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Summary of PhD research

Title: Culture in the Continuum: Youtube, small stories and memory making
Monash University, Caulfield School of IT, Melbourne
Supervisors: Professor Sue McKemmish and Dr. Frank Upward

1. Synopsis (Purpose of research)

The purpose of this research project is to generate theory about how digital technologies and web tools found in user-generated social network Youtube sites, contribute to the creation of personal and community cultural memory.

The study of how Youtube users construct, organise, use and share personal memory will contribute knowledge about the definition and identity of user-generated moving image as records of human mediated interaction. Additionally, theory generated about how Youtube is used as tool for shared community memories will provide valuable knowledge about how the phenomenon of social media contributes to the formation of recorded culture.

2. The Dramatic Problem (Research questions)

These questions will provide insights into the challenge of how social media technologies and personal recordkeeping relate to understandings in Archival Science of the concepts of 'record' and 'form' in relation to social digital technologies.

2.1. Research Question:

How does user-generated moving image found on Youtube contribute to personal memory making and cultural heritage?

2.2. Subsidiary Questions:

- 1) How do Youtube users create, use, capture, organise and share their videos?
- 2) How does Youtube enable memory making for individuals and its community?

3. The Structure (Research Design)

The philosophical framework for this research project is drawn from a desire to understand and interpret meaning as constructed by individuals' interactions with technology. Therefore, this research project is situated in the interpretivist paradigm and undertakes a grounded theory approach to develop theory about culture formation using web tools in online spaces.

A pluralist methodology utilising qualitative methods of data collection, as well as content and discourse analysis, is used to interpret a complex and dynamic social world of multiple realities. The concept of methodological pluralism is taken from the research conducted at the University of Surrey in 2006 and concerns the practice of combining different methods in a project for the purpose of triangulation. (Moran-Ellis et al., 2006 p. 45) The primary aim of using methodological pluralism is to establish meaning using multiple methods and then employ the use of threading to follow a theme or themes across the data sets, "to create a constellation of findings which can be used to generate a multi-faceted picture of the phenomenon." (Moran-Ellis et al., 2006 p. 54)

4. Premise (Significance of the research)

This research project travels a different path to current thinking about digital technologies and preservation strategies in Archival Science. Research into participatory culture from a recordkeeping perspective will provide new understandings about how social media creates cultural forms and provides evidence of culture. Additionally, theory about personal and community memory making as part of participatory culture will reveal and challenge the traditional structures within the current custodial practice of cultural heritage institutions. Investigations on user vernacular will contribute to the development of a conceptual language for defining the record in dynamic online social spaces.

Additionally, this research can be significant to fields which rely on defining concepts of the record and understanding evidence. Conceptualising the language of participatory culture could contribute to legal definitions of born digital material. There are also implications for copyright law by investigating how users understand ownership of digital information, stories and the creative process in online communities. Furthermore, fresh ideas about how storytelling is valued in digital spaces could contribute to the building of innovative cultural communication machines.

Ultimately, this research will contribute theory of a post modern world, revealing the value, spaces, and systems which contribute to multiple and equal points of view. Taken as a whole, my research provides an opportunity to view the creation of the cultural record from a different perspective...the individual creator...you.

"We explore recordkeeping and archiving as a form of witnessing and memory making, a particular way of evidencing and memorialising our individual and collective lives – 'our existence, our activities and experiences, our relationships with others, our identity, our 'place' in the world'."

(McKemmish 1996 p29)

5. The Hero's journey (About the researcher)

Leisa Gibbons completed a Masters in Information Management and Systems at Monash University in 2007. With a background in visual media, Leisa's archival theory specialisation travelled towards moving image and digital technologies and led to starting a PhD at Monash in 2008. This research investigates the complexity of cultural heritage and digital records, with a particular focus on personal records found in social media website, Youtube.

Whilst studying, Leisa has worked as an Archivist at BHP Billiton Archives and as the Records Manager at the Brotherhood of St Laurence in Melbourne. Recently, Leisa decided to undertake her PhD studies full-time and has now set up her own consultancy, Rhizome Digital, which provides information and records services to individuals, small business and not-for-profits. Leisa's specialisations are web2.0, personal recordkeeping, digital records and business records management. Rhizome Digital has been working with the BSL on the Electronic Records project.

McKemmish, S. (1996). Evidence of me. *Archives and Manuscripts*, 45(3), 174-187. Retrieved August 13, 2007, from Informit database.

Moran-Ellis, J., Alexander, V. D., Cronin, A., Dickinson, M., Fielding, J., Slaney, J., et al. (2006). Triangulation and integration: processes, claims and implications. *Qualitative Research*, 6(1), 45-59. Retrieved March 14, 2009, from Sage Journals Online database.