

## Pathways of Teen Content Creators through Information Experiences: Exploring Information Practices of Teen Content Creators in Digital Communities

Mary Ann Harlan

School of Library & Information Science

Queensland University of Technology/San José State University Gateway Program

maryann.harlan@gmail.com

### Abstract

We live in an increasingly global community of networked participation. Teens are active members of this community. Over half of American teens have created and shared content online such as blogs, art, websites, videos, and game design (Lenhart & Madden, 2005). Teens learn to participate in the sharing of content primarily in an informal manner, through the use of a variety of information sources and formats.

This research asks ‘how do teens experience information and engage information practices in creating content’ seeking to express the ways in which teen’s experience information and to describe the information practices as they participate in content creation.

The study uses a relational approach to information literacy as a theoretical framework. It takes the position that information literacy is “experiencing different ways of using information to learn” (Bruce, 2008, p. 5), and that information practices are situated within contexts (Lupton, 2008). The context of this research is teens’ experiences in digital participatory communities. A participatory culture has been defined as “a culture with relatively low barriers to artistic expression and civic engagement, strong support for creating and sharing one’s creations, and some type of informal mentorship” (Jenkins, Clinton, Purushotma, Robison, & Weigel, 2006, p.3). While not all participatory cultures are online, this research focuses on online content including blogs, art, videos, music, programming (games), story-telling forums, and web sites. Asking the question how teens experience information and engage in information practices allows the researcher to explore information literacy situated within the context of a digital participatory culture.

This research uses a constructivist theoretical framework of applying grounded theory methods as outlined by Kathy Charmaz in *Constructing Grounded Theory* (2006). Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with teens that participate in diverse forms of content creation including art, video, writing, and programming. Interviews occurred both to gather initial data and to theoretically sample teen content creators after initial analysis. Data were analyzed using the principles of grounded theory: constant comparison of collected

data, a coding focus on process, theoretical saturation, and the practice of constructing a theory grounded in collected data.

This research has preliminary found that participants experience information in a variety of ways that can be categorized as information as community, information as inspiration, information as tools, information as skills, information as artifact. The information practices could be categorized as gathering, thinking, and using information and included serendipitous finding, focused browsing, direct searching, musing, studying, planning, copying, modeling, and composing. Participants entered the process of creating content in different ways and took a variety of pathways through information experiences but the moving parts were generalizable across the small group of participants.

The research contributes to an emerging field of interdisciplinary research that investigates the contributions of teens to the participatory culture of the digital communities and an emerging focus in LIS on information literacy within a variety of social contexts. It may provide practitioners including teachers, librarians, and youth advocates insight into the information practices of teens that will be helpful developing programming and academic learning experiences.

### References

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