

The Effects of Online Communities in Our Society

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Introduction

When people go online, they bring with them their morals, language, etiquette, thoughts, stereotypes, taboos, values, and many other factors that make up their culture. In effect, an individual's culture is transformed into a digital framework where they mesh with other digitized people and their culture. This Independent Study is going to look at how technology affects people in our culture by observing how people interact with one another on various online forums.

Where Do We Go From Here?

Digitized individuals can dynamically alter their online persona to create what they want. However, this is not the only case. Sometimes people are limited in how they create their online persona based on the online medium or their offline culture. To understand why someone takes on a different or the same persona online, one must correlate it to their offline persona and their offline culture to get an accurate understanding. Understanding what characteristics of a society, culture, and individual get digitized is a significant step in better understanding the online and offline culture.

1. Technology is incorporated into our daily lives.
How? Facebook and other communities are live 24/7/365 and a user can log on at anytime.

2. Technology allows us to digitize ourselves. This causes the line dividing the online and offline world to be blurred.
How? Sites, such as Facebook, allow us to input any and all of our personal information into a digital profile, including a picture of you. This allows our online self to become a continuation of our offline self.

3. There are different degrees to which one digitizes oneself.
How? One can decide to only go on forums where they just need a username OR one can log on to a forum where they need to add personal information, a photo, etc.

6. Becoming more involved in the online forums causes one to become more integrated with technology, making the person more cybernetic.

Language ideology can be a useful aid in being accepted quicker into an online community. By using the same language ideology as the audience, the user has an easier time expressing intentions, avoiding hostility, and being trusted.

As a user decides how "digitized" they want to be, or are pressured to be by the culture, one can see language ideology at work. Language ideology is utilized in order to communicate intended goals with the rest of the forum, such as what the username says.

5a. A digitized person can then assimilate into the online communities easier.

4a. Personalized Communication
Someone who appears more human online (by showing their offline name online, displaying their real picture online, etc.) is seen as more credible and can communicate with others easier. The line between the two worlds is more blurred.

4b. Less Personalized Communication
By limiting how much one expresses online, the individual stays less connected with the other people, which causes less personal communication. The line dividing the two worlds is more defined. These forums are more like bulletin boards. Comments consist of less personal content such as stating one's opinion about a topic and not talking to anyone specifically while not replying to another individual in the same forum.

The language ideology of the audience is just as important as, if not more than, the speaker's language use. Users not as digitized do not have the same language ideology and may miscommunicate ideas. This can cause the new users to be perceived as strangers.

5b. Less digitized people are not taken as seriously by the online community. This may cause quicker hostility towards their ideas and make it more difficult to be accepted into the community.

Instance 1:
D: It's not your money Obama...how about giving it back to us???

Instance 2:
G: Setting your hopes on the unpredictable weather for renewable energy like wind and solar power isn't the way out of this mess energysidealist. He is going to throw money at temporary construction projects that are just TEMPORARY!

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Instance 1:
[no display picture] J1: This mess with our health care system got started because the government started pocking its nose in it. So of course cost shot up, every time government is involved in something it never goes right.
....

Name one institution in our government that isn't in financial crises, the same will happen in the health care reform crap.

NO RESPONSE TO COMMENT

Instance 2
[no display picture] J1: You think Ted Kennedy had End of Life Counseling, like the crap he wanted to push on the rest of America.
J2: There it is again. The stupid republican reiteration device.
S1: [J1] probably thinks that by posting it everywhere it will make more sense.

Orientation

While online communities are related to an offline culture, they have their own culture independent of the offline one. They have their own coherence, often focused around a shared interest or condition. Within these digital worlds, individuals can take on different personae. My research topic pertains to patterns and behaviors of online individuals on facebook.com and foxnews.com (Wilson and Peterson).

Each forum implies certain assumptions on how and why to participate in each community. When communicating with other individuals, one slowly comprehends the language rules and communication styles, which are a part of the language ideology. Language ideology is defined as "sets of beliefs about language articulated by users as a rationalization or justification of perceived language structure and use." I use this idea to understand the online community where people use a mixture of English, abbreviations, and cultural references to adapt to the digital setting (Woolard and Schieffelin).