30, 2008. In December 2007, a 31-year-old Beijing woman named Jiang Yan jumped off the 24th floor balcony

of her apartment. A post on her blog before her suicide blamed her death on her husband's extra-marital affair. News of this "death blog" spread on the Chinese internet and soon, a mass of outraged netizens launched a Human Flesh Search Engine to track down the guilty parties. Within days, every detail of her husband's personal life was all over the internet. For months, this man, his alleged mistress and their parents were bombarded with attack messages and even death threats. In March, the husband sued three websites for cyber violence and privacy violation.

[33] The most infamous case took place in the PRC when Li Qiming, driving a black Volkswagen Magotan, hit two female students at Hebei University on October 16, 2010. Li continued to drive on after hitting the two students, one of whom later died. When Li was stopped by campus security guards, he yelled, "Li Gang is my father". (http://china.globaltimes.cn/society/2010-10/585212.html) For a detailed documentation, see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Li_Gang_incident.

[34] Tom Downey has provided quite a comprehensive coverage of the infamous cases taking place in the PRC.(http://www.nytimes.com/2010/03/07/magazine/07Human-t.html?_r=2&pagewanted=all)

[35] "Human-flesh search engines: China takes instant justice online" by Kevin Bloom. http://www.thedailymaverick.co.za/article/2010-03-16-human-flesh-search-engines-china-takes-instant-justice-online

[36] "A witch-hunt is a search for witches or evidence of witchcraft, often involving moral panic, mass hysteria and lynching, but in historical instances also legally sanctioned and involving official witchcraft trials."http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Witch-hunt

[37] "Human Flesh Search Ends in Bloody Case": It all began with an unexamined lie, the man claimed he was abandoned by his girlfriend after supporting her for four years, and that he had terminal leukemia and would like to see her again. After having successfully mobilised aHuman Flesh Search, he tracked her down and stabbed her to death in public. http://big5.xinhuanet.com/gate/big5/news.xinhuanet.com/video/2 009-05/17/content_11388430.htm; For a detailed narrative of the incident in Chinese, see http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_5ee0e8640100d74v.html~type=v5_one&label=rela_prevarticlehttp://big5.eastday.com:82/gate/big5/news.eastday.com/s/20090225/u1a4200069.html

[38] Pan, Xiaoyan, "Hunt by the Crowd: An Exploratory Qualitative Analysis on Cyber Surveillance in China". Global Media Journal. FindArticles.com. 22 Jun, 2011. http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_7548/is_201004/ai_n53931440/

[39] "Human-flesh search engines: China takes instant justice online" by Kevin Bloom http://www.thedailymaverick.co.za/article/2010-03-16-human-flesh-search-engines-china-takes-instant-justice-online

[40] For the video, see "Online lynch mobs find second post-quake target; Liaoning girl detained by the police"http://shanghaiist.com/2008/05/22/online_lynch_mo.php; For a series of discussion and rebuttal, see "Internet Mob Rides Again – Liaoning Bitch-Girl"http://blog.foolsmountain.com/2008/05/21/internet-mob-strikes-again-liaoning-bitch-girl/

[41] "Chinese Student in U.S. Is Caught in Confrontation"http://www.nytimes.com/2008/04/17/us/17student.html?st=cse&sq=china+tibet+Duke&scp=1

[42] "人肉搜索"若搜錯了，誰才能"平反"？ "What if "Human flesh search"got it wrong,who should we find to "redress [a grievance]"? http://big5.home.news.cn/gate/big5/www.xj.xinhuanet.com/2009-01/22/content_15526532.htm

[43] http://www.chinasupertrends.com/chinas-human-flesh-search-engine-not-what-you-might-think-it-is/

[44] Pan, Xiaoyan, "Hunt by the Crowd: An Exploratory Qualitative Analysis on Cyber Surveillance in China".

Global Media Journal. http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_7548/is_201004/ai_n53931440/.

[45] The construction of a Harmonious Society (和諧社會héxiéshèhuì) is a socio-economic vision that is said to be the ultimate end result of Chinese leader Hu Jintao's signature ideology....The idea has been described as resembling characteristics of New Confucianism in some aspects.In a country where political class struggle and socialist slogans were the normative political guidelines for decades, the idea of societal harmony attempts to bring about the fusion of socialism and democracy.http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harmonious_society

[46] Just to list a few videos with English subtitles or commentary:
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=09Ht7l1Jdkg; http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QgiAx-zDpIQ ; http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z9drPmoXTKE&feature=related ; http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ydZh9It7Wds&feature=related.

[47] Since most of the news is in Mandarin, I only include reports in English here: "Taiwan taekwondo athlete in Asian Games sock sensor row" (17 November 2010, Last updated at 15:30 GMT) <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-pacific-11775465>; "Taiwan fury after athlete's Asian Games disqualification in China" (November 17, 2010 -- Updated 20:50 GMT) <http://edition.cnn.com/2010/SPORT/11/17/asian.games.china.taiwan/index.html>; "Taiwan taekwondo storm casts cloud over Games" (Wed, Nov 17 2010) http://in.reuters.com/article/idINIndia-52974420101117;

[48] Here is a partial list of Facebook pages for reference: http://www.facebook.com/AntiRogue#!/Justice.For.Taiwan.Yang.ShuChun; https://sites.google.com/site/dirtytaekwondo2010/. http://www.facebook.com/AntiRogue; http://www.facebook.com/event.php?eid=161214030582670; http://www.facebook.com/pages/zhi-chi-yang-shu-jun-wo-men-ting-nai-dao-di/140944652624862?ref=ts&v=wall; http://www.facebook.com/pages/yang-shu-jun-shi-ge-shi-jianqing-zong-tong-fu-li-ji-xiang-zhong-guo-biao-da-zui-zui-zui-qiang-lie-de-kang-yi/169393219756510
Screenshot of his Facebook page taken by a PTT user: http://img408.imageshack.us/img408/7568/facebookqs.jpg; "學生書PO文挺韓網友人肉搜索" http://video.chinatimes.com/video-cate-cnt.aspx?cid=10&nid=42491; "po文失格大快人心挺韓網友引公憤" <http://www.ctitv.com.tw/news_video_c14v22957.html>

2.4 SEEING LIKE A CITIZEN: PARTICIPATORY VIDEO AND ACTION RESEARCH FOR CITIZEN ACTION

by

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ESSAY

In the *favelas* (slums) of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, it is people who hold the guns that call the shots. Drug-trafficking gangs, heavily armed militias and military police vie for the doubtful honour of who kills the most people in a year. Within the *favela*, these groups control much of everyday life—down to when residents can come and go; who gets connected to the internet, water, electricity and other urban services; and, how people can mobilise. From 2006 to 2009, I worked with community activists and community researchers in *favelas* (slums) in Rio de Janeiro on an action-research project, focusing on how citizens can participate and learn in order to reduce violence and build peace. As part of this process of learning and action, we made a series of participatory videos about people's experiences of violence in the *favela* and their perceptions about what could be done about the situation. We agreed from the outset that these videos would be shown to people in the local, state and national government in order to start a dialogue over how the Brazilian government treats the issue of security in the *favelas*. In the process of making these films, many different people from all walks of life and parts of the community, were involved.

This link between digital technologies and resolution of crises has emerged as a point of discussion with participants from all the three continents. In Taiwan, Eric Ilya Lee introduced us to the Frontier Foundation that works exclusively with natural disasters and crises ridden geographies, harnessing the power of peer 2 peer networks and helps people emerge as actors of change rather than mere victims of change. In a similar vein, Pichate Yingkiakittun from Thailand works with digital storytelling as a way of recording human rights violation and leading to peace resolutions in times of political crisis in his own country. Brendon O'Brian from Trinidad and Tobago, works actively to introduce digital technologies and ideas to sexually discriminated communities, helping them cope with everyday violence and participate in building peaceful structures of survival.

While Marlone Parker, who joined us as a facilitator for the African workshop, actually looked at similar contexts of drugs, violence and racism, and how digital technologies helped him in his work with violence-riddled communities, Nonkululeko Godana (Book 3, *To Act)* and Kerryn Mckay (Book 1, *To Be*) both propose and analyse the use of digital technologies towards resolution of different crises, in their own experiences in South Africa.

"When you are using a survey tool, you are getting one answer to a question but there might be so many angles and dimensions to a question that you are asking about. The video can bring out all the dimensions and angles" – Lopita Huq, Bangladesh

This form of research, also adopted by Esther Weltervede in her essay (Book 2, *To Think*), is increasingly becoming the need of the day. The notion of collaborative knowledge production, embodied in online platforms like Wikipedia, which depend upon discussions, consensus building, and the co-existence of contradictory knowledge is slowly trickling into academic research and practice. It builds a new way of relating to research participants, not as subjects of knowledge or objects of study, but as peers who engage with the researchers in a 2 Way

They had, at times, very different ideas about what the videos should address and how. And yet, none of the films mentioned at any point which groups they believed were responsible for the violence. Despite the overwhelming presence and control of drug-trafficking gangs and militias in people's daily lives, the films were completely silent about them, choosing instead to focus on how children start down 'the wrong path' and what parents can do to bring them back; and on grassroots initiatives that they had to try and knit together a more cohesive, fair and peaceful community. At a public screening and debate with policy makers, a journalist from a national newspaper focused on this silence in his article about the project. To those outside the *favelas*, it seemed a striking and strange silence. To those inside the community making the films, it was a reflection of a choice about how to navigate relationships of power and risk.

Participatory video (PV), as a digital and visual medium, acts as a lens through which the power relationships, identities, and perspectives of the people involved are projected, reshaped and made legible to others. This piece will explore the dimensions of participatory video, in terms of its characteristics as a visual and digital medium, in order to understand how participatory video can amplify and reflect processes of social mobilisation and people's identities as citizens within that. This article will draw on the experiences ofthe Development Research Centre for Citizenship, Participation and Accountability (Citizenship DRC)[1] where these participatory video was used as part of action research withina global collaborative knowledge network. The work was carried out by researcher-activists working with local activists, community groups and citizens in Brazil, Jamaica, Mexico, Nigeria, Angola and Bangladesh (see Appendix 1 for more details).

Because of this interest in participatory forms of learning and creating knowledge, and their potential for amplifying the effects and results of research, the network decided to experiment with participatory video as a research and communication method for social change . Many of the researchers and activists involved had long histories of using other participatory methods (including theatre, participatory learning and action approaches, etc.), while some came from more traditional research backgrounds. In Nigeria, in 2006, we held a training for researchers interested in integrating participatory video into their work. Following this training, each of the researchers returned to their respective countries and carried out their research projects with communities and villages, and each used participatory video in distinctive ways depending on their contexts.

These are researchers who are deeply engaged in contexts, and are already working for social change through a range of alliances, networks and identities. For them, participatory video was about new alliances that they could build and how they could work with different actors through these processes. As a result, each researcher approached their use of participatory video in a different way. In each case, researchers agreed with the participants how to use the videos at the outset of the process.

In Mexico, they used the films to instigate discussions at the community level about violence; in Nigeria, they used the films as digital letters sent between estranged Muslim and Christian communities and at a national policy forum to make the case for political reform; in Brazil, they used the films to lead off debates hosted in *favelas* by community activists with municipal and national policy makers on the topic of security; in Bangladesh, they used the films so that village-level members of large NGOs could hold those NGOs to account for their work; in Angola, they used the films for community-level discussions about how to mobilise more effectively and how to pressurise the government for greater decentralisation and services.

Similarly, in each case the expectations and perspectives of those involved from communities also shaped how the process evolved—sometimes taking the project in unexpected directions.

In 2008, we met in South Africa to reflect on our experiences of using participatory video. Since then, these projects have continued in different ways. This paper draws on the documentation of this entire process for the insights provided.

The process of participatory video facilitated and juxtaposed different perspectives, and articulated these perspectives into a range of spaces, from policy debates to cross-community dialogues. In a sense, participatory video helped to facilitate dialogue across a series of divides throughout the research. The aesthetics of participatory video—the kinds of stories that are told, the visual nature of these stories, and the visual mode of communication are important to understanding how this happens. Participatory video also establishes a different set of relationships of consumption and production of knowledge, in how research is produced but also in how knowledge is shared and communicated, and which identities come into play in the process. Through experimenting with different ways of sharing knowledge, participatory video was a means of shifting the traditional power relationship between the researchers and the researched.

What emerged from all of this is the role of participatory video in reflecting back to participants' versions of their own realities, addressing in some cases a lack of recognition and alienation from political, social and economic systems and potentially accentuating that alienation in others. This in turn, relates to how people's identities shift through the process of participatory video.

Location: Nigeria Photo: Alison Dunn

learning process. It allows for different vocabularies, perspectives and frameworks to come together in kaleidoscopic patterns so that multiple knowledge structures can interact with each other in dialogues of change. This was also a lesson that we learned at the Thinkathon where different stakeholders – digital natives, practitioners, development agencies, corporate representatives, policy makers, researchers and academics – came together in a dialogue with each other, only to realise that there is more synergy in their ambitions and aims than they had imagined. But the difference in location, perspective, legacy and vocabulary did not allow for an easy interaction. It is a challenge for researchers working within such a multi-stakeholder research environments to capture not only the coherence, but also the confusions (or as Wheeler points out – the silences) from which creative and experimental models of knowledge and learning can be produced.

"Self-empowerment is not easily measured but I can see that poor people's self empowerment increased when they used the video." - Idaci Ferreira, Angola

The alienation of people from political, social and economic systems is not always disempowering, though. In our workshops, the younger participants often espoused an apolitical stance while engaging with extremely politicised communities and spaces, negotiating with power both in its abstract and quotidian forms. Ritika Arya from India, looks at inequities of power and money in the city of Mumbai, as she works towards providing education, vocational skills, and creative channels of technology-mediated communication and expression, to socially and economically disadvantaged children in slums. Along with a team of volunteers, she raises funds, organises events and also creates participatory structures where the 'beneficiaries' actually get to define what they want to learn. And yet, when we met Ritika, she did not see herself as either politically motivated or socially engaged. As she said in her own introduction, "I just do what I think needs to be done!"
This disavowal of the political was reflected in the stories of many other participants who constantly

Participatory video provid a vehicle for people to see themselves as citizens in new ways and for them to learn a new mode of citizenship . But at the same time, the process is overlaid onto existing patterns of authority, social mobilisation, and social roles. The results of this process can only be understood in relation to how the two interact. If citizenship is about the establishment of boundaries of exclusion and inclusion, about who can be a citizen and how and who cannot, then technology (in particular visual and participatory forms of technology) can make these boundaries more acute in some ways and dismantle them in others. And so these cases of participatory video, as they relate to on-going mobilisation, can shed some light on how issues and identities become framed and reframed through digital and visual communication. This piece will draw on example from the cases above to illustrate how this unfolds in practice.

Participatory video implies several changes to the knowledge processes involved in the research and the power dynamics within them. First, as with other participatory approaches, it inverts the relationship between the researcher and the researched (Chambers, 1995), while recognising that power imbalances still pervade this relationship. It shifts the perspective of who is the 'expert' away from the researcher and towards the researched as those who hold the most knowledge about their own realities. In that sense participatory video is about opening the spaces for that knowledge to be given greater weight, as opposed to the weight of the knowledge of the external researcher. In inverting the relationship between the researcher and the researched, the process of participatory video also opens new possibilities for how that knowledge is perceived by policy makers.

In many cases, policy makers are not disposed towards listening to or acknowledging the realities of people living in exclusion or outside of dominant groups. The mode of listening to and seeing visual material in the shape of films encouraged seeing *favelas* residents as citizens in a way that does not often happen.

Children in Rio de Janeiro's slums watched footage they filmed of participatory research
Photo: Joanna Wheeler

What exactly is participatory video?

Participatory video has been used since the 1970s as one in a range of participatory approaches to development work and more recently in combination with participatory action research. Snowden (1983) who pioneered its use in 1967 describes the process:

The ability to view immediately one's self speaking on videotape assists individuals to see themselves as others see them. This self-image conveys the impression immediately that one's own knowledge is important and that it can be effectively communicated. These video techniques create a new way of learning, which not only build confidence, but show people that they can say and do things that they thought were not possible before.

Since the 1970s, advances in technology mean that participatory video is now digital—with a whole series of implications for how it is edited, its replicability, its cost, and its integration with other internet-based technologies .

The process of making participatory video involves training community members in basic video skills: Filming with a digital video camera, recording sound through different microphones, and digital editing. The approach combines technical skills with a participatory process of generating content.

Location: Bangladesh
Photo: Lopita Huq

This can involve documentary type filming and/or drama and re-enactment. The process of deciding what will be filmed is as central to participatory video as the question of who and how it will be filmed. Many of the groups in the Citizenship DRC used participatory story boards to construct the outline for the films, where participants decide on key elements of a story and map these visually into frames which provide the basis for organising the filming. Crucially, these films were created as part of larger processes of participatory research, and so were situated in relation to a wider conversation about the research questions and themes on citizenship, democracy and violence. Another important element of participatory video is that the participants receive copies of the footage and films (or keep the originals, if there is more institutional support) and they choose what to do with this material.

What did we learn?

Given some distance from this process, it is now possible to look back and ask some wider questions about participatory video: How does the format of participatory digital video, with its own aesthetics, mechanics, and relationships between power and knowledge relate to possible citizen action? How does participatory video map onto and subvert existing power relationships, roles and identities (including those of the researched and the researcher)? What can participatory video show us about the politics of inclusion and exclusion and how it feeds into people's understandings of their citizenship or the lack thereof? What influence does participatory video have on people's identity and their ability to mobilise around, reframe and engage different issues?

battle the traditional articulations of what it means to be a political actor because their non-institutionalised, collaborative methods of working do not fit the expectations or imaginations of what it means to be political in their own contexts. While they might have a political consciousness, they might not always reflect a vocabulary to articulate it. Many of their political actions are often also located in the realm of the cultural. This leads to traditional actors not finding easy synergy with their activities, thus leading to an apparent widening between the analogue and digital activists.

"PV leaves something concrete behind for the researched. The video stays behind, the community can play it back. It's not like writing an article which they never get to see." - Jenks Okwori, Nigeria

"PV can be a comprehensive tool to allow us and other people to understand a problem better, what they want to express and how. PV moves from individual personal representation to a more collective participation. It is also good to use as a way of finding alternatives, to find solutions to a problem." - Carlos Cortez Ruíz, Mexico

Namita Aavriti Malhotra's essay (Book 3, *To Act*) also adds another dimension to this – the formats and aesthetics that determine the virality, mobility, transferability and shareability of these videos. Malhotra draws from her own experiences to show how formats and technologies often determine the share, remix, reuse cultures and environments that make the videos visible. It is necessary, when talking about technology-mediated objects, to look at the nuts and bolts of the technology as much as the content. Tied to these are also questions that Free and Libre Open Source Software movements have been posing about ownership and intellectual property around these videos.

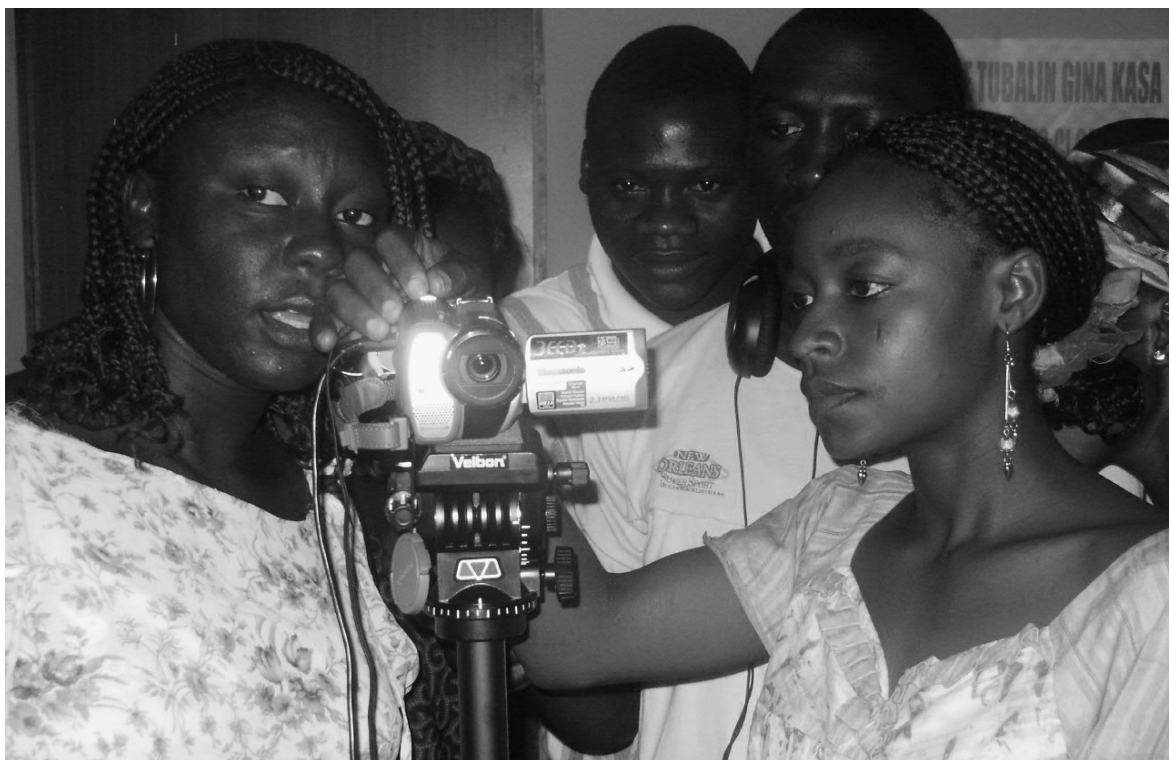
In this conversation about participatory knowledge production, we want to emphasise that digital technologies and online platforms are not mere tools of production – they are significantly altering the

Relationships to the consumption and production of knowledge

Participatory video does not fall into the classic dichotomy of the relationship between the consumption and production of knowledge. In effect, it positions people in such a way that unravels each of these. In terms of consumption, participatory video forces an answer to a prior question: Who should consume the knowledge? Participatoryvideo, as a process, gives control over the response to this question, at least to a certain extent, to the participants, who have copies of the videos to use as they decide best. As such, it is creating a different kind of relationship between the researcher and the researched in terms of how knowledge is produced and consumed. Participatory video is primarily about the creation of knowledge by and for the participants (the researched).

As the projects unfolded, there were divergences between the agendas of the researcher and the people involved in the community. The researchers had assumptions about how the participatory video would be used and the community members brought their own perspectives to this. Researchers, in part, had their agenda set through their involvement with an international network (although that network was also collaborative), and so they had a sense of the subject they want to address. These issues played out differently in each context, so the participatory video process was also about the researchers negotiating the agenda for the video work so that it contextualised this prior research agenda in the way that these issues played out in each place.

In terms of the production of knowledge, again it operates at a prior level which is around the creation and articulation of a message, rather than just its replication. Participatory video, like any participatory learning and action process, does not assume there is a set message to convey, but rather that the process is constitutive of the message (Gaventa and Cornwall, 2008).



Young people in Kaduna used participatory video to create video messages to build dialogue between Christian and Muslim communities separated by violence Photo: Laura Cornish

This is a change in the dominant approach to the relationship between the researcher and the researched, where the researcher has expert knowledge which is used to generate and ask questions, and the researched gives answers which are interpretedand used by the researchers. In terms of how this relates to questions of digital integration, the process of production is not necessarily linked to structures of the internet or mass media. But participants can connect to these during the process or with the final films, if they choose too.So participatory video is facilitative

There are many levels of iteration in the participatory video: Between consumption and production; between the self and the group; between the community and policy spheres; between the verbal and non-verbaland between the generation of images and their reflection and amplification. As a result, participatory video can facilitate continually expanding boundaries of knowledge, from the self to the group to the community, to beyond; between different perspectives expressed, reconciled or shed through the process; and also in terms of the diversity of uses as reflection of identity but also as its projection and amplification.

At the same time, this facilitative potential faces physical and symbolic limits as addressed in the section below on power relations: Who controls the camera, and how decisions are made about what is filmed. Participatory video relies on access to the appropriate technical equipment, and that technological layer inevitably creates a barrier to access.

The aesthetics of participation in digital video

This section will look more closely at the aesthetics and mechanics of participatory digital videoand digital storytelling. There is a duality to the aesthetics of participatory video. On one hand, film, when controlled by the participants (rather than a professional filmmaker or a researcher) visibilises the hidden in that it makes legible specific local paradigms of knowledge production and co-creation and these need to be understood as the new default positions within which digital natives operate.

"In Brazil, we held a showing of the participatory videos in a cinema to launch a debate with public officials. Here was a video made by people from the favela and we were showing it in a movie theatre to an audience of people from the government. This was a really important moment for them and for them to see that these policymakers were really listening. It created a different kind of voice, even if we can't say for sure that policy changed." - Joanna Wheeler, Brazil

"People were very possessive of the camera. After some time the community attempted to work together to buy their own camera." - Lopita Huq, Bangladesh

"…before we let people open the discussion. Now we are focusing too much on the story we are presenting. If we focus on violence, people say, no it doesn't happen. They focus on the story not on the violence and the problem." - Carlos Cortez Ruíz, Mexico

Leandra (Cole) Flor, in her photoessay (Book 1, To Be), brings out the nuances of the visible and the invisible from her own experience as a travel blogger and photographer, who uses these platforms to look at peoples' reactions to larger political ideas on an everyday basis. Flor constructs 'mirror-exercises' to see how reality gets constructed with digital representations and how they often follow predicted paths. Flor looks at the camera and what it produces, as a structure of irony rather than reality, to see what it shows and also hides simultaneously.

"There is an element of validation, but in the moment of filming, the camera can confirm or undermine the previously held or expect views and content." - Idaci Ferreira, Angola

knowledge not easily accessed from an outside perspective. In acting like a mirror, it reflects back certain aspects of reality. This can be a very strong reinforcement of people's identity and views. But it is a much more complete image of reality than many other research methods offer.

Yet at the same time that it visibilises things that may have been hidden or missed, it also effaces certain truths, evades certain aspects of reality, and edits out certain things—it is not a perfect mirror .

This dual aesthetic of both illuminating and hiding simultaneously is evidence of the power of visual stories: to both communicate powerfully and obfuscate. This can occur at the moment of filming, but also at subsequent moments when the film is shown.

Another important element of the aesthetics of participatory video is that it is based on images. As such, it imitates many of the features of one-to-one communication but with the possibilities of one-to-many modes. Like theatre, it relies on extended non-verbal communication as much as verbal forms. Participatory video offers a way to include 'extended language' in the research process by recording people's emotions, expressions and gestures and allowing them to use this extended language to communicate about the research topic (Ramella and Olmos, 2005). This more encompassing aesthetic of the visual, combined with the easy replicability of digital video, represents a qualitative departure from written and text-based forms of research .

This is an important difference with some text-based internet communication, which is faceless and increasingly abbreviated, and disconnected from people and places. Theanonymisation (or at least the slipperiness of the identities created via the internet) of certain internet-based forms of communication is precisely what is fixed with digital video. There is a groundedness to it—to the context, a place, to people and to the faces. Digital video is about constructing and reinforcing identities through their reflection.

How does PV relate to existing power relations, roles, and identities?

Throughout the research, there were a series of examples of how the process of participatory video interacted with existing power relations, roles and identities . These examples are not universal, in that there may be others and the particular issues that arise are specific to the contexts involved.

One possibility is that participatory video leads to an inversion or disruption of existing power relations, as in the relatively powerless using video to hold more powerful actors to account. For example, in the Bangladesh case, village members of an NGO used the videos to hold the corporate level of the NGO to account. They showed, through the films, how the policies of the NGOs were not necessarily delivering what was promised and how they diverged from the realities in their context. For example, one NGO opposed shrimp cultivation because of environmental and labour rights issues, but local NGO members saw shrimp farming as an important livelihood strategy and were more interested in how the NGO could support reforms to land-holding patterns and farming techniques to address the environmental and labour issues. When more senior figures in the NGO watched the film, they were forced to engage with these views that they may have ignored had they been presented in other ways.

Another possibility is that participatory video leads to a reproduction or reinforcement of existing power relations, as in reinforcing the voices which are already dominant within a specific community. This can arise particularly if there are weaknesses in the facilitation that do not adequately take into account who has access to the camera and how it is used. During participatory video work in northern Nigeria, power issues around gender emerged strongly. In this case, the young Muslim Hausa men (who are often more heard than young women in the Northern Nigerian Muslim Hausa community) made a concerted and transparent effort to exclude the young women from the process of the video. As facilitators, we chose to

Community researchers in Rio de Janeiro's slums made films about violence that were shown to policy makers Photo: Joanna Wheeler

then work with the young men and women separately to produce films with gender-specific groups rather than a gender-integrated group. This decision was taken because of the risks to the young women of being involved in a project that was seen as a threat by the young men. However, the young men's film was made in the streets and public spaces and did not include any women or girls. And the young women's film was filmed exclusively indoors, with other women and girls. Although this was a necessary facilitation approach, it did reinforce the existing dynamic in the community that silences the views of girls and women, especially in public. This example demonstrates how existing power dynamics can be reinforced through the process of creating a participatory video.

A third possibility is that rather than simply reinforcing existing power relations, participatory video might submerse them: It might ignore or evade particular structural issues and address these in a tangential way in order to escape censure. For example, in the example in the introduction, *favelas* residents produced three films about violence in their communities, in which violence was treated as a disembodied problem and the focus was on the effects of this violence (particularly on young people and children) and the community's response. Residents felt it was too risky to name those responsible for the violence, whereas addressing the effects and the response at the community level was safe.

"When someone is talking and you are writing, the amount of processing you do, what you write is usually what you have heard and what you think it means. But it might not be exactly what this person is saying. The filtering and processing does not happen with video—it is raw. You are allowed to see and hear so much…video has a permanency which you can keep referring to, hearing and seeing new and different aspects every time." - Steve Abah, Nigeria

The interview with Adam Haupt (Book 4, To Connect) suggests that these renegotiations of power are not limited to participatory videos. From his experiences in South Africa, Haupt examines how the introduction of digital technologies to the world of music in Cape Town and Johannesburg led to a recalibration of power relationships between the different actors involved in music production, which was often located firmly in cultures of gang violence and racism.

However, participatory nature of knowledge production doesn't automatically lead to a re-articulation of the contexts. As YiPing (Zona) Tsou's essay (Book 2, To Think) demonstrates, it can also lead to a 'Witch-hunt 2.0' that reinforces the existing power relationships and perpetuates violence endorsed by the authorities. Technologies in themselves are not liberating and can be used as effectively to exercise regressive ideologies and structures as they are deployed towards progressive change.

At the heart of collaborative knowledge production is indeed the possibility of reformulating identities and roles, leading to a dramatic rendering of existing power relations. However, these can be witnessed only when located in what Anat Ben David calls a 'granularity of practice' (Book 1, To Be) so that the context is not merely a backdrop against which knowledge gets measured but also becomes an actor that shapes the processes of collaboration.

"If we are using video, if we ask about violence

Location: Angola Photo: Idaci Ferreira

In this sense, there is a risk of video being too superficial—a story deepens understanding about certain aspects of a situation, but it also provides a mechanism for avoiding talking about things.

These examples show the variety of possible ways that participatory video can interact with structures of power and identity within the community, and emphasises how participatory video can replicate, evade or unsettle relationships of power.

Seeing like a citizen, learning modes of citizenship through participatory video

Reflecting on these cases in terms of the way that knowledge is consumed and produced, the aesthetics of participatory video, and its interfaces with power relationships throughout offer some insights into the wider question of how participatory video can create possibilities for seeing like a citizen or learning new modes of citizenship. In this case, our research questions were about what leads to greater citizenship, and our methodology provided a way to test the answer to the question through the process of the research itself (see McGee and Pearce 2009).

What emerges from the process about modes of citizenship is that a sense of citizenship is not like a switch that is either permanently on or off. It is not about becoming a citizen where someone feels at all times and in all places like a citizen or never like a citizen. Rather, a sense of agency or empowerment can be transitory: We have moments as citizens and moments as subjects, and sometimes we can experience these in rapid succession. This is consistent with the way that digital technology through participatory video can lead to a strong sense of seeing like a citizen—seeing yourself and your ideas reflected through film and acknowledged by the wider community or even representatives of the state. At the same time digital video technology can lead to a sense of alienation and seeing like a subject—when your ideas are erased or omitted from the film or the

results you hope for fail to materialise.

Another dimension of how participatory video is about learning a mode of citizenship is the way that the reflections in video can be linked to increasing a sense of belonging and recognition. People seeing themselves on camera has a powerful effect—it becomes irrefutable evidence that they exist and that their views matter.

Seeing yourself as a citizen is not only about a sense of recognition and belonging, but also about a sense that citizens should be heard by their governments and more broadly by other groups in the societies where they live. Entering into a participatory video project that has the objective of influencing policies and bringing about positive social change implies that participants see themselves as citizens who have a right to be 'seen' by their government and society. So participatory video can help citizens amplify their voices beyond themselves to others in their community, village, city, country and world .

Participatory video can not only amplify voice, but can be used to create pathways for accountability, as in the example of the NGOs in Bangladesh or the policy debates on security in Brazil.

Yet this mode of learning citizenship can also lead to disillusionment when the results of the process do not match expectations. This shows how learning a mode of citizenship through digital technology can lead to moments of enchantment as a citizen and moments of alienation as a subject. As Jenks Okwori, a researcher and activists from Nigeria describes:

"People think that the views and opinions they express will affect change, though this may not happen, and what will be the consequence of this?"

A final aspect of the mode of citizenship that emerges through participatory video is about the interaction between the technological dimension of the process and existing trajectories of social mobilisation, activism, and citizen action.In order to understand how participatory video engendered new modes and identities of citizenship it is important to

directly, when we administered the questionnaire many people refused to answer the questions on violence. If there is a camera on them, they were even less likely to talk about violence, especially if they themselves were violent. People are excited to see themselves on the screen, this is a great medium, but it has its drawbacks." - Steve Abah, Nigeria

"One woman saw herself on TV and she said that, 'We were hidden all this time, and now we have been exposed to the world.'" — Lopita Huq, Bangladesh

"We have the possibility to use the video to present [citizens'] own views in their own voices. The video is closer to people's voice than text. But when it is orientated to action, it leads to another problem. Here is a problem, now what should we do about it? How do we use it as a further tool for mobilization or action?" - Carlos Cortez Ruíz, Mexico

"Who are the people participating in PV? In our case, we selected people who have some kind of active initiative in the community. We approached people who have some position of action or leadership. This probably aided the process, as they quickly recognized the possibilities of the format. This is in contrast to people who have never been involved in a social action process." - Carlos Cortez Ruíz, Mexico

understand the complex interaction between existing trajectories of action and the technological process .

In some cases, involving people who already engage in activism and citizen action can reinforce and deepen their roles. These people can be quick to see the possibilities that the technology can offer and they have the mobilising capacity at the local level to leverage these possibilities .

By contrast, in Brazilwe involved young people and others with no history of activism, but who had chosen to become involved in an action research project. We combined this with the participation of some well-established community activists. In this case, the engagement in the participatory video process was less about sustaining and enhancing existing activists, but more about building awareness and capacity for new ones.

Conclusion

This piece explored how participatory video is a process that can unsettle patterns in the consumption and production of knowledge in research, and in terms of other existing hierarchies. People can also use it as a mode of seeing themselves as citizens and of shifting how the state and others see them as citizens. As such, it operates as an idiom for the existing power relationships, identities and trajectories of social mobilisation while holding the potential for this to be reconfigured. Participatory video connects a technology to social processes, rather than just producing a video about a particular topic.

This work has some important implications for research. Much research is text-based and relatively single dimensional in how it captures knowledge. This example shows the importance of multi-dimensional views of knowledge in terms of the expanded aesthetics of participatory video and how these help to broker the formation of new identities. Participatory video can be understood as a melding between technology and a process of participation so that it facilitates iteration between different kinds of knowledge and ways of knowing—this includes the way that the visual can make legible different registers of communication and experience. At the same time, the stories and images that make participatory video a powerful mode of communication can also serve to obscure certain truths and reinforce certain hierarchies.

The process of participatory video also implies important changes in the relationship between the researcher and the researched; in how knowledge is produced and consumed. As with other participatory research approaches, participatory video moves away from a model where the researcher controls what knowledge is generated and how it is used.

The case of participatory video has other implications for digital activism and notions of citizenship that are linked to this. The mode of citizenship learned through participatory video can be transitory: There are moments when we see and are seen like citizens, but also moments when we see and are seen like subjects. Making a film that is directed at government officials or other groups in society reinforces the idea that as a citizen you should be seen and heard—recognised and involved in decisions that affect you; but it can also lead to moments of seeing and being seen like a subject when the good intentions behind this process fail to deliver to the extent of people's expectations. Central to this mode of citizenship is the aesthetic of film that grounds it in a place, and hyper-identifies with the personal—with certain people, their faces, their expressions, and their views that they chose to express through the film.

Participatory video is an example of how digital technologies and social processes interact and what happens as a result. It raises important questions about how digital technical dimensions map onto existing practices and trajectories of activism, participation and citizen action. This work has shown that there are a range of possibilities for what may emerge and the ways that participatory video can reinforce or submerse issues of domination and exclusion, and also reverse them.

Appendix 1

Lead Researcher (s)	Country	Organisation	Use of participatory video in research process	Approach to participatory video
Steve Abah and Jenks Okwori	Nigeria	TFDC/ Ahmadu Bello University	As part of research on violence and democracy, and in the national campaign for electoral reform	Used theatre for development in combination with participatory video with community-based groups in Northern Nigeria to create dialogue between Christian and Muslim communities
Idaci Ferreira	Angola	ADRA	As part of research on mobilisation and citizenship in a post-conflict context	Used theatre, participatory learning and action methods and participatory video to continue NGO's work with local level civic associations formed through the humanitarian response to build the capacity for participation in local governance
Carlos Cortez	Mexico	UAM-X	As part of on-going work on violence in indigenous communities and how this relates to wider questions about participation, democracy and human development	As part of a community-university development programme with promotores in rural Chiapas and Guerrero, where participatory video was used in the process of 'social diplomas' for community activists
Joanna Wheeler	Brazil	Community-based activists in favelast	As part of research on citizenship and violence in favelas,	Working with young people and other segments of the community to voice their experiences of violence and insecurity in order to influence government security policy through a series of debates and screenings hosted by favela-based activists
Lopita Huq	Bangladesh	BRAC University	As part of research on the rights of garment workers and shrimp farmers	Working through partnership with five national Bangladeshi NGOs on the effects of their programmes (in micro finance and awareness raising) in creating a sense of citizen agency
Joy Moncrieffe	Jamaica	Community-based activists and children in schools	As part of research on how children perceive and experience violence and how this affects their sense of citizenship	Working with activists in garrison communities and groups of school children to build a dialogue around how children experience violence, linking to radio programmes in Kingston

[1] The Citizenship DRC was a global collaborative research and knowledge network that ran from 2000 to 2011. In that time, it brought together more than 60 researchers working in seven7 core countries with additional work in 12 more, to produce more than 450 research outputs and over 100 in-depth case studies (www.drc-citizenship.org). The central focus of the Centre was how citizens, themselves, can help to make citizenship and democracy more real for marginaliszed and excluded groups. At the heart of the Citizenship DRC's approach has been an understanding of the complexity of the relationship between research and action—and that the creation of critical forms of knowledge is central to how things change (Reason and Bradbury. 2001).

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2.5 EPHEMERAL IMMORTALITY OF TWO DIGITAL NATIVES

by
Alaa Abd El Fatah
REFLECTION

Editors' Note

We met Alaa Abd El Fatah in the workshop at Johannesburg. As a relocated Egyptian who lives in South Africa, he had stories to tell – of dispossession, of leaving home, of never leaving home, of belonging, and of fighting for justice. But for Fatah, like many other digital natives we encountered, justice was not about courts of law and the legal infrastructure. It was more personal, more immediate, more visceral. It wasn't about burdens of proof or legal procedures but about passions, emotions and the desperate hope that given enough time and people, things will change. This excerpt from two of his blog entries that he wrote during the workshop looks at how digital natives often engage with politics in a language and perspective that doesn't segue very well with dominant discourse emerging from traditional actors. In two sets of reflections, one about how he defines himself and the other about a tragic case 'back home' of a digital native who has attained immortality in his death, Fatah captures the turmoil and seething unrest, which, a few months after the workshop was witnessed in the Arab Spring. Fatah's stories become important not only because they capture the certain attitude that digital natives have brought to the table but also because they show us the precursors to revolutions. In Fatah's stories are hints of what is to come and what drives people – digital natives or otherwise – to come together for change.

Recently I discovered that there are aspects of myself that I was very assertive about back home in Egypt but never really expressed while travelling. Now that I live in South Africa I find myself feeling constantly dispossessed of them.

I've been mitigating by over expressing some of it online, and it is turning me into a loud, incessant and boring voice. Being alienated from my blog[1] is making things worse as I only express myself in the very limiting and crippling medium of Twitter handle @alaa. (I *really* don't get people who think a 140 character limit is a good thing.)

So I came to the digital native workshop with my own personal agenda. I wanted to use it as a space to learn how to express these aspects in English and outside of my own familiar context.

With this agenda in mind I chose the word 'the dispossessed' to express my political identity in a word-matching activity. *The Dispossessed* is the title of a sci-fi novel by Ursula K Le Guin[2], about a truly anarchist human society, a society that spent 200 years living with no government, power hierarchies or private property. In Ursula's novel dispossession is a positive thing and a choice. But I also chose the word because it can be understood in many other ways and sometimes it can be a negative thing.

I'm a reluctant anarchist. I don't buy any of the narratives that justify states, borders, capital or governments. I abhor power in all its forms and totally distrust representative democracy. Yet I totally live within modern society. I consume, I have a career, I engage in politics as they are (and I enjoy these activities). I find myself very able to imagine the world Le Guin describes (and even see and live glimpses of it in spaces as diverse as slums, free software movements and youth camps) yet I can't imagine how we can move from today's society to that just dispossessed society.

At the same time while I'm perfectly comfortable in the paradox of being an anarchist and living as a bourgeoisie, I have no patience for people who can't imagine anarchy. People who not only are

comfortable in the status quo but can't think anything else is possible.

Part of the reasons why I chose to live in South Africa is a romantic notion that I'll be living among a victorious people. As Arabs we are resigned to a very pessimistic view of the future; history and politics are a long list of defeats. My personal short history as an activist is full of optimism but made entirely of defeats. So I thought living in a post-apartheid South Africa would teach and inspire me. Instead, what I found is a very right wing conformist society. I met the fiercest defenders of the status quo. Not a day passes when I don't feel like Egypt with all its despair and decay is a much more dynamic and free society.

Now I'm almost sure this is about me and not about South Africa. I'm out of context, and don't know how to seek what I'm looking for.

***

It is 3am, I can't sleep. I've made the mistake of reading through a browser tab I had open but neglected for a while[3] and suddenly all I feel is this all encompassing rage. My energy and enthusiasm for the digital natives workshop hits rock bottom.

Digital native Omar Khadr is all I can think about. A child soldier captured by the American invaders attacking an Afghan village, he was subjected to torture and solitary confinement for 10 years, most of them without access to legal counsel and without trial. He has been tried under a special military court for war crimes. The layers of injustice are unbelievable; a child soldier is a victim regardless of his actions. But even if we disregard and ignore that the alleged war crime is fighting back invaders, how is it a war crime to fight soldiers? US wars now are not only unilateral but also one sided by law! But none of this even scratches the surface of the whole story, the torture, the detention, the dehumanisation... I can't go on. Just read the article[4].

Omar is a digital native but there is more in common between us. He liked Tintin, Batman and Harry Potter for instance. As proof of his danger to "civilised" people his resilient unbroken spirit was cited!

Now in a gathering of Africans with people who personally witnessed, lived through or lived in proximity to equally horrendous injustice, why is the plight of this particular child soldier filling me with rage? Is it because he is like me? A digital native? A Muslim? Is it because his torturers are democratically elected and his torture chamber paid for by free tax payers, many of them supportive of the abuse?

I frantically search my mind for inspiration, for hope. The past two days I enjoyed telling my stories about fighting injustice from my context and experience. But today I realised my stories are all about defeats. None of them have a happy ending (though I usually ramble on until I run out of time and avoid offering an ending at all).

Today I told the story of another digital native, Khaled Said[5] , a 28 years old Egyptian from Alexandria who was tortured to death by two policemen in the street in front of his neighbours. Egypt has a long dark history of torture and police brutality[6] ; a topic I'm unfortunately familiar with from family experiences, activism and just reading the news. For decades there was very little resistance to torture, only a handful of very dedicated activists tried to tackle the issue, most victims were silent. Recently things have changed with more and more people confronting the issue (police brutality is also increasing). The shift has a variety of reasons but among them is the rise in the use of online social media for activism.

The details of the story are gory and irrelevant. What is relevant is that Khaled changed everything. While we were slowly building momentum for an anti-torture movement the story of Khaled for some reason filled many, many, many digital natives with rage and all of a sudden a Facebook group[7] and some viral messages (and a graphic post-mortem photo[8]) meant to inform people about what happened turned into spontaneous protest and action by thousands of young men and women (boys and girls really) in multiple cities across the country (and a big critical mass in Khaled's home town Alexandria).

Why did Khaled of all the victims resonate? Why did their rage instead of being frustrated and impotent like my rage today become a positive force? Beats me, but turn into a force it did, with all the foolishness of a very young, very inexperienced mob, with little leadership and through extremely messy processes, the campaign continued for months. Justice for Khaled!

Now this story did not end yet. The two officers who killed Khaled are standing in trial, but it is already a story of defeat, for the prosecutor wouldn't charge them with murder or torture but with lesser charges of involuntary killing. The police is already intimidating the young activists and Khaled's family. The best possible outcome is waaaay less than justice for Khaled.

But I cling to the notion that something bigger than justice was already achieved. Every potential victim who chose to take the risk of inviting torture by putting her body on the line despite never having any past experience of protesting, organising, or engaging in any form of political action (and probably even no prior interest in anything political) has liberated herself. She has confronted the worst they can throw at her and by her own choice and with the consent and support of the community. She has created, with a mix of bits and blood, a new reality even if just for herself and the few thousands that chose to get involved. She is free from fear and free from rage. Not a bad deal when you are defeated, eh?

More importantly while the young activists did not offer justice to Khaled's family they offered what the elders call solidarity. Solidarity like the keywords we discussed yesterday is one of those words that should mean something very profound but we've abused it so badly, it hardly means anything at all. So let me share with you what solidarity they offered.

Imagine yourself the mother of a no longer young handsome boy. He is 28 now in your eyes, still a boy but to the world, an adult. You look forward to seeing him build a life, a family, and you look forward to having grand children. And then he is taken away from you by two human avatars of pure evil, by the conscious actions of others, your son is murdered, tortured to death. And they won't even allow you a proper funeral or the truth, let alone justice.

What can anyone offer this mother? What words do you console her with? How do you even muster the courage to look her in the eye?

Well here is how. You bring a couple of thousands of your friends and you chant:

(Rejoice mother of the martyr for we are all your sons and daughters, we are all Khaled Said.)

Whenever any injustice happens, we use this banal slogan, "We are all…". How cheeky can these digital natives be? Not only do they offer a cliché, they even tell her to rejoice? But that's why we need fools. They don't know how to behave appropriately, they offer themselves to her as siblings of her martyred son. They offer her son to her as a martyr and not a victim.

And now I come full circle. I'm back to my rage at the torturers of Omar (who aid, train and reward the murderers of Khaled), whouse the word 'martyr' to dehumanise Omar, me, our people and our culture. They talk about our cult of martyrdom and how it makes us into irrational violent beings. Well, here is the cult of martyrdom for we refuse to think of Khaled as anything but immortal (as a digital native I must reflect that his immortality is in the realm of information, from the memes in our heads to the bits in our social networks).

Omar khadr will never have justice. Never! The empire never pays for its crimes. And I don't know if he has any use for solidarity but I know I need it. The impotent rage in me will not calm until Omar is offered a futile defeated attempt like that offered to Khaled. Is it selfish to want a balancing middle act when you know there is no happy ending?

[1] www.manalaa.net

[2] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Dispossessed

[3] http://georgiebc.wordpress.com/2010/10/28/orwellian-circus-khadr%E2%80%99s-trial/

[4] http://georgiebc.wordpress.com/2010/10/28/orwellian-circus-khadr%E2%80%99s-trial/

[5] http://moftasa.net/khaledsaid

[6] http://www.tortureinegypt.net/

[7] http://www.facebook.com/ElShaheeed

[8] http://ar.wikipedia.org/wiki/%D8%AE%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AF_%D8%B3%D8%B9%D9%8A%D8%AF

2.6 DIGITAL NATIVES' ALTERNATIVE APPROACH TO SOCIAL CHANGE

by

Maesy Angelina

ESSAY

Editors' Note

This essay frames the current debates on technology and change through asking questions of impact. What is the impact of a 'click' of a mouse or Liking something on Facebook? Will these actions that you can take sitting behind your computer actually lead to change? Maesy Angelina and the other contributors in Book 2, *To Think* make it clear that there is another form of power, the power of framing. We frame activities according to our own ideologies and practices. What does not fit is found to be trivial. In Angelina's research into the Blank Noise project she demonstrates that digital natives might have an alternative approach to change, organisation and participation. She challenges us to reframe how we approach the ideas of change and activism. If you place existing narratives of heavy-loaded concepts like activism on digital action, they will never fit.

Digital natives are destabilising existing power structures and challenging the status quo. The geo-political context in which digital natives live, affects their activities, beliefs and opinions.

Their world is a hybrid existence between the on- and the offline world. Both Esther Weltevrede (Book 2, *To Think*) and Anat Ben David (Book 1, To Be) argue that digital technology does not only offer people a place to search for information and express one's

opinions, it also enables people to network, engage and participate with other users of technology as well as with digital objects, like the hash tag, page rank or status update. This specific interaction with both the user and the tool makes one native to both the physical and digital world. As Weltevrede puts it: "The moment when the medium becomes second nature is when Twitter stops being "like SMS" and when it becomes tactically and socially useful." This is the digital tipping point where Angelina argues that digital natives' approach to social change may be different to the pre digital generation as their strategies, usages and experience of the information environment is different. What the Blank Noise project has in common with other digital native actions that we have encountered, is that individuals who are directly or indirectly affected by an event, societal experience, taboo or distrust try to tackle these issues in a public sphere. For them it is clear that issues like eve-teasing or as Ivet Pipers shows us (Book 4, *To Connect*), child abuse can only be de-stigmatised if they are discussed out in the open. To do this one needs to challenge existing power structures.

Digital natives with a cause: Between champions and slackers[1]

My first encounter with the idea of new media technologies' crucial role in contemporary youth movements was when I read the United Nations World Youth Report in 2005. The report stipulated that emerging youth movements are characterised by the use of such technologies in organising, communicating, and campaigning (UN DESA, 2005:125). The interest on this topic has since considerably escalated among academics, policy makers, and other practitioners.

Studies have progressed from an initial pre-occupation with the instrumental role of technology (see, for instance Kassimir, 2006; Brooks and Hodkinson, 2008, and Shirky, 2008) to an inquiry on emerging new actors, politics, and forms of activisms enabled by such technologies. At the centre of this new line of research are digital activisms conducted by young people whose lives are significantly shaped by the ubiquitous internet technologies – the 'digital natives'[2].

They are hailed as the new actors who are defining the potential future directions of activism - one that focuses more on issues related to everyday democracy and favours self-organised, autonomous, and horizontal networks (for examples, see Bennett, 2003; Martin, 2004; Collin, 2008). However, the emergence of this hopeful narrative is also accompanied by one of doubt. It questions the extent to which internet activism can contribute to concrete social change (Collin, 2008; Kovacs, 2010). Some proponents of this view insist that digital activism can only be effective if accompanied with rigourous real-life activism, to the extent of calling those who engage solely in digital activism as 'slacktivists' (Morozov, 2009; Gladwell, 2010).

The current debates were propelled by the question on the impact of youth digital activism. The problem with this question lies in the inherent assumption that the researcher's idea on activism is universally shared, including by the digital natives. History has shown that new forms of activism have emerged along with the structural transformation of societies (Offe, 2008; Touraine, 2008). Hence, it is valid to presume that youth in the 21st century 'network society' (Castells, 1996) also give birth to alternative approaches to activism.

Instead of impact assessment, I argue that the effort to understand digital natives' activism should start by asking how youth imagine and approach social change to give room for alternative approaches to emerge. Inspired by Claus Offe's (2008) method to identify the "newness" in new social movements, I attempt to address the question by looking at *the issue, strategy, site of action*, as well as the *internal mode* of organising of a movement.

The framework will be first used to confront existing assumptions on activism and social movements, which will also serve as a point of comparison to a

digital natives' movement chosen as a case study. As a response to the Global North focus in studying digital natives, the case study chosen is Blank Noise, a youth-led collective that has been addressing the issue of street sexual harassment in urban India through street interventions and online campaigns since 2003.

Activism with a Capital 'A'

What do we mean by activism? Literatures have acknowledged that it is a difficult concept to pin down, since it has been used in many different ways by a variety of actors. Broadly speaking, activism has been meant to refer to collective action for social change as one of the forms of civic and political engagement, such as protest events and direct actions, advocacy to change policies of powerful institutions, consumer boycotts, or public awareness raising campaigns (Kassimir, 2006; Sherrod, 2006).

The aforementioned understanding seem to be the lens with which the majority of researches on youth digital activism have been conducted (see, for instance, Juris and Pleyers, 2009), resulting in two problems. Firstly, most researches tend to only discuss the concrete and action aspects of activism, ignoring the intangible aspects that also determine activism as a practice: the underlying ideology, articulation of issue, the profile of actors, and how the movement organises itself.

Secondly, there seems to be some underlying assumptions on the established form of activism (Angelina, 2011). Referring to Offe's framework, the issue chosen relates to structural changes, manifested in making concrete demands for policy reforms or behavioural change. The demand is made to an identified 'opponent', formal entities such as the state or major corporations. The *strategies* include policy advocacy, campaigns, or marches with the streets or physical space as the *site of action*. As for the *internal mode of organising*, the movement consists of highly-committed individuals who are involved full time in the movement. To paint a picture, for many of us activism on women's rights might refer to a group of extremely dedicated people who have spent years advocating for a Domestic Violence bill to be passed by the government and attempt to raise public awareness by marching on the streets with placards saying "Stop violence against women!".

While activism in common understanding definitely plays an important role in today's society, is this approach the only form of activism? More importantly, is this approach to social change also employed by digital natives with a cause?

Despite the digital divide, it has been widely acknowledged that to some extent all of the current generation of young people is a part of a "network society" (Feixa et al, 2009), one in which technology is deeply embedded in social structures (Castells, 1996). This results in a number of shifts in our societies, most notably the interconnection between the physical and the virtual as public space, where "ideas and values are formed, conveyed, supported, and resisted; space that ultimately becomes the training ground for action and reaction" (Castells, 2009: 301). Other shifts include the decreased influence of the state, whose power is challenged by globalisation, and the significance of major corporations and mass media as power holders. These shifts provide ground to believe that young people who grow up in this societal structure may have different approaches to social change as opposed to the assumptions held by many current scholars and practitioners – a proposition we will explore through the case of Blank Noise.

Blank Noise: A digital natives' movement

Blank Noise started in 2003 as a final year art project of Jasmeen Patheja, then a design student in Bangalore, as a response to the experience of many women around her, including herself, facing street sexual harassment on a daily basis. It was initially known for its street interventions, but what distinguished Blank Noise from similar initiatives is its prominent use of the web, with four blogs, a YouTube channel, as well as a Flickr, Facebook, and Twitter account. Today, Blank Noise exists in nine

cities in India and consists of over 2,000 volunteers, most of whom are women and men between 16 to 35 years old. The collective has received national and international media attention and was named as one of the most outstanding citizen activism in India (Mishra, 2010)[3] .

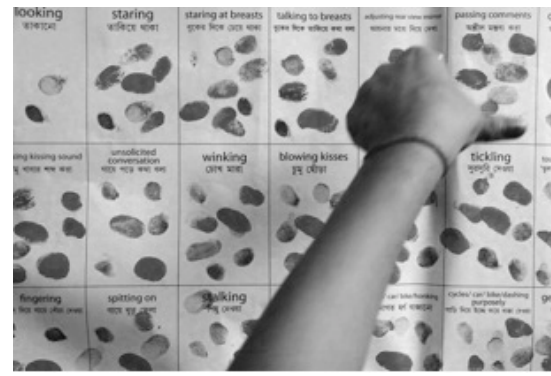
The issue: A new kind of articulation

Blank Noise was born to address prevalent acts of sexual harassment against women in public spaces in India, which ranges from staring, catcalls, to groping. The harassment is widely ignored by the society and called 'eve-teasing'[4]. The term, an Indian–English euphemism, both trivialises the issue by calling it "teasing" and places the blame on women through its play on the biblical Eve, a temptress who lures men into teasing her. Eve-teasing as a term is not formally recognised in the Indian Penal Code, but women could file a report under Sections 292 and 298 that criminalise any actions that make women targets of obscene gestures or violate women's modesty (Baxi, 2001). However, police rarely takes action unless it leads to violent death or fatal injury, and eve-teasing is often portrayed as being a romantic gesture as shown in Bollywood films (Natarajan, 2008).

Based on my conversations with 13 people in the collective, I discovered that Blank Noise shares similar characteristics with women's movements that focus on violence against women. Both identify the internalisation of patriarchal mindset as the root cause and the struggle to redefine cultural patterns regarding women's presence and engagement with the public space. Indeed, the Indian women groups of the 1970s laid the ground for Blank Noise's work by raising public awareness on the many forms of violence against women (Kumar, 1993). Although they acknowledge eve-teasing as a form of violence, the Indian women's movement has only done occasional, sporadic interventions, perhaps due to the choice of dedicating their limited resources to the more serious forms of violence - such as rape, bride burning, or dowry murder (Gandhi and Shah, 1992).

Blank Noise is the first one to systematically address street sexual harassment, but it differs from the usual women's movement in other respects as well. Most women's movements do identify patriarchal mindset as the source of violence, but they also make structural, tangible demands and identify opponents to make the demands to (Taylor and Whittier, 1995). New legislation criminalising domestic violence or service provision by the state are often advocated for an indication of concrete progress towards their overarching goal. The battle is for women; men are welcomed mostly only as far as signing petitions or joining the protests (Gandhi and Shah, 1992).

In apposition, the participants in the Blank Noise collective, all named spreading public's awareness on street sexual harassment as its overarching goal, but there were no intermediary tangible demands articulated. The collective did not even offer a rigid guideline of what constituted street sexual harassment. Instead, it opened up the space for a collective vocabulary building through polls on its blog and the streets to explore, question, and trigger debates around the ambiguous forms of eve-teasing, like staring.



A street poll on the definition of eve teasing in Calcutta

Furthermore, they unanimously refused to identify an opponent because all members of the society are deemed equally responsible. While many scholars might read this as a sign of youth's faltering trust in the state, it is actually more based on the grey nature of the issue itself. Hemangini Gupta, a Blank Noise coordinator, asked, *"Should we be allowing the state to legislate an issue like street*

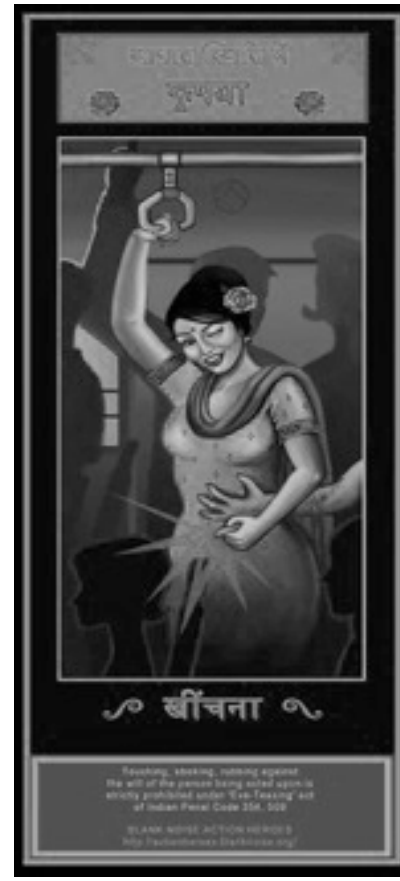
sexual harassment where there is so much grey even with how it is understood and defined - from 'looking' to physical violence?"

I would argue, however, that Blank Noise has a conceptual, intangible opponent: the mindset that normalises street sexual harassment. This is reflected in their strategy to create public dialogue, both in the physical and virtual public spaces. The expectation is to make the collective as inclusive as possible, including for men because this is also an issue of their concern. Blank Noise also has a significant number of men volunteers and a specific intervention for men called Blank Noise Guys that asks for men's perspective and experiences on the issue (Blank Noise, 2009). This is where Blank Noise differs from the general picture of activism in terms of the issue articulation.

The strategies: Public dialogue and culture jamming

Blank Noise is a form of public art meant to provoke thoughts on a deeply normalised issue in a society that is already de-sensitised with the more established forms of protest, like street marches and petitions. Aarthi Ajit, a 25-years-old volunteer, explains this as: *"Maybe they don't have the same effects anymore and we need to look for new ways. Perhaps the more direct, playful ones will make people think and want to be a part of your movement"*.

Art interventions to provoke thoughts on street sexual harassment can be exemplified by a poster made by Rhea Daniel, a Mumbai-based self-employed design consultant. Rhea, who has been following and commenting on Blank Noise blogs and Facebook group since 2008, was tired of the representation of women only as victims of street sexual and one day got the inspiration to draw a different image: Women who are not afraid to take action, or in Blank Noise's vocabulary, "Action Heroes".



An Action Hero Poster by Rhea Daniel

She explained to me that the poster was influenced by the 1950s pin-up and Indian calendar art. *"I deliberately wanted to attract attention with established art forms, however kitsch or sexist, and turn it into an instrument for empowerment... I know sexist imagery influences people and I was trying to reverse it, using the same instrument for my purpose."*

What Rhea described is called culture jamming, a technique of raising awareness by subverting an element of a well-known cultural object and causing people to think critically about the message behind the twisted object (Cox, n.d.). The poster was provocative because it subverts the internalised popular notion of women in eve-teasing. She is dressed in a *salwar kameez* [5] with a *dupatta* [6] , not Western clothes; she is feisty and winks as she smacks the hand that groped her belly, not looking afraid or humiliated by the harassment. This re-

appropriation of mainstream cultural symbols is currently used by many consumer-based social movements and is especially popular among urban youth who distribute their work virally through the internet (*Ibid*). Although Blank Noise does not explicitly claim culture jamming to be its strategy, this is indeed its entry point to open up the space for dialogue in public spaces.

While the playfulness of Blank Noise differentiates itself from the protest approach employed by activism in general, what can be achieved from such a strategy?

I discovered the answer while studying one of its most popular street interventions, the 'I Never Ask for It' clothes collection campaign, which is a street exhibition of various clothes contributed by women who have been harassed by wearing them. It tackles the notion that women are to blame for the way they dress, for the clothes collected have ranged from tight shirts to a *saree*. There is no slogan like 'Stop Eve Teasing" or definitive messages of the type, but volunteers engage passers-by in conversations about the clothes gallery and the issue of street sexual harassment.

'I Never Ask for It' Clothes Collection Drive in Bangalore

The twist of gender dynamics in this intervention is a form of culture jamming. While commonly culture jammers leave the viewers to think about the message, Blank Noise helps them process the message by taking the space opened by this thought-provocation and having volunteers engage passers-by on a conversation about street sexual harassment. Going back to the issue articulation, Blank Noise embarks on a dialogue in the streets without defining street sexual harassment or prescribing solutions. The people engaged are diverse in gender and class, a sign of 'everyone' being included.

What kind of impact is created by such an intervention? It is fair to assume that not many passers-by will change their behaviours after witnessing only one event and Blank Noise does not have the means to contact and check with them. The members admitted that they do not know how to measure tangible impacts generated for the people who saw the intervention, but this is not their main concern. *"This is an issue nobody talks about, so the very act of doing something about it seems to be enough right now,"* said Apurva Mathad (28, male). This indicates that Blank Noise's most significant impact is not external (the public), but rather internal (the activists). This is echoed by all the other interviewees, all of whom felt that they were changed by their experience with the collective regardless of the length and intensity of their involvement. Some people realised how much their bodies have been disconnected from the public space; others felt empowered to deal with street sexual harassment.

This is when I understood the other, more central objective of Blank Noise that was verified later only by the founder and coordinators: To empower people through their experience with the Collective. The discussions and debates raised through the public dialogue help the volunteers themselves to learn more about the issue, reflect on their experiences and opinions, as well as to give meaning to their involvement. This is when I also understood the point of "no target group": People in Blank Noise also learn and become affected by the interventions they performed. Influencing 'others' is not the main goal although it is a desired effect, the main one is to allow personal empowerment of those within the Collective.

In this sense, Blank Noise is again very similar with grassroot feminist collectives whose main objective is to empower its members and do artistic interventions on the streets. However, when they

raise public awareness, there are usually clear verbal messages through protests or street theatres and the main intention is to attract media attention – a clear separation between the activists as content providers and the public as the target audience. This separation is not as clear in Blank Noise, where the performers and the audience are mutually dependent for them to create meanings from the intervention.

The site of action: the streets and the cyber

Like so many other movements, Blank Noise started by taking its interventions to the streets, an example of which is already elaborated in the previous section. While Blank Noise shares most movements' current use of the Web, which are mostly for communication and coordination purposes (Juris and Pleyers, 2009), it differs from existing movements in its engagement with the cyber public and its inception to its cyber public campaigns.

Blank Noise started its online presence with a blog that was used to announce upcoming street interventions. The nature of its web presence changed when it shifted from one-way communication using Web 2.0 tools, as what older activists mostly do[7]. The previous one-way communication in the Blank Noise blog changed after two events that I call the digital tipping points, the points where the communication shifts into an interactive joint content-production with other internet users. This mode of communication has been noted by scholars, such as Manuel Castells (2009) and Clay Shirky (2010), as being the characteristics of the network society – where people are used to being producers and not only consumers of content.

The first was when Jasmeen started uploading photos of her harasser, taken by her mobile phone, to the blog in 2005. Comments immediately flooded in, raising questions about the nature of the violation, whether such actions are warranted, and the ethics of the action given that the man is of the lower class and has no access to the internet. The discussion resulted in Blank Noise deciding to blur the photos. This is when Blank Noise first realised that the cyber space is also a kind of public space that can give shape to the public conversation it imagines.

The second was the blogathon proposed by one of Blank Noise volunteers to commemorate the International Women's Day in 2006, which asked bloggers around India to write about their experiences with street sexual harassment and link it to the Blank Noise blog. The blogathon received massive responses, perhaps both due to the frustration on the silence around the issue and because blogging had just recently become a major trend at that time in India. Eve-teasing became an urgent topic on the cyber space and the success triggered the creation of Blank Noise's community blogs, in which the contents are contributed by other internet users. The tipping point was when the nature of Blank Noise's web presence changed due to its interaction with other web users. It took place when Blank Noise jumped into actions entirely dependent on the public response to be successful.

Now Blank Noise engages with the virtual public through comments in its main blog[8], virtual campaigns, and the community blogs. The most famous of the community blogs is the Action Hero blog[9], which hosts the stories of women's encounters with street sexual harassment and how they reacted. After speaking with a woman who contributed a post in the blog, I discovered that the anonymity granted by the internet and the supportive environment in Blank Noise's blog compelled her to write. She further shared that reading others' stories and receiving comments for hers made her feel less alone and helped her healing process. Blank Noise's cyber presence became a virtual support group for many women affected by street sexual harassment.

Kelly Oliver (in Mitra-Kahn, unpublished [10]) argued that writing experiences of a trauma, in this case street sexual harassment, helps the self heal by using speech and text to counter their emotions and exercise their agency; the process of empowerment that occurs hence establishes Blank Noise as a (cyber)feminist praxis.

Other than engaging with the virtual public through community blogs, Blank Noise also started conducting online campaigns. One of them is the online version of the same 'I Never Ask for It' campaign in February 2010, which asked Twitter users to tweet about their experiences with street sexual harassment and provide posters that can be used as a Profile picture or on Twitter background. These interventions are forms of culture jamming: breaking the existing silence on street sexual harassment in the virtual public space.

One of the posters for the online 'I Never Ask for It' campaign

Internal mode of organising: One full-timer among thousands

In the words of Kunal Ashok, one of the male volunteers, the collective consists not only of, *"people who volunteer or come to meetings, but anyone that has contributed in any way they can and identify with the issue"*. In this sense, Blank Noise today consists of over 2,000 people who signed up to their e-group as volunteers.

Blank Noise's 'I Volunteer' button

How does a collective with that many people work? Firstly, although these people are called 'volunteers' for registering to the e-group, I would argue that a majority of them are actually what I call casual participants – those who comment on Blank Noise interventions, retweet their call for action, promote Blank Noise to their friends through word of mouth, or simply lurk and follow their activities online. In the offline sense, they are the passers-by who participate in their street interventions or become intrigued to think about the issue afterwards. These people, including those who do the same activities without formally signing up as volunteers, are acknowledged to be a part of Blank Noise as much as those who really do volunteer.

Blank Noise is open to all who share its concern and values, but its volunteers must go beyond articulating an opinion and commit to collective action. However, Blank Noise applies very little requirement for people to identify themselves with the collective. The main bond that unites them is their shared concern with street sexual harassment. Blank Noise's analysis of the issue is sharp, but it also accommodates diverse perspectives by exploring the fine lines of street sexual harassment and not prescribing any concrete solution, while the latter is rarely found in existing social movements. The absence of indoctrination or concrete agenda reiterated through the public dialogue approach gives room for people to share different opinions and still respect others in the collective.

Other than these requirements, they are able to decide exactly how and when they want to be involved. They can join existing activities or initiate new ones; they can continuously participate or have on-and-off periods. This is reflected in the variety of volunteers' motivations, activities, and the meaning they give to their involvement. For some people, helping Blank Noise's street interventions is exciting because they like street art and engaging with other young people. Many are involved in online campaigns because they are not physically based in any of the cities where Blank Noise is present. Others prefer to do one-off volunteering by proposing a project to a coordinator and then implementing it. There are people who started volunteering by initiating Blank Noise chapters in other cities and they gradually have a more prominent role. Some stay for the long term, some are active only for several times before going back to become supporters that spread Blank Noise through word of mouth. The ability to personalise volunteerism is also what makes Blank Noise appealing, compared to the stricter templates for volunteering in other social movements.

Any kind of movement requires a committed group of individuals among the many members to manage it. The same applies to Blank Noise, who relies on a group of people who dedicate time and resources to facilitate volunteers' and think of the collective's future: The core team. Members of the core team, about ten people, are credited in Blank Noise's Frequently Asked Questions page and are part of a separate e-group than the volunteers. In its seven years, the core team only went for a retreat once and mostly connected through the e-group. In this space, they raise questions, ideas, and debates around Blank Noise's interventions, posters, and blog posts. Consequently, for them the issue is not only street sexual harassment but also related to masculinities, citizenship, class, stereotyping, gender, and public space. However, there are also layers in the intensity of the team members' engagement.

The most intense is Jasmeen, the founder and the only one who has been with Blank Noise since its inception until today. Jasmeen is an artist and considers Blank Noise to be a part of her practice; she has received funds to work for Blank Noise as an artist. Thus, she is the only one who dedicates herself to Blank Noise full time and becomes the most visible among the volunteers and the public eye. According to Jasmeen, she is not alone in managing the whole process within Blank Noise. Hemangini Gupta who joined in 2006 has slowly become the other main facilitator.

Hemangini, a former journalist who is now pursuing a PhD in the United States, explains her lack of visibility, *"Blank Noise could never be my number one priority because it doesn't pay my bills, so I can only do it when I have free time and my other work is done"*. The same is true for others in the core team: students, journalists, writers and artists. Unlike Hemangini who still managed to be intensively involved, they have dormant and active periods like the volunteers.

The core team functions as coordinators that facilitate the volunteers' involvement in Blank Noise and ensure that the interventions stay with the values Blank Noise upholds: confronting the issue but not aggravating people, creating public dialogue instead of one-way preaching. This role emerged in 2006 when the volunteer applications mounted as the result of the aforementioned blogathon. They have also initiated or facilitated the growth of Blank Noise chapters in other cities. Although some of them have also moved to other cities for work, they remain in touch online. Together, the core team forms the de-facto leadership in Blank Noise.

A strong nucleus of committed people is crucial in any form of social movement. However, Blank Noise is unique in its accommodation of people who cannot make Blank Noise a priority in their lives.

Understanding Blank Noise

Returning to the prevailing assumptions on the concepts and practice of activism, it is clear that Blank Noise cannot be understood using the lens of these assumptions. Blank Noise shares most feminists' analysis of harassment, naming normalisation, internalisation, and patriarchal

mindset as the root causes. Their standpoint of street sexual harassment being a societal issue that concerns women and men are the same, but they part ways when Blank Noise does not identify an opponent or propose a concrete structural solution.

Its aim to raise public awareness and enable people's empowerment through involvement with the collective are not new; neither is their use of art and performances. It is new in the translation of the objectives. Instead of a structural change, Blank Noise interprets social change it desires as a cultural change which can be seen in concrete at an individual level as well as in the increase of media and public attention on the issue of street sexual harassment.

The method of achieving this is not through clearly articulated messages that can be written on a placard and carried to street marches, but by exploring the ambiguity through public conversation and culture jamming through street interventions and online campaigns alike. Instead of having a clear distinction of content producer and audience, both performers and audience are interdependent in creating the meaning for the interventions. These are not the result of "slack", as proponents of the aforementioned doubt narrative would contend, but a critical deliberative process.

Speaking of "slack", Blank Noise also defies the stereotypical dichotomy of full-time activists and slacktivists. As a collective, there are many roles and degrees of intensity that are needed for it to sustain and expand itself. Many of them are 'everyday activists' (Bang, 2004; Harris et al, 2010), young people who are personalising politics by adopting causes in their daily behaviour and lifestyle, for instance by purchasing only Fair Trade goods, or being very involved in a short term concrete project but then stopping and moving on to other activities.

A collective of everyday activists means that there are many forms of participation that one can fluidly navigate in, but it requires a committed leadership core recognised through presence and engagement. As Clay Shirky (2010: 90) said, the main cultural and ethical norm in these groups is to 'give credit where credit is due'.

Since these youth are used to producing and sharing content rather than only consuming, the aforementioned success of the movement lies on the leaders' ability to facilitate this process. The power to direct the movement is not centralised in the leaders; it is dispersed to members who want to use the opportunity.

Alternative approaches to social change

Current studies on the intersections of youth, activism, and new media technologies have begun to leave the techno-centered paradigm and use activism as a conceptual lens. Nevertheless, activism as a concept is currently loaded with assumptions on the kind of social change desired and how it can be manifested. By identifying these biases and putting the case of Blank Noise into the picture, I have demonstrated that today's digital natives may have an alternative approach to social change and organising a movement that cannot be understood through the current stereotypes.

Many youth movements today aim for social and cultural change at the intangible attitudinal level. Consequently, they articulate the issue with an intangible opponent (the mindset) and less-measurable goals. Their objective is to raise public awareness, but their approach to social change is through creating personal change at the individual level through engagement with the movement. Hence, 'success' is materialised in having as many people as possible involved in the movement. This is enabled by several factors.

The first is the internet and new media/social technologies, which are used as a site for community building, support group, campaigns, and a basis to allow people spread all over the globe to remain

involved in the collective in the absence of a physical office. However, the cyber is not just a tool; it is also a public space that is equally important with the physical space. Despite acknowledging the diversity of the public engaged in these spaces, youth today do not completely regard them as two separate spheres. Engaging in virtual community has a real impact on everyday lives; the virtual is a part of real life for many youth (Shirky, 2010). However, it is not a smooth 'space of flows' (Castells, 2009) either. Youth actors in the Global South do recognise that their ease in navigating both spheres is the ability of the elite in their societies, where the digital divide is paramount. The disconnect stems from their acknowledgement that social change must be multi-class and an expression of their reflexivity in facing the challenge.

The second enabling factor is its highly individualised approach. The movement enables people to personalise their involvement, both in terms of frequency and ways of engagement as well as in meaning-making. It is an echo of the age of individualism that youth are growing up in, shaped by the liberal economic and political ideologies in the 1990s India and elsewhere (France, 2007). Individualism has become a new social structure, in which personal decisions and meaning-making is deemed as the key to solve structural issues in late modernity (*Ibid*). In this era, young people's lives consist of a combination of a range of activities rather than being focused only on one particular activity (*Ibid*). This is also the case in their social and political engagement. Very few young people worldwide are full-time activists or completely apathetic, the mainstream are actually involved in 'everyday activism' (Bang, 2004; Harris et al, 2010).

The way young people today are reimagining social change and movements reiterates that political and social engagement should be conceived in the plural. Instead of "activism" there should be "activisms" in various forms; this is not a new form replacing the older, but all co-existing and with the potential to complement each other. A more traditional movement focusing on changing legislations would benefit greatly from the existence of a digital natives movement aiming at empowering individuals and transforming attitudes, since they are addressing different stakeholders with different strategies but intending to achieve the same overarching goals. In cases where digital natives are taking an issue where no tangible opponent or goals can be identified, it can still be harmonious with the larger goals of a movement, the way Blank Noise's efforts to address street sexual harassment is still in line with the spirit of the wider women's movement. Hopefully, this will be a beginning to wider acknowledgement of digital natives' alternative approach to imagining and achieving social change.

[1] The paper is based on the author's 'Beyond the Digital: Understanding Digital Natives with a Cause' research project, documented through a series of blog posts and position paper on the Centre for Internet and Society (CIS) website as well as a Master's thesis. The author would like to thank Blank Noise, especially Hemangini Gupta and Jasmeen Patheja, as well as Nishant Shah of CIS and Fieke Jansen and Josine Stremmelaar of Hivos for their support for the research.

[2] I use the term 'digital natives' while being fully aware of the debates related to the name, which I could not address given the limitations of this essay.

[3] For more details on Blank Noise, visit: http://blog.blanknoise.org

[4] Editors' note: For us what the Blank Noise project has in common with other digital native actions that we have encountered is that individuals who are directly or indirectly affected by an event, societal experience, taboo or distrust try to tackle these issues in the public sphere. For them it is clear that issues like eve-teasing or in Ivet Piper's contribution (Book 4, To Connect), child abuse can only be de-stigmatised if it is discussed in the open. To do this one needs to challenge existing power structures. There need not be tangible results, but once these issues are brought into the public domain, they find others affected by the same

issues and the community of participants and supporters grows.

[5] Loose shirt and pants popular in South Asia.

[6] A scarf women wear with salwar kameez.

[7] Based on an interview with Anja Kovacs, a researcher on the Centre for Internet and Society in Bangalore who is documenting forms of digital activism in India.

[8] http://blanknoise.org

[9] http://actionheroes.blanknoise.org

[10] Mitra-Kahn, Trishima (unpublished) *Holler back, Girl!: Cyberfeminist praxis and emergent cultures of online feminist organizing in urban India.* Quoted with permission.

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Source for the image: Blank Noise's Facebook group http://www.facebook.com/group php?gid=2703755288

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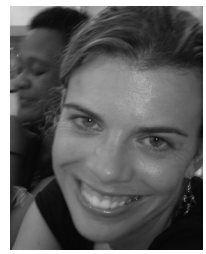

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BOOK TWO **TO THINK**

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