
HUMAN BEHAVIOUR

WHEN AND WHERE VIRTUAL SOCIETY MEETS PHYSICAL SOCIETY?

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Abstract

The internet has created a copy of our physical world. E- becomes a part of every day life of our local, regional and global society. The World Wide Web (WWW) has been accountable for social virtual interaction as alternative to face to face (F2F) interaction. The connection between physical and virtual society is functional, and loosely coupled. All human activities have moved from physical society to virtual society. New concepts, theories, and paradigms have been emerged as a result of the new virtual comer. Online interaction often supplements offline F2F, and social networks. The question becomes: is the virtual society rooted in the physical society? And does the virtual society meets the physical society?

Keywords: virtual consumer, virtual society, Internet

1. Introduction

The World Wide (WWW) has fostered social change in our real and virtual society. The internet has created a free copy of our world. E- becomes a part of every day life of the local, regional and global society. The WWW has been credited with promoting social virtual interaction as alternative to face to face (F2F) interaction. Virtual society plays critical roles on what is going on real society. Human social activities, behaviours, and social structures and social processes have moved from real world to virtual world. New concepts, theories, and paradigms have been emerged as a result of the new virtual comer. Online interaction often supplements offline F2F interaction and social networks.

In the last decade, we have witnessed a dramatic expansion of online service businesses such as portals, search engines, photo sharing, online commerce and auction, and so on. Freed from geographical and temporal constraints, Online activities supported by these services have given rise to fundamentally new behaviours. The ways in which we access the Web have also diversified, from accessing with the traditional desktop PCs to accessing with

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PDA's, cellular phones, smart phones, and tablet devices. The emerging 'ubiquitous information environment' [1] will entwine the Web into our everyday lives to such an extent that the boundary between our real-world activities and our virtual activities will become blurred [2].

Would physical society meet virtual society? Mark Slouka answered that in his book *War of the Worlds*: "In 1990, a reporter for the New York Times, following the famous case of a man accused of murdering his pregnant wife and then blaming the assault on an unknown black assailant, asked a neighbor of the couple for her thoughts on the tragedy. Do you accept his story? She was asked. Does it seem possible to you, knowing this man, that he made up the whole thing. 'I don't know', the women replied, 'I am dying for the movie to come out so I can see how it ends'." [3] Mark Slouka said "I do not think this woman was joking or being cynical. Or even evasive. I think she simply meant what she said. For her, a TV movie (*virtual*) about the tragedy would tell her- more accurately than her own (*physical*) experiences. Less than a year later, the made-for-television movie 'Good Night, Sweet Wife: A Murder in Boston' presumably did just that." [3]

In the following sections Individual personality, behaviour, interaction and settlement and community are analyzed in terms on physical as well as virtual level.

2. Virtual Personality

Most definitions of personality asserted that personality is a complex, stable, changing, and responsive to situation and static [4]. Personality can be seen as a 'System' which is constituted of 'subsystems' and interactive entity with its environment [5]. Virtual personality emerges from the idea of system, interaction and construct a social network. The interplay between social structure and personality can be generalized to the virtual reality. Personality impressions is not limited to face to face interaction (F2F) and can be formed based on an individual's personal website [6], Facebook [7], email content [8] and even email address [9].

3. Virtual Behaviour

Observing people's behaviour in the real world directly and vicariously as well as Web mining, (i.e., looking in detail at users' click streams in the virtual world), is an useful way to understand human behaviours on the on real world and on virtual world. Example of understanding indicators on the virtual level are: page-views, number of visiting unique users, click-through rate, conversion rate, etc. [10-13]). As can be seen from Figure 1, actions start with intention for information retrieval, then online behaviour starts search and then site visit or views for usage or purchase and finally reaches real world behaviour as a resultant activities.



Figure 1. Action on the Net.

Behaviour settings are small-scale social systems, bounded by time and place, composed of people and physical objects [14]. Time and place boundaries are important for identifying when and where the behaviour setting exists, but people and objects are primary components. People are the most malleable part of the behaviour setting and are essential to its existence [15]. The virtual behavior settings are ‘open all night’ and have 7/24-hour access. Because anyone can access a virtual behaviour setting from anywhere in the world with a computer, theoretically, people can be participating in it at all times. Therefore, it may never ‘close’ or cease to exist. The difference between F2F behaviour settings and virtual behaviour settings in regards to place has to do with the absence of a physical place despite the presence of an emerging virtual ‘place’. Social interaction between participants and their mental maps of the virtual community produce place in virtual behaviour settings.

4. Interaction

Social interaction can be defined as is the process in which people act toward or respond to others. People can interact with the help of the symbolic system such as language and gestures. According to Herbert Blummer people interact with each other and toward things according to the meaning they give them and meaning arises out of social interaction through an internal process of interpretation [16]. On other hand George Homans-Exchange Theory, argues that self interest is the universal motive behind the way people behave toward one another. Exchange Relationships occur when a person acts in a certain way toward another to receive a reward or return [17]. People are looking for meaning and exchange in physical society or in virtual society. Two of the biggest differences between F2F and virtual behaviour settings are how the concepts of time and place are dealt with. Time and place boundaries are fundamental attributes of physical behaviour settings [18].

5. Virtual community

According to Bell and Newby the concept of community “has been the concern of sociologists for more than two hundred years, yet a satisfactory definition of it in sociological terms appears as remote as ever” [19]. Fernback and Thompson argue that “the term virtual community is more indicative of an assemblage of people being ‘virtually’ a community than being a real community in the nostalgic sense” [J. Fernback and B. Thompson, *Virtual*

communities: Abort, retry, failure? online at: <http://www.well.com/user/hlr/texts/VCCivil.html>]. Some definitions of the virtual community stress the connectivity nature of the concept. Moreover, Smith defines virtual community as “a set of on-going many-sided interactions that occur predominantly in and through computers linked via telecommunications networks” [20]. Where Rheingold states that virtual communities emerged from “public discussions with sufficient human feeling to form webs of personal relationships in cyberspace” [21].

Bernard, stated that: “The distribution of people in dispersed social systems is not only spatial but mental. Some people are in a planetary community; some are in a national community; still others are in a community bounded by their limited interests. The bodies of people might be in one spatial area, but not their social worlds. The concept of locale has little meaning in this context. The concept of communality was once proposed to refer to these locale-independent relationships. Now the implications for the community of the independence from locale as shown by these new kinds of relationships are becoming overwhelming.” [22]

Rheingold provides a more emotive definition. According to him “virtual communities are social aggregations that emerge from the Net when enough people carry on those public discussions long enough, with sufficient human feeling, to form webs of personal relationships in cyberspace [21, p. 5] Rheingold argue there is a predictable relationship between technology and people's behaviour.

According to Stone, there were “textual virtual communities” from the mid 1600s, “electronic virtual communities” after the invention of the telegraph and still others based on radio and television. Stone notes that “arguably one of the best examples of a virtual community in the late twentieth century is the Trekkies (Star-Trek Fans), a huge, heterogeneous group partially based on commerce but mostly on a set of ideas” [23].

6. Discussion

A new social paradigm has emerged dealing with a connection between physical and virtual social components such as social structure, virtual personality, virtual interaction, virtual settlement, virtual community, virtual village, virtual city and virtual society. An example of such changes: on May 5th, 1997, the European edition of BusinessWeek led with the cover story ‘Internet Communities: How They're Shaping Electronic Commerce’ [24]. This paradigm deals with new ways of life, culture, interaction, personality and social structure including email-list forums [25], chat-systems such as IRC [26], MUD's and MOOs [27, 28], web-based discussion areas [29] and usenet news-groups [21, 30]

In local as well as in global physical society meets virtual society with no regard to time and place. They are interrelated in locality and expand in global. The more growing separation from reality the more we accept the copy of

reality. With e- in every social structure, personality, roles, and every day activity. We accept abstraction for real things. Even the debate about the relationship between physical space and community is not new. In 1960, Nelson, Ramsey, and Verner wrote “the confusion of space with the community itself is doubtless a result of the strong influence of space upon human relations” [30, p. 25].

It is difficult to be separated by the boundary of the real and the virtual worlds and should rather be understood as a continuous flow of action dynamically running through both worlds. That is, if all the action and behaviours could be tracked and analyzed in great detail, people’s privacy would be completely invaded. Absolute traceability of human behaviour creates not only great analyzability for understanding people’s activities but may also jeopardize their privacy without properly coping with such concerns [2].

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