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ADVANCES IN GLOBAL SERVICES AND RETAIL MANAGEMENT

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ISBN 978-1-955833-03-5

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Accelerated Modernity: What Are the Social Media Stories Undergraduate Students Engage With?

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Abstract

This paper aims to show how current undergraduate students use social media in their daily lives, taking the first ten minutes of the day as a concentrated insight into their priorities of practice. The work draws on primary data from four focus groups of UK business students in higher education. Through the application of Rosa's construct of social acceleration, initial findings indicate a hierarchy of priorities, shaped by economic, cultural and structural drivers in what social media is engaged with, in what sequence, and for what purpose. These choices reflect acceleration in the changes to the technology, the pace of social changes and the accelerated expectations of the pace of life. This article seeks to reimagine transmedia in the context of social media identity in an accelerated modernity. Here we have the intersection of three important rapidly changing constructs for the analysis of the use of media. These are the widespread, ubiquitous use of social media, the acceleration of late modernity and the impact of transmedia practice on how users engage with media.

Keywords: social media, acceleration, transmedia news, transmedia storytelling, mediatisation of self

Introduction

This article seeks to reimagine transmedia in the context of social media identity in an accelerated modernity. Here we have the intersection of three important rapidly changing constructs for the analysis of the use of media. The first area to deal with is the use of social media. In less than 10 years social media has moved from being a minority technologically enabled form of computer mediated communication to becoming one of the dominant means of participation in contemporary society. The role of social media in negotiating identity in late modernity is becoming central and changing rapidly.

Rapidity is a characteristic of an accelerated society and the second topic that this paper seeks to deal with is the relationship between acceleration and social media. Acceleration here is conceptualised by making use of the theoretical perspective developed by Hartmut Rosa. A significant part of this paper will be to outline how Rosa's work on acceleration helps to make

sense of the adoption and role of social media, and how social media plays a part in identity in late modernity.

The intersection of acceleration identity and social media offers an opportunity for re-imagining of transmedia. While much current research on transmedia has focused on narratives as fiction, this imagining of transmedia explores the narrative of identity as negotiated with(in) social media. Transmedia is ripe for this expansion of terrain as the boundaries between media properties owned and managed by corporations and media entities imagined through celebrity merge. At one end of the spectrum, entertainers and celebrities from the world of show business, sport, fashion and lifestyle seek to harness the opportunities for engagement and the monetisation of their fan base across a range of platforms exemplified par excellence by the Kardashian family transmedia empire. At the other end of the spectrum, individuals seeking work and credibility strive to create a valuable media reputation across social media platforms.

Somewhere in the middle of these two extremes we find young graduates and undergraduates studying at the University of Brighton. Their access to the desired lifestyle of celebrity, and the imagined excitement of what their peers are doing, are a constant pressure. This social media of shared images of other people's lives, forms the raw material of this research.

The intake of four years of Brighton Business School students discussed for this research, the first 10 minutes of their day. Specifically, how they use social media, what they looked at, what they care about and what they thought it meant. The paper seeks to explore their experiences, their priorities, and their consumption in the context of an accelerated modernity. One of the most important insights in contemporary philosophy and sociology is the relation between concerns, strong evaluations and the formation of identity: what we care about is expressive of who we are (Archer, 2007; Taylor, 1989; Frankfurt, 1988; Sayer, 2011). In this sense, the processes of prioritizing and rehearsing taking place in transmedia are useful to grasp how identities are negotiated with(in) these new technologies.

Literature Review

Use of Social Media

Social media platforms are a significant part of the range of media and interpersonal interactions in contemporary culture (boyd, 2014). The choices of which platforms are used and for what purpose reflect changes in needs and expectation of users. The range of platforms available and the uses they are put to also is related to the changing affordance of the platform, and changing user expectations. It also reflects a structural factor, a need for capitalist reinvention to create new products and services to offer to the market (Standing, 2016). This intersection between the needs and expectation of the users and what the platforms offer leads to a contingent adoption of the platform for purposes that change over time. For example the rise and decline of AOL, MSN Messenger and MySpace may indicate this pattern. Some might argue that these dynamic changes are indicators of early market conditions and that the emerging monopoly of Facebook is more reflective of late capitalism (Keen, 2015). This study makes the case for a deliberate use of alternatives to Facebook (notably Snapchat and Instagram) to sidestep some of the monopolistic characteristics of Facebook, at least among the studied groups of undergraduates.

That the different platforms are used for different purposes and with different priorities – offers an interesting extension to ideas about the named web (Hogan, 2012) and the tendency to use social media as a curated presentation of self (Hogan, 2010). Hogan's studies showed that as the social media platforms have moved users from a paradigm of online identities based around self selected names, or avatars, towards an online presence closed related to their offline presence, the use of social media has changed. The use of real names on Facebook (and widely on Twitter and Instagram) has changed the relationship to the developing archives of content (pictures, links, statuses and likes) towards a curated, reflexive presentation of self.

Acceleration

The analysis draws on Rosa'a concept of social acceleration (Rosa, 2003; 2013) to structure the differing themes identified and the drivers for these themes. This analysis facilitates identification of broad socio-technical trends such as the impact of the Network Society (Castells, 2009), and fine granular changes, such the increased reliance on personalized newsfeeds (Newman, 2011) with their attendant risk of this use of news leading to a filter bubble (Pariser, 2011). Acceleration also allows a focus on how the mediatisation of self is termporalised (Pentzold, 2018) through social media (Couldry and Hepp, 2018).

Rosa offers "three analytically as well as empirically distinct categories" (2003: 80) of acceleration, in an approach to modernity that moves beyond a simple description of the technically enabled increase in transportation or information: technological acceleration, acceleration of social change and acceleration of the pace of life.

Technological Acceleration: "the intentional acceleration of goal-directed processes" (Rosa, 2013: 74), are not just the machinery and information systems of modernity, but the technology that allows the conceptualisation of life to be conducted in an accelerated manner. The adoption of reliable clocks, and geographical maps for example are technological necessities for the Fordist and Post Fordist capitalist production and distribution systems of modernity. Technological acceleration is most notable in the compression of space, by changes to transport and the distribution and access to information. In this research, space is reduced to a non factor as social media feeds bring an immediacy and proximity to news shared from anywhere in the world. Rosa shows these changes as impacting on the spatial, the social and the processes of production.

Acceleration of Social Change: "an increase of the rate of decay of action-orienting experiences and expectations and as a contraction of the time periods that determine the present of respective functional, value, and action spheres" (Rosa, 2013: 76). This is demonstrated by rapid changes to the way society is arranged, characterised by Bauman (2000) as liquid modernity. Migration and globalised job markets, are now a new normal. Current graduates are entering a labour market where they may expect to change jobs many times, or even have several jobs at the same time in the gig economy. Family relations are rapidly changing away from an industrial nuclear family, to a more temporary series of monogamous relations, even where these are longer term families, there is the "consciousness of contingency" (Rosa, 2013: 112). The markers of shared social ideas, whether in the serious news agenda or the consumption choices of fashion or celebrity are changing at a greater pace, as we move from experiencing news as scheduled, to continuous broadcast, to on-demand and global. The window in which news is current, shrinks as the pace of fresh news

accelerates. This social de-synchronization may enhance the attraction of social media as an agent of synchronisation.

Acceleration of the Pace of Life: "the increase of episodes of action and/or experience per unit of time as a result of a scarcity of time resources" (Rosa, 2013: 121). People speak faster, play music faster. News is consumed in fragments, multi tasking, multi layered. Wider choices and greater social changes leads to an increased expectation of what to do. Technological acceleration, which might reduce the time it takes to do a task paradoxically leads to a change in "temporal standards" (Rosa, 2013: 128). So, despite the speed at which technology enables communication, transport and production, there is a widespread perception of a lack of time.

Rosa's suggests that these three forms of acceleration can be considered as products of three drivers of acceleration: economic, cultural and structural.

The Economic Motor: time is money. The logic of capitalism determines that increased output per unit of time, is increased productivity and profit. Likewise competition that leads to innovation encourages an accelerated attempt to gain maximum return on the competitive advantage, before the competition catches up. Financial markets are predicated on exchange occurring before disadvantageous changes in value. Likewise the cycles of consumption and redundancy of goods accelerates. Capitalist growth is fuelled by shift work and 24 hour production, requiring a strict separation of work and free time, and intense planning and scheduling. Foucault (1975) saw the internalization of time management through coercion in 'stable' and localized institutions, such as factories, hospitals, prisons, asylums, kindergartens, and schools. However, Deleuze (1995: 178), a contemporary of Foucault, already envisaged a shift from this fixed and enclosed institutional structures to more fluid and mobile modes of surveillance and configuration of individuals:

"We are in the midst of a general breakdown of all sites of confinement – prisons, hospitals, factories, schools, the family. The family is an 'interior' that's breaking down like all other interiors – educational, professional, and so on. The appropriate ministers have constantly been announcing supposedly appropriate reforms, but everyone knows these institutions are in a more or less terminal decline. It's simply matter of keeping people busy until the new forces knocking at the door take over".

Transmedia should be understood within this background of ideas and as taking part of a broader societal shift from disciplinary to 'control' societies (from factories to corporations, from schools to perpetual training) taking place in late modernity. Here, the motor for internalization of time management is more subtle, with work taken home, online shopping done while at work and socialising and networking being conditions of work – e.g. 'ultrarapid forms of apparently free-floating control' (Deleuze, 1995: 178). Deleuze already saw in these new social forms the possibility of 'limitless postponements' in which 'one is never finished with anything' and, therefore, the active role of the agent in prioritizing his concerns and projects plays a pivotal role. As he saw it, we, as subjects, no longer live as the mole in enclosed spaces, but as serpents that have to travel fast among the multiple nodes of open spaces: to know who we are we have to know what we care about and, at the same time, to know what we care about we have to surf in the world.

The motto of this new way of living can be summarized in the (in)famous phrase 'Life is like riding a bicycle. To keep your balance, you have to keep moving'. Or, even worse, 'to know who

you are you, you have to revisit constantly what you care about'. Accordingly, there is an increasing fear of 'missing out', of being left behind, and life cannot be any longer a matter of passionate devotion to what we care about, but of acrobatic movements across networks of the world to find something in which we can, at least momentarily, feel like ourselves: "many young people strangely boast of being "motivated"; they re-request apprenticeships and permanent training. It's up to them to discover what they're made to serve […] The coils of the serpent are even more complex than the burrows of the molehill" (Deleuze, 1995).

The Cultural Motor: the promise of acceleration. What was once the protestant work ethic (and the fear of damnation) has been replaced by Weber's iron cage. The cost of the missed opportunity, the unrealised potential to gain security, accelerates as precarity, risk and uncertainty increase. (c.f. historian Egon Friedell on the black death and the cultural preconditions for the enlightenment). The good life is the life full of experience, self-actualisation and realising our potentials, driven by the fear of missing out. The old Romantic ideal of authenticity is here wickedly adapted to cast life as an endless process of experimentation without a purpose and without security (see Honneth, 2014). Time is scarce, despite technical acceleration. These cultural factors both drive, and are driven by the economic motor above explained, and in the coordination of these accelerated activities Rosa shows the structural motor arising.

The Structural Motor: the temporalisation of complexity. As acceleration occurs, there is increasing structural differentiation, meaning that different actors and activities are focused on achieving specific outcomes in a precisely fragmented timescale. These activities are ever-increasing in interdependency. This accelerated interdependence is complex and requires effective ordination to be effective. The coordination is a driver of acceleration as the needs of the faster processes impose pressure on all others. Table 1 relates these drivers of acceleration to Rosa's categories of acceleration.

Table 1: Hartmut Rosa's Social Acceleration Framework

Acceleration Motor: Category:	Economic	Cultural	Structural
Technological	Circle of production, distribution, and consumption constantly accelerates	Theories of "hyper-acceleration," "turbo-capitalism," and the "digital speed revolution" on the one hand, and conceptions of "polar inertia," the "end of history," the "closing of the future," and the sclerotic inescapability of the "iron cage" on the other	Late capitalism: speeding up of intentional, goal-directed processes of transport, communication, and production
Social Change	Restless competition Entrepreneurial networking, social capital, the in crowd. Fear of obsolescence Skills currency	Fashions and lifestyles, social relations and obligations as well as groups, classes, or milieus, social languages as well as forms of practice and habits… change at ever-increasing rates	Basic structures of society.. organize the processes of production and reproduction.. family and work .accelerated.. to an intra-generational pace: i.e. divorce, remarriage, precarity frequently changing jobs
Pace of Life	Tendency to "compress "actions and experiences	An increase in the decay rates of the reliability of experiences and expectations	Postmodernity and contingency hinges on this

A number of other concepts can be fruitfully mapped onto this grid, for example Reading's Identity, memory and cosmopolitanism (2011) or Bauman's Liquid Modernity (Bauman, 2000) has salience with the recognition of the increasing emphasis on individuals seeking individual solutions. The psychological research into the Fear Of Missing Out (FOMO) (Przybylski et al, 2013) can be seen in the light of Bauman's insight, to be more than a just and individual psychological response.

Transmedia

Transmedia is a concept of media analysis centred on access to the media crossing traditional boundaries of platform, and sometimes author. An eclectic and wide range of academic approaches have been used to engage with the concepts of transmedia, they include adaptation studies, which considers the transfer of content from one medium to another (Leitch, 2008; Hutcheon, 2013). Another approach is to explore how the aesthetics of the medium relate to the text, thus applying ideas such as intertextuality or transfiction (Ryan, 2008; Herkman, 2012). A widely cited approach is an explicitly pro-profit mantra proselytised by Jenkins and others who consider and codify industry transmedia practice (Jenkins, 2006; Scolari, 2009).

Redmond in his analysis of celebrity and the media builds a strong case for the suitability of celebrity as a transmedia narrative. He offers an extended Miley Cyrus case study by application of Jenkins ten suggestions for Transmedia Storytelling (Redmond, 2013: 77-84; Jenkins, 2007).

Methods

The study used four focus groups to gather semi structured responses from undergraduate students of business at Brighton Business School. Each session lasted an hour and consisted of eight to twelve self-selected undergraduates (total 57). The invitation asked them to come along and "discuss the entertainment market, social media use and what is changing in their experience as users with a focus discovery, consumption and feelings about social media". The students were briefed to clarify that the focus group and participation were not related to their studies. They were given consent / information and then a set of printed themes to discuss. For this paper only responses to the opening question "do you have a routine first thing in the morning; tell us about the first ten minutes of your day?" will be analyzed.

The participants were invited to each contribute, and in most of the sessions this lead to a round robin discussion, where the themes that emerged in early answers were often reflected by subsequent contributors. While this introduces risks of social conformity, it also presented opportunity for discussion and comparison.

The focus groups were audio recorded. The students were thanked for their participation and offered access to any outputs that resulted (such as this paper). The audio recordings were not transcribed but used as a resource in the discussion of the themes that emerged. Some indicative phrases are used verbatim in this paper.

Data Collection

The following comments (Table 2. Sample of results from first question across groups) are taken from responses across four groups (a total of 57 students) who started studies between 2011-2015.

The groups were asked:
- Do you have a routine first thing in the morning; tell us about the first ten minutes of your day?
- What do you look at, in what order, why?
- How do you feel about the things you look at?

Table 2: Sample of Results From First Question Across Groups

When my alarm goes off, check my iPhone: Snapchat, Facebook
I don't put on music, I make my bed.
Social media - only Facebook
Emails, then bank account then Facebook. Then get ready for uni
All my social media apps "see what I missed out on"
Snapchat then Whatsapp, Facebook, email then Instagram.
Why that order: "the interest of what I want to read. After looking at Snapchat see if there is anything that I need to respond to"
Check email (quickly) - what I looked at before I went to sleep effects what I look at first
Spanish student: first, coffee. Then if there is anything important while I drink coffee
What is important? "an email from uni or work"
First Instagram then email, then news apps (The Economist on student discount)
I set my alarm half an hour before I need to get up, which is really sad. I usually check twitter to see if there is anything that has happened overnight, like news will be a trending topic, then Instagram and later Facebook, it tends to be less relevant with news
Snapchat, I like to keep up with what celebrities and see what they did
Check my Facebook and Instagram on the bus in the morning. Follow pages that have something new: those I'm interested in and related/suggested pages. If there is nothing on Facebook I go to the BBC site and his "my news".
Get information on what's new to watch from adverts.
I can find events on Facebook and where everyone is going. Facebook will help keep me up to date by showing trailers and small episodes.

Findings

Four themes emerged from the activities of the first ten minutes as described by participants. These were a hierarchy of sources, a relationship between the source and the closeness to the participant, a highly routinised practice of media consumption and a low regard for traditional sources of news.

The Hierarchy

Several of the participants explicitly listed the news sources they engaged with, as having a set order. While it was not an approach all conformed to, it recurred frequently. The hierarchy was an essential prioritization which was made more explicit when there was time pressure in the morning (for example on days when there was a 9am lecture to attend).

The hierarchy tended to place interpersonal messaging such as SMS, Whatsapp and Facebook messenger as the most essential places to seek news in the first minutes of the day. This was followed by Snapchat and Instagram, then Facebook and from the sources of social media, Twitter came last. After these channels were engaged with, if there was time most respondents then looked to more traditional sources: BBC News, The Guardian and in a couple of cases The Economist.

How Close the Source

The hierarchy of sources was explicitly predicated on how close the participant felt to the news they were consuming, in terms of both proximal and effective closeness. The interpersonal messages were explicitly sent to them. This was overnight contact from friends, both at University and also from their home town or country. Email was hardly mentioned in this context. After the messages that were 'to' them, most participants checked sources that were about these same social networks, so Snapchat and Instagram were cited as a place to see what their friends had been up to, with some mentions of the fear of missing out ("to see what my friends were doing last night"). There was a blurring at this stage between those who were explicitly members of the participants known social network and other forms of network related to aspiration and lifestyle. In other words, this scanning of the feeds on Instagram and Snapchat included sources that were celebrities from lifestyle TV (such as The Only Way is Essex) and sport and music. These sources were also scanned to see what other people "were doing last night".

In this context many participants reported looking at their Facebook and Twitter news feeds. These were consulted both for a broader set of interpersonal sources ("other people I know") and for news of current events. The current events might still be quite centred around people, known or followed. But these sources (Facebook and Twitter news feeds) were also where current events of a more mainstream type of news would be consumed.

A Routine for News

Generally it was only after the sources which related directly to the participants were checked, that a more general consumption of news took place. Some of this was mediated by inclusion in social media feeds, especially twitter which was cited by several participants as their main source of news about current affairs. Many respondents would look at the BBC, with a few explaining they had customized news feeds at the BBC, highlighting stories on the basis of pre-selected categories. These sources were not justified in terms of why they were selected rather than others, except in the case of The Economist (which was explicitly mentioned a few times as a source suitable for students of business).

News was often consumed as video clips and these might come both directly from the web sites of providing organizations, but also often through inclusion in social media channels. When consumed on social media, there was a lack of clarity about the source, so generic terms such as 'news video' was used to include sources such as Vice News alongside the BBC and many US news providers.

Social Media Acceleration

Table 3: Social media use in Rosa's acceleration frame, maps these initial findings onto the drivers and categories of Rosa'a concept of social acceleration (Rosa, 2003 and 2013).

Table 3: Social Media Use in Rosa's Acceleration Frame

Acceleration Motor: Category:	Economic	Cultural	Structural
Technological	Product placement Ad revenue	Personalised	Platform capitalism Content competes for attention
Social Change	What's hot & What's not	Filter bubble Trending topics Fake news	Normalisation Social Contagion
Pace of Life	Entrepreneurial self Fear of missing out	Knowing the memes Being in "the conversation"	Need to respond FOMO

Conclusions

In trying to make sense of the application of Rosa's acceleration framework to the students experience of use of social media in the first 10 minutes a day I will make reference to Table 3 (above). The categories provide an easy way of establishing different impacts of acceleration on social media usage, the motors are more complex to apply. At their intersection some sense might be made. For example when considering the technological acceleration of social media usage critically, the economic motor related to the placement of products advertising revenue and the gathering of user information are among the economic drivers for this particular technology. This technological acceleration also has impact in the cultural sphere in relation to the personalisation of content, which enhances the technological provision of content and has a cultural impact. For

example when we consider the emergent phenomena of fake news and the resulting filter bubbles. Finally Rosa's structural motor which relates to the functional differentiation is useful in assessing how social media is driven in late capitalism. We can see a competition between different agents seeking attention and their means of technological intrusion into those first 10 minutes of the day. Whether it is alerts from the University about the start time of lectures, newsfeeds from formal news providers such as the BBC and The Economist or of more personal information from the actor's own social network: all have a structural, coordinating dimension to which the technology is an enabler.

Looking at the category of acceleration related to social change we can see that economic motors of acceleration which relate to social change might for example require students to be aware of "what's hot and what's not". These are the topics that are likely to be under discussion in their day. To have awareness is needed by them, in order to be an effective agent in contemporary capitalism, related to the how rapidly news loses currency. To the cultural perspective of social change concepts such as the filter bubble and fake news we can help make sense of why it is culturally significant for the pace of social change that what is shared on social media becomes the topic of discussion in a particular community or group. Considering the structural accelerating motor of social change we can see that in the globalised multicultural environment in which our students encounter social media there are two countervailing forces. One is of normalisation and the other of social contagion. These act to increase the pace at which an idea or meme becomes something that all members of the group need to know about . This perspective helps us appreciate the deep-rooted structural factors involved in why social change is accelerating.

The third category is the acceleration of the pace of life at the level of the individual agent and their experience. This contraction of their own event horizon and the extension to the realm of the possible, brings more opportunities. It also increases the cost of missed opportunities. An economic motor is the increasing importance of the entrepreneurial self, the need to be always on and ready to respond. This pressing need to demonstrate competence is an important factor in why the graduate needs to be ready to respond to those opportunities of first 10 minutes of the day. We might also consider the psychological concept of the fear of missing out and how that fear may, from an economic perspective drive the need of engaging with personalised social media feeds during the first 10 minutes of the day. Turning to Rosa's cultural motor as the pace of life accelerates the importance of being in "the conversation" the idea of knowing the current memes are deeply important to cultural inclusion, as the pace of life and the range of opportunities accelerates. The risk of being "behind the curve" accelerates and cultural capital is demonstrated by being "on topic". This pressure is structurally compounded by the global nature of contemporary society where communication may come from anywhere on the planet in any time-zone. This structural differentiation imposes the need for synchronisation, for example even in responding to a popular culture events such as the latest episode of Game of Thrones airing in a different time zone would accelerate the pace of life and heighten the fear of missing out or at least of encountering a spoiler.

Transmedia Reimagined

What is the relation between a student commenting on Game of Thrones, and viewing pictures of a party attended by a celebrity they admire? From a transmedia perspective there are a number of features in common. Both are media events that are shared across multiple platforms of distribution

and consumption. The fan response to a global narrative franchise such a Game of Thrones, is of less interest here than the more personal relationship some of the students had with the celebrity narrative. In these imagined closeness we can see the celebrity as a transmedia narrative (Redmond, 2013). That awareness of what happened last night, at a party far far away, may also be a source of social capital, and an enabler of the entrepreneurial self. It is where this intersection may offer a new imagining of transmedia, as the platform of prime importance is the identity of the consumer. Who the student imagines they are and how this might be realised in a professional identity are areas for future research.

This paper has shown ways to reimagine transmedia in the context of social media identity in an accelerated modernity. It is situated in the intersection of three important rapidly changing constructs. The paper shows in some detail how the students use of social media has a hierarchy determined by the proximity or importance. This hierarchy offers insight into how social contagion and the fear of missing out might be part of the phenomena of fake news and the filter bubble.

The paper has made application of Rosa's accelerated society to make sense of the adoption and role of social media, and how social media plays a part in identity in late modernity. This also raises questions about the economic drivers of platform capitalism, and the impact of social media companies which need to harvest attention.

This re-imagining of transmedia has suggested a narrative of identity as negotiated with social media in the boundaries between media properties owned and managed by corporations and media entities imagined through celebrity. The consumers are individuals seeking work and needing a credible presence across social media platforms. Their access to the desired lifestyle of celebrity, and the imagined excitement of what their peers are doing, is a constant pressure. This work is intended to contextualise their experiences, their priorities, and their consumption in the context of an accelerated modernity and in so doing depict a transmedia negotiation of identity.

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Acknowledgements