Is Social The New Personal?

What we don’t deliberate over is the fact that circles and communities never remain strictly closed or rigid; they contract with the loss of some, and expand, with new members becoming family and bringing their own circle of friends on board. It’s the leitmotif of our offline social circles, why not online?

We are at a cut-off point in time when we can demarcate the line between the generation that looked at the coming of the internet as a historical narrative, an event that occurred in their lives, and those for whom it is a “way of life.” This second group – perhaps those born in the mid-90s, to middle-class, educated, white-collar parents - sputtered their milk tooth as their parents set-up a Yahoo account for them (fear of running out of domain names is quite valid). Their first baby steps, first birthday and first comic act in school is recorded not on photopapers stuck in decorated albums, but in the real-time archives of Picassa, Facebook, Orkut or Flickr; a life weaved out of domain names is quite valid. Their first pregnancy pictures to videos of the hospital visit post delivery and so on from their digital cameras to the Web.

Does this generation realize that they are unwitting curators and historians, documenting their every waking routine and the meta-narratives of their lives? Many of their activities – uploading photographs, sending emails, responding to posts and commenting on forums, watching videos and shopping online and simply being available in green indicator – are indicators of their personality, their hobbies and interests, their moods and nature, and gives us clues to their literacy levels, intelligence, emotional quotient, and more. Clicking links, reading news at all times, “Liking” several hundred posts (randomly), participating in a-synchronous messages in real-time (you message and don’t wait for the opposite person to respond immediately) and living a multi-tabbed existence is not only what they do but who they are.

The post-digital generation never knew of a world where the “net” was looked upon as a mysterious monster” as Ayehsa Tabassum. The digital generation have begun to take social media personally. It is just today that we realize why efforts are sustained & consistent and the possibilities of a fair, open and participative society if efforts are sustained & consistent and ideas, ever green. How about you?

The cheerleader of this issue, Maureen Agena, helps us celebrate World Social Media Day. Meena Kandasamy affirms the democratic nature of the net in our opening story and she is joined by the champions of this issue: Andres Palma, Juan Casaneuva and Tsinane Pe, who give us reasons to disregard the cynicism that is usually reserved for new technologies and fads. My faith is affirmed in the possibilities of a fair, open and participative society if efforts are sustained & consistent and ideas, ever green. How about you?

Personal always preclude a narrow margin of allowing in the social. It is just today that we have begun to take social media personally. Happy Clicking | Connecting | Liking!

Nilofar Ansher

P.S. Please do write back to the contributors and the editor with your e-reactions, emotions, suggestions for improvements to the newsletter (and the stuff that delighted you). Lurkers, time to come out of the closet.
Guest Editor: Nilofar Ansher | Design: Albert Mucunguzi (@almuc.me) | Content Strategist: Samuel Tettner (@tettner.com)

NEWS

The new Lord Mayor of Dublin Andrew Montague signed a mayoral scroll proclaiming Social Media Day on 30 June. It is a fitting honor for Dublin – Europe’s internet capital – which is home to the European headquarters of Facebook, Zynga, Google, LinkedIn and many others.


Pope Benedict XVI Writes His Very First Tweet http://newsfeed.time.com/2011/06/28/the-holy-see-goes-high-tech-pope-benedict-xvi-writes-his-first-twitter/ [324x390] [324x390] [324x390]

WORKSHOPS & CONFERENCES

Locating Internets: Histories of the Internet(s) in India – Research Training and Curriculum WorkshopDeadline for submission: 15th July 2011-06-08; Continue to Page 10

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Next Issue: Internet Governance. Deadline for Contributions: July 10.

BOOKS AND BLOGGING: My Side of the Story

By Meena Kandasamy

I review one or two books every fortnight for The New Indian Express. And since I have just finished my doctoral thesis, I can safely say that I read about twenty books a month, if I feel like it. I don’t faithfully post all these reviews on my blog, leaving the door open for discussion. Readers tell me they have gone through the posts and so go around selecting books with the kind of reviews I write. Some urge me to be more subtle, more vicious and develop an acidic style of attack. Many of the readers strays into my blog looking for a review of some book, then they

I have read Kurt Schork’s famous and heart-wrenching dispatch, spoke of correspondents being killed while reporting from conflict zones, selected Dan Eldon’s story in Somalia as the most tragic of that lot, condemned the necessity to make a biopic on him. And then we both laughed at the fact that the said biopic was going to star Daniel Radcliffe. Until the Harry Potter reference, and then I had to simultaneously google in order to keep up. I still don’t believe this is chatter i can imagine how wide-eyed and tongue-tied I would have been. Thank god for the internet, for its explosion of knowledge, enormous ease of access.

Would this presentation ever have been possible without the web? Where else in the world can ideas be bounced around with wild abandon, where else would people have the opportunity to affect change in the world at their knowledge on a hopeless hoolie whose only sin was to have a green sweater? Imagine the feedback I got. I would like to keep the diaries of conversations, of the little something from that whole system is a mark of you making a list. Google and tagging ensure that I can imagine how wide-eyed and tongue-tied I would have been. And I somehow believe that the way a book is read presently is certainly going to radically affect the way in which books are written. Google-addicted audiences demand and deserve nothing less, I guess.

Yesterday, I met a young man as fierce and weird as me. I met him online of course, on Facebook, and by the time it was our fifth conversation there was talk of snipers. I had read sniper alley in Sarajevo, asked me if I had read Kurt Schork’s famous and heart-wrenching dispatch, spoke of correspondents being killed while reporting from conflict zones, selected Dan Eldon’s story in Somalia as the most tragic of that lot, condemned the necessity to make a biopic on him. And then we both laughed at the fact that the said biopic was going to star Daniel Radcliffe. Until the Harry Potter reference, and then I had to simultaneously google in order to keep up. I still don’t believe this is chatter i can imagine how wide-eyed and tongue-tied I would have been. Thank god for the internet, for its explosion of knowledge, enormous ease of access.

CONTRIBUTORS

The right shade of burgundy that would work well with lipstick-kissing your collection of poetry Books, in those 21st century digital avatar cannot even be autographed. They have lost their fresh scent, their scent of all that personality has ensured that books are no longer independent entities. It is time for the poor book to collectively urge to use ink. Or they can fall back upon their cosmic power, their new-found God-like ability to exist without any beginning or end. Reading one book is no longer just reading that book. Something in it prod one to look up for more, to chance upon tens and hundreds of other books. Every book entices you into its exclusive lair. But walking away has never been easier. Information is now served in its slicest scrapbook form, and extracting just a little something from that whole system is quick, but also cumbersome. And I somehow believe that the way a book is read presently is certainly going to radically affect the way in which books are written. Google-addicted audiences demand and deserve nothing less, I guess.
In the last couple of years, our society has given credence to an idea that has existed since the surge of communication media, the idea that the creation of a new medium means the death of the old one. For example, when radio was invented many thought that the newspaper would disappear entirely. It hasn’t, but contrast, the radio offers a sense of “immortality”. When television sets hit the market, it was truly believed that all other mass media would fade into obscurity – TV offered viewers in movement and could beam images in real time. However, the last I looked, “traditional” media is still around.

It is now fashionable to say that social network will be the downfall of any other media forms, because digital platforms on which the modern media thrives gives you information in real time. Let’s remember that not every thing that is online is true; it’s enough to look at the famous ‘false’ death announcements on Twitter, the last one of which was Venezuelan president Hugo Chavez’s (who is in Cuba getting an operation!).

I point out a few of the things we ought to look at when engaging with social media and how traditional media could learn from social media and vice-versa.

Social Media versus Traditional:

- Not everyone is connected and when they are, they don’t have the gadgets needed to be online all the time. Let’s forget the “digitizing” of an operation!

- Traditional media has a strong niche and reaches many people. It will continue to do so till the world doesn’t get digitalized!

- Why does traditional media need social media?

- Traditional media is mono-directional (sender-receiver). It’s only when they unite with social media platforms can they create a conversation and begin to listen, interact and know the “user” (who would otherwise be the traditional consumer)

- With traditional media the business creates a brand, with social media you turn the users into brand-loyalists.

- Traditional media informs, social media reaftths and communicates.

In conclusion, we must understand that traditional media should not reduce themselves to simply “digitizing” their operation, they need to change their way of informing. Society is changing and with it, the way we access information.

Translated from Spanish by Samuel Tettar.

The Contrarian View

Complementary Voices

Traditional and social media do not stand on opposite ends of the spectrum, opines Andrés Felipe Arias Palma

Social is personal

Rotimi Olawale steps into his parent’s shoes and relives his wonder as he makes sense of the social media technologies that punctuate our office routines and personal lives.

It is now fashionable to say that social media technologies, at least in Nigeria. Several of my friends who work with large corporations have had their access to social media sites blocked at work. This is part of several companies’ efforts to curtail employees from wasting company time and productivity.

But smartphone! The average upwardly mobile digital native has a smartphone with multiple features; top on the most sought features are to connect to Twitter, Facebook, Mxit, LinkedIn, and several other social media platforms that they have a stake in. Tapping Internet from their mobile phones, they bypass the company’s network and continue their conversations. The mobile is phone? Share pictures, ‘Like’ several status updates on Facebook and RT a Twitter link! Today’s “mobile” — to theaverage Internet user is an opportunity to enhance their brand and maintain real-time contact with customers, engagement in real-time terms. GTBank, my local bank in Nigeria, maintains a wonderful social media presence where they respond to tweets in less than an hour. I was startled when they provided links for me to download a mobile banking app for my BlackBerry phone, enabling me to check account balance, see a mini-statement of my account and also purchase top-up card for my phone.

Today’s working professionals are learning to cope with the constant buzz, pings, online groups, chats, tweets and more that tend to punctuate their normal work day. But we can already see a number of people are already hooked and can’t seem to get any work done if there is any disruption to their Internet connection, even if there are a number of tasks that can be done without the latter. It is not surprising when a couple of weeks ago, a UN report declared Internet access a human right!

No ask myself, where would social media be in the next five years? I am sure even Mark Zuckerberg and the Google founders (both digital natives) would predict a number of tasks that can be done without the latter. It is not surprising when a couple of weeks ago, a UN report declared Internet access a human right!

In conclusion, we must understand that traditional media should not reduce themselves to simply “digitizing” their operation, they need to change their way of informing. Society is changing and with it, the way we access information.

Is social media a tool to be on? Or a tool to be off? Rotimi Olawale steps into his parent’s shoes and relives his wonder as he makes sense of the social media technologies that punctuate our office routines and personal lives. No longer in the dilemma of being in or out, Ayesha Tubabas believes the Internet is here to stay, so why not jump into the driver’s seat and control the steering!

Current trends do indicate that the Internet has to be stay, forever, so I choose to be with it'. From a humble start with an e-mail account, to chatting, blogging, networking, and recently, tiny steps towards online shopping, I have slowly travelled the map of the Internet. But honestly, it wasn’t something tangible. I think of the older generations would have thought of taking back when we were all getting to know the net. Using the Internet to ‘keep in touch with friends and family abroad, seemed like the only reason to be online – for about ten minutes a day. But as I broke the ‘Breaking News’ habit, I was exposed to a world I had no idea existed. I discovered a universe of blogs, how people were doing about half an hour a week. This was back in the late ’90s. Soon, as I entered college, assignments and keeping up with peer competition turned the tide. The outlook that the computer was a mysterious monster (with exotic viruses) and the net, an addictive danger was slowly changing. It was like riding a bicycle, once you get the hang of the controls and learn the balancing act, it’s not so scary anymore.

Alice in Wonderland Feeling

With all the new sites, blogs, encyclopedias and social networking sites seeking information, turning in assignments and keeping up with trends and the increasing circle of friends became easier. And Google! Oh, Google was the answer to the labor pain of an entire generation for whom everything had to be in (and I am not referring to the Instant Maggi Noodles-consuming older kids) videos, chat forums or Facebook. The world online – a world of opportunity – everything on a supersonic speed is how we play life.

My moment of victory (and confirmation) came with the political revolution in a country far away from India, Egypt. I felt like an Egyptian activist, although I was not, supporting my ‘online’ – aka the virtual world on Twitter. It fostered a sense of empowerment in me. It was obvious, though not measurable that opinions do mobilize change. But it doesn’t stop there. Metropolitan cities in India are currently in the throes of a major ‘feminist’ movement, the Slutwalk, and though I don’t have the means physically to attend the protest march and follow it on the main social networking sites online. Engaging in forum discussions, furiously chatting on Facebook with a larger group of supporters, social media sites have given us a platform to express our opinions and connect with others. Network forms a major part of being online today – from professional contacts to book club groups, we are all a-twitter with buzz. The online world stands at me as if it were another universe! Reckoning to Childhood Days

The last few months have been tough for me. Juggling work, extra projects, family and friends has kept me on collapse mode. However, the Internet has come to my aid, again. Friends are too busy themselves to meet up, so we keep in touch through e-mails, phone calls and Facebook. I have stopped bothering them, for we know we can choose to shut down the screen and meet up face to face when the time is right. Of course, there are many ‘side-effects’ that I haven’t spoken of, worst of which is loss of privacy/security breach, this need to keep checking our messages, etc. Recently, my pictures were stolen to create a fake profile in another person’s name. I learnt a lesson the hard way, like the old-fashioned virtual world has its share of good and bad. Do I still choose to be ‘hit-ten’? Yes!
This map shows the universe size of active social networers for each market and then segments users into three behavior types: Messagers, Groupers and Content Sharers. This behavioral data is based on a number of detailed questions we conduct into the way that consumers use social networks. Because social networking is now so big and touches every aspect of our internet experience, this detail is essential for the effective planning and implementation of marketing activity across social networks.

This data reveals that users across the world are very different in how they utilize their network, with more focus on messaging and less on content sharing in established markets like US and UK but more focus on content and groups in fast growing markets like Indonesia and China.
Digital Natives on Facebook

Making Sense of Social Network

Socially Speaking

Do extroverts have patent rights over the word social? Ravish Khapra – an introvert by choice – says otherwise.

Would you settle for it if you could be told by yourself and be guaranteed happiness? Because, the assumption is that we are social beings and much better off in company than in isolation. More than happiness, it’s our needs that get fulfilled in company. We need to be in a social environment to hear and receive feedback for our responses. And social doesn’t mean public. At home, it is our family members who engage with us and we in turn engage with circles beyond home like in office, our colleagues or peers provide us with a response. In isolation, with limited communication, we would be static.

There are two types of social beings, namely introverts and extroverts. Coming straight to the point, let me make it very clear that being an introvert doesn’t mean that you are losing out on something. You continue being part of the social stream and get responses from people around you, depending upon where you are – at home, doing grocery shopping or attending tuition class. An introvert may not generate the same number of responses that an extrovert generates. However, these varying degrees of responses cannot be predicted or mapped. But we must keep in mind that we all are wired for human interaction. And that’s the work of the human brain.

So, everyone is social to some extent and only the degree differs, depending upon the environment we are born in or the stimulus we are exposed to. It’s a matter of choice, whether we choose to be social or not. First, then a need for babies, then a want for adults. We are born with a natural instinct to be social, just like everything else. An introvert may not experience this particular online social environment, but they do get the same amount of feedback as an extrovert. An extrovert would have more online friends compared to the introvert. However, the richness of the experience in the online social environment doesn’t merely depend on the number of friends we have. So, an introvert with fewer friends could have a richer experience than an extrovert who has many friends.

I believe that you should remain in what mould you are most comfortable in. If you think you are by nature an introvert, then let not the “tag” or perception of an introvert – withdrawn, reclusive, anti-social, lonely – force you into adopting artificial ways of engaging with people. No one is an introvert unapologetically. We all behave in a certain way because that’s our comfort state. The experiences can be positive and life-enhancing whether you are quiet and withdrawn, with your books and music or whether you are looked on as an extrovert.

Making Sense of Social Network

Social Media: Selective Addictions—Necessary Obsessions

Anand Philip posits that the lines separating addiction and necessity are artificial at best and nothing but a lure for the opposition camp to trumpet their sentiments / offline

Addiction and necessity are not really opposite. Many necessary things can become addicted and some are addictive. But these divisions are commonly used by both haters and fans to qualify their indulgences. However, instead of making a statement like “It is an addiction for some and a necessity for others,” I would like to look at why and how such a dichotomy came to be.

Xenophobia

We love routine. With the advent of social media, many of the older methods of making connections, networking, and even romance have been changed radically. Also, in social media, the tools keep changing, while age it was Orkut, now it’s Facebook, and we don’t know what it will be tomorrow.

Moreover, new tools come with a steep learning curve and favor early adopters (and adapters). So, it is only natural that these fast changing, time consuming online activities appear as additions or crazes to the ‘older’ generation.

Power always tries to conserve power

The new web is that it is an equalizer. Till the advent of blogs and to a much larger extent, YouTube and a few other services, who got to be famous and what becomes the talk of the town was largely controlled by a highly centralized system of the ruling makers. This is one of the reasons behind the mainstream not being very happy about social media, at least initially. It is doubtful that they predicted what social media was going to be or do, but the implicit threat in a medium which allowed everyone to have an opinion and become influential was not hidden.

Variable-ratio schedules in Operant Conditioning

It has been noticed that in situations where there is an action and a response, if the response follows an action, but not at every instance of the action, the behavior that leads to the action is reinforced and habits thus formed are very resistant to change.

This is the reason we spend so much time on social media. We cannot ever be sure which tweet is going to get 100 re-tweets or what pic is going to reach reddit’s front page – there are formulas, but they don’t always work. So we keep at it.

Conclusion: Addiction or necessity?

The hallmarks of addiction are an inability to stop, severe disruption in normal routine, and the need to continue despite demonstrable ill-effects to self. Most users of Twitter don’t develop RSI (repetitive stress injury) or malnutrition due to it. Obsessions on the other hand are more common; they are characterized by preoccupation and craving. If you have been blogging or tweeting for a while you have an almost constant mental conversation trying to fit real life into tweets and blog posts. Yes, that is an obsession, and it can be healthy; it can be your bread and butter. It can keep you online 10 hours a day and make your mom go crazy. So, take a step back if your mom threaten to throw you out, but chances are she will join Facebook tomorrow – it’s addictive you see.

Digital Natives

Illustration by Albert Muc on Facebook (http://facebook.com/alumc)

Digital natives aren’t just hanging out on the internet and showing how this invisible invisible invisible invisible force, a sort of human curiosity, the urge to know about things and importantly other people has been bolstered by digital technologies.

Digital Natives

Socially Speaking

New Members Who Joined Our Facebook group!

Kunal Mehta India

Gabriel John Komanda Kenya

Kerry McCay South Africa

Peterson Wanyakote Kenya

Steve Vollo USA

Joseph Munuulo Uganda

Erurence Gray Uganda

Guest Editor: Nilofar Ansher  |  Design: Albert Mucunguzi (http://alumc.me)  |  Content Strategist: Samuel Nteyie (http://samuelnt.com)
Maureen Agena tells us why it’s time we cheer for World Social Media Day on June 30

First celebrated in 2010 on June 20, the World Social Media Day recognized the day media became social to the common man. The use and application of social media comes at an opportune time to capitalize on the application of citizen journalism, a practice still limited and understood by only a few. Citizen journalism, also known as “participatory journalism,” is a kind of journalism where people can publish news globally on news websites or media publications. A practice that has so far been the reserve of established journalists and media companies. On this day, we appreciate the changes in media that have enabled information sharing and networking in real time among ordinary people. Social Media for Development

When the World Wide Web made its way into homes and office—beyond military and scientific walls—we needed a web master to guide and help end-users, but today, the situation has changed. Social media tools are second generation tools that empower users on the web to read and write on it. With social media, you can publish your content without having to depend or take permission from established institutions or authorities. The user-centered and enables inter-operability and information sharing.

It is true that social media alone is not relevant unless linked to development. The tools must be participatory in a sense that people must be involved and share or access information voluntarily. Technology

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Anti-Social Verses

By Hasina Hasan

What are users interfacing so much for?
Who are they using through the interfacing?
Users using each other?
Why is U using the UI?
Using each other?
Don’t make excuse of using the interface!
I see through all your lies!
Stop using the interface as an excuse to fight!
Stop fighting!
Stop this fatalistic attraction to the other user
To the other user’s tools and attractions!
What is all this towing?
What is all this kissing each other and then pretending professionalism in public?
Pretending the public display of hate canield!
Your behind the scenes love making?
What is this tightrope walking when instead you could be tending to yourself and your loved ones?
When is that what you want?
I can see through your lie and I see through my child eyes!
I am blind and I can see.
I am deaf and I hear your stomach rumble for what is not yours to have.
You’re driving me mute.
As the spectator in the circle, mouth widened!
I am dumbfoundedly in love with you.
Can you hear my silent plea?
Can I let you go in peace
Can you hear my silent plea?

=""
In earlier days what used to be the rumor/gossip of a faraway town or an obscure article on a distant celebrity, is today, the talk of everybody’s neighborhood because we all belong to the same neighborhood, the cyber neighborhood.

Upending Anonymity, These Days the Web Unmasks Everyone

Noopur Lily

Right, I want to be an Icelandic citizen. Has Social Media finally “arrived” ... via Facebook that is? #InfoFatigue

Iceland Crowdsources Its Constitution

Nilofar Shamim Ansher

Who wants to do something fun? Let’s all write a story together! I will the first line of the short story, tag one person, who then has to write add one line to the story, and tag someone else, and that’s it! There is one aspect we must observe however, the short story must include expressions of the digital world used in non-digital contexts! for example: “Sir Ajay the third, rode all the way to Duke Albert’s castle, and posted the rewards notice on his wall”. For this act of aggression, Duke Albert blocked him from attending the royal banquet.” Here we go...

Samuel Tettner
‘Free, Fair, and Wide-Reaching’

Facebook and Twitter can play a vital role in popularizing traditional not-for-profit organizations, finds out Tsinane Pe in an interview with Solveig Firing Lunde.

Tsinane: Solveig Lunde is a volunteer at Federación Nativa del Río Madre de Dios y Alianzas (FENAMAD), an indigenous organization located in the Peruvian Amazon. One of the first things she did when she came to FENAMAD was to create a page for the Federation on Facebook.

Tsinane: Why is FENAMAD on Facebook?

Solveig: There are many reasons why I created a Facebook page for FENAMAD. Before involving your organization with Facebook you should ask yourself two questions: Why is Facebook a good tool, and how can it help us?

Tsinane: How can the organization benefit from being on Facebook?

Solveig: I will try to answer these questions from FENAMAD’s point of view. Facebook has a lot of qualities. First, it is free. Second, Facebook works when other pages do not. Twitter, for instance, does not work in Puerto Maldonado, and FENAMAD’s own website takes ages to load. This does not mean that Facebook can or should replace an ordinary webpage, but it can be a useful supplement.

Third, it’s a platform that most can easily learn. That makes it democratic, and strategic, for an organization that sees a fair amount of attention. We can afford to train new people in using proprietary tools, when they might not be with us 6 months down the road.

Fourth, Facebook is growing in Peru. This means that a lot of enthusiastic Peruvians probably will spend quite a lot of time on the site, sharing information they find interesting with friends, and possibly be loyal to organizations that are easily accessible on popular media sites.

Fifth, it is already big in the Northern part of the world, both among individuals but also, or to a much smaller extent, among civil society actors. If you want to make an impact on the European or Northern American domain, both politically and when lobbying for funds, being active and visible on such a popular platform is mandatory.

Tsinane: Could you give us the specific strategies you have taken up for your organization?

Solveig: The idea to begin with, is to use Facebook to show the page to an active and interested public. Our ambition is to use some of our material on the Internet. YouTube is very useful for us when we want to publicize our videos. FENAMAD also has a blog, but believe there is still a lot of unused potential.

Tsinane: Free services on Internet give only benefits or are there also risks involved for the organization? What is your opinion?

Solveig: Successful use of social media requires knowledge about its potential and limits. It is important to keep in mind that everything that we publish on the Internet is public. We are working with people who might not want to be exposed with pictures, names or other information on the Internet. FENAMAD is a non-profit organization and we are preventing this from happening. There is also a need for capacity building within the organization, to learn how to use the Internet in general, and Facebook and other social media technologies in particular, both at the institutional as well as the individual level.

Visit the Facebook group: http://www.facebook.com/pages/Federacion-Nativa-del-Rio-Madre-de-Dios-y-Alianzas/FENAMAD/20118499915650

Solveig Firing Lunde and Alicia Fernandez, directora de FENAMAD

INTERVIEW

Turning crowdsourced reports into actionable information

By Juan Casesenova

The Digital Era brings into sharp contrast the cultural changes that it’s a harbinger of in the traditional society: openness, transparency and communication. Case study of CitiVox | Juan Casesenova

Mexican ICT4Change start-up company CitiVox was recently born with the aim of developing technology that would enhance citizen’s voice and institution services to provide transparency and better quality of life. Their core technology is known as a ‘citizen relationship management tool’ which aims to make crowdsourcing citizen report manageable for institutions that intend to listen to citizens and respond to them with adequate solutions. So far, the initial projects have been initiated to identify, track and respond to quality of life complaints, crime reporting and election monitoring.

Aware that people interact daily with a wide variety of devices and technology, the CitiVox platform can be customized to receive reports from any source, be it smartphones, ‘dumbphones’, email, Twitter, Facebook, web apps, other websites, etc. Also, using the original communication media, anonymous messages can be sent between the institutions and reporters so that further information can be gathered for verification.

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By Albert Mucunzú

About a year after I had got my first job — at Makerere University Business School, a memo was sent from the Principal’s office. He directed that a blog be set up to support and promote the new deployment in the institution. We had been implementing a plan to set up a website for each of those departments, [which was already too much work for me and my team of one], and the new task of setting up blogs was proving to be enormous.

What was always going to be harder was sensitizing the staff of these blogs: cause a lot of them didn’t even own a computer — let alone even knowing what a blog is!

But when I was laying out the page for contribution, I set up a forum on Facebook where almost everyone sent us a URL to their blogs.

I remember not so many of my workmates had Facebook accounts (that time Twitter was not much of a foreigner), and there used to be hot debates on whether they actually needed them.

and assigned to users for further tracking. CitiVox has enabled workflows so that report management can be carried out within an institution where it is easy to know the status of the reports and the person responsible for executing them. Also, report metrics and analytics dashboards have been included to compare essential report characteristics as well as help track internal report analysis among staff.

Despite the technical nature of the functions, experience from the first project deployments reveal that aiming to set new institution-citizen communications is a complex matter. To achieve this goal, in-depth change management within the institutions is needed and civic engagement must play an active role in order to promote transparent, open and effective dialogue between both parties. CitiVox’s ‘citizen relationship management platform is being used in Mexico and Honduras. In Mexico, a citizen reporting strategy was implemented to enhance government dialogue with the inhabitants of the state of Guerrero. Initially, the state Ministry of Public Security set up a SMS public service so that people would get useful information on what could affect them in their daily life. Once citizens gained trust and value on the government’s information offering, users built a database of over 35,000 contacts in urban and rural areas. The second step was initiating a citizen-government dialogue asking people to report a quality of life issue and setting up a report-management team in the government.

San Pedro Sula, Honduras saw a similar deployment. Here, we gave smartphones to people who were trained to report crimes. Despite the digital divide in the region, policemen became familiar with smartphone use and after an adaptation process, mobile crime reporting began to substitute older crime reporting and follow-up procedures in the police department.

Either with open public crowdsourcing or with selected group reporting, CitiVox is engaging with institutions and people to establish technology that can provide tools for turning information into concrete service processes and actions. Social media is slowly but surely becoming a vital part of our lives and could soon be an essential component in dialogue and service between people and institutions. The greatest technological challenge thus far is to build flexible, intuitive and adaptable solutions that can add value to people’s voices and institution’s internal processes. Though, after the first experiences using CitiVox, the greater challenge supersedes technology. The Digital Era is still very fast paced for many people and some of the cultural changes that it involves (openness, transparency, communication, etc.) demand profound changes in society’s power structures, philosophies and habits.

Blogging: Evidence that we’re living in the era of individualism

By Albert Mucunzú

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changed. At least I see a number of my ex-workmates on Facebook, with a few of them actually posting updates regularly. Every morning I look at my Facebook news feed, and Twitter stream... It’s all about people’s experiences, and their lives. The “me, mine and my thing” it turns out that we are in an era where everyone is very obsessed about themselves, as well as very willing to share.

And that is the whole point in blogging. Almost all bloggers write in first person, spending hours each day chronicling their anger at their service providers’ (MTN in my case) poor QCs, or how poor the roads in their country have gotten, or as is the case with most of the African bloggers now, how the government has failed on basic service delivery like electricity...

The Facebook update and tweet is so ephemeral, solipsistic, snarky and many other words you can learn by Googling me...

Back in the day, it sounded queer for me to hear people actually wanting to be heard, sharing their experiences and their thoughts! It’s a different era altogether. I hope you’re loving it!
Facebook and the Technologies of memory: On Letting Go

By Samuel Tettner

I have this proto-neurotic habit of keeping my "friend" count on Facebook hovering around 150. I think this is a manifestation of the “carpe diem” (seize the day) idealism that is present in all of us. Or maybe now that I am just a year away from being alive for a quarter of century (I turned 24 this year), I look at this stage as a one-time affair to be maximized.

Our life is full of transitory connections - ex-friends, one-time friends, one-night stand-type friends, situational friends (ones you meet at a festival or concert), friends of exes – as we trans-locate through social ecologies: college, work, romantic engagements, hobbies, new cities, and new lifestyles. By keeping these connections present and visible in our social life (online and offline) we maintain a live nerve to the past. It is very easy to remain friends with people from our past because of a sentimental nostalgia: scrolling through their pictures we reminisce about what was and is no more. The truth is, I don’t talk to them anymore, and in the rare occasion I do it is to partake in a mutual exercise of bias confirmation, of the construction of a romanticized distant thought. “Oh man, remember that one time in college when you…those were good times”.

I used to do this all the time, relive the moments and reap the feel-good effects of younger-Sam’s actions. Recently, I have been paying close attention to the effects this practice has on me. The past is a powerful force in my life; it helps me situate myself and judge growth patterns and trajectories. It can also be overwhelming, a force so powerful it can swallow us. I think "the past" is something we all must deal with in our lives. Technology has interesting effects in the way we deal with the past; Nishant’s piece (Rest in Code) on how digital storytelling can help people in mourning was particularly touching because, just a week before, a good friend lost his life in a drunk-driving accident. Social media lets us see these changes in our social networks throughout our life, with patterns disturbed, maybe even re-organized.

Are we supposed to have 5,000 friends by the time we are 60? Is our “friend list” an accumulation of everyone we’ve befriended in our lives up to that point or is it an instantaneous peek – a cross-section – into our social life at that time? For me the answer has begun leaning towards the latter. If you have not actively contributed to my life in positive ways in the last year, you are out. I am finding this option to be more intellectually and emotionally honest, at least more so than “we’ll stay in touch someday”.

So, yes, 150 is my number: 150 friends is a quantity that I can handle. 150 gives me a healthy combination of people whom I can effectively keep a track of. 150 also seems more “natural”, alluding to the size of the nomadic hunting tribes which constituted our early social organization. The key perceptual change, in my opinion, is that by clicking “remove friend” I am not eliminating all the experiences I had with that person. All the good times which constitute my memories of places, people and experiences are still there, “There” is in my mind, where they have not been appropriated, sorted and formalized by Facebook. “There” is also crucially in my past, which allows me to better live in the present.

The End Note

Facebook and the Technologies of memory: On Letting Go

POEM: SOCIAL

By Frank Odongkara

So many faces
they meet and chat in places
and take pictures for memory patches

On and on they push and pull
each other in and out of the pool
in groups of course; to win the bull

Church is a place called hell
Where the devils dress well
and work is done by the address of the bell

In times of hunger they kill to fill
with disregard to how the preys feel
but soon they want those habitats refilled

A story was told of a team
that worked to form another team
that they may form another team

Love and life are two great myths
that we spend on all we got in form of tithes