Meaning Across Media

Cross-media Communication and Co-creation

Kjetil Sandvik

Department of Media, Cognition and Communication
Film and Media Studies Section
University of Copenhagen

Introduction

The vast spread of the internet and mobile media over the last two decades has generated great hopes and deep worries – in public debate as well as in research. Following from this, international media and communication research is currently engaged in a longer and deeper process of examining and assessing the cultural consequences of networked communication. Meaning Across Media, which is a three year collective research project funded by the Danish Council for Independent Research headed by Associate Professor Kjetil Sandvik and located at the Department for Media, Cognition and Communication, University of Copenhagen, joins this process, departing from the ongoing transformation of the Danish media environment, and relating local findings and perspectives to changes in communication flows and practices worldwide. Previous research has examined the production and uses of the contents of various media, but mostly in comparative isolation from each other. Meaning Across Media examines the different modes of communication that users engage in as distributors, remixers, as well as producers in their own right, thus proposing the important question: Which communicative roles do the users of new, digital media engage in? Audience and reception studies have traditionally asked not only what media do to users, but also what users do with media: how do people use, interpret, and otherwise engage different types of media. Some users may just employ one of the modes above, some all four of them. Whereas the concept of cross-media communication has most commonly been used to refer to media institutions and their communication strategies, the focus of Meaning Across Media will be on the user perspective proper. An important task in grasping the user perspective today is to consider the diverse modes of engagement and various degrees of participation and co-creation taking place – by individual users and through user networks in which media content is being shared, distributed, commented upon, edited and added to.
Participants and Sub-projects

Project 1: Co-creating smart cities: cross-media communication in the public sector
By Kjetil Sandvik (associate professor, University of Copenhagen)
Smart cities are cities in which digital technology utilizes “networked infrastructure to improve economic and political efficiency and enable social, cultural and urban development” (Hollands 2008). This project focuses on how mobile and networked media, specifically smartphones and social network applications, may be used to augment citizens’ encounters with public institutions (e.g., libraries or museums): how may new media facilitate public communication as composition, collaboration, participation and/or co-creation? While much research on ‘social’ and other ‘new’ media has emphasized their implications for either political participation or commercial strategies, this project will throw new light on cross-media communication as it relates to public participation in classic cultural institution and doing this not just by focusing on the institutional perspectives (Drotner et.al. 2011, Simon 2010) but by exploring the media’s possibilities for creating new augmented experiences for the users.

Project 2: Speaking of the weather: communicating about climate change
By Klaus Bruhn Jensen (professor, University of Copenhagen)
This project conducts a qualitative study of how media users make sense of climate change, as they flow across different platforms and genres, and in their networked interactions with each other. The study addresses the relationship between communication and action: how do various communicative genres and user roles anticipate how people could (or should) act in potentially momentous matters, such as climate change? Communication necessarily ends; what do people do about the weather when they stop talking?

Project 3: Exercising with the smartphone
By Stine Lomborg (associate professor, University of Copenhagen)
This project conducts a study of how social media applications on the smartphone, and the networked communications that such apps facilitate, may serve to support and motivate a healthy, active lifestyle. The relationship between apps and everyday activities: how do particular design, communication and connectivity features of smartphone apps add to the experiences and everyday habits of users? How can app developers and small internet businesses involve their target groups as co-creators of their product by using behavioral log and network data (produced by user participation) to better understand their target groups and possibly simultaneously enhance business value?

Project 4: Gamification in cross-media communication
By Anne Mette Thorhauge (associate professor, University of Copenhagen)
This project conducts a study of ‘gamification’ – the use of computer game designs and techniques – as an aspect of cross-media and networked communication. Can game dynamics help to explain how communication unfolds and how people relate to each other across media and contexts? Gamification represents a particular conception of the dynamics of networked communication, also beyond gaming. Does gamification offer a relevant theoretical framework for understanding and explaining networked communication in social media? And, in practice, might game dynamics motivate behavior change in areas such as physical exercise when integrated into app designs?
Project 5: DR’s Digital Cultural Heritage Project and User Engagement
By Bjarki Valtyssson (associate professor, University of Copenhagen)

DR’s digital cultural heritage project gives access to an archive consisting of material from DR and seven other Danish cultural institutions. The purpose of this research is to conduct a qualitative study on how users interact with this archive, what engages them to participate and what they expect to gain from their participation. DR’s digital archive provides a special opportunity to detect users’ new modes of engagement and participation (Carpentier 2011). Will online engagement foster offline interests and visits to cultural institutions? Will users consume? Will users create? In other words, will they accept a more static version of the cultural heritage, or will they use the affordances provided by digital communication to bring the cultural heritage alive?

Project 6: News production as invitation to co-creation
By Mette Mortensen (associate professor, University of Copenhagen)

This project performs a qualitative study of how DR’s practices of news production across platforms may facilitate user collaboration, participation and co-creation. Media convergence has changed the food chain and flow of information into journalistic genres (Jenkins 2006b; Jensen 2010); it has invited cross-media production and distribution of news (e.g. Couldry et. al. 2007; Fenton 2010; Schröder & Larsen 2010); and it has enhanced user involvement (e.g. Bruns 2008, Deuze 2007). How might the democratic functions of a public service institution such as DR be conceived in the new media landscape? What are the limits to public participation in creating media content? And, how are the boundaries negotiated between professional and non-professional news producers?

Project 7: News consumption as social sharing
By Jakob Linaa Jensen (associate professor, Aarhus University)

This project focuses on the changing patterns of news consumption among Danish citizens, following the addition of social media to the existing circuit of newspapers, radio, TV and websites. News consumption, thus, gains an added social dimension of sharing links and stories among ordinary users. This project examines, first, which media are used to access news, when at home, at work or on the move. Second, it investigates whether and how citizens share links to news stories through social media such as Facebook and Twitter. In terms of the five main modes of user engagement, this project focuses on collaboration (sharing), but also addresses participation and content curating: it may be expected that news sharing can contribute to agenda-setting and, perhaps, ultimately to political participation, formally or informally. Changing patterns of news consumption, thus, hold major implications for the current state and future of democracy.

Project 8: Co-creating democracy? A quantitative study of cross-media news use (PhD project)
By Jacob Ørmen (PhD student, University of Copenhagen)

Based on the quantitative baseline of the project, this study examines, first, whether and how media users participate in the production of classic political news across platforms and, second, how they perceive the opportunities for genuine political influence through news media. Developing a differentiated understanding of ‘production’ – encompassing both actual participation in the generation of news stories (e.g., through citizen journalism) and subsequent interaction with news content (e.g., through comments) – this
study will map the various participatory strategies that news users follow to influence political agendas. Despite the undeniable potential of new media types (e.g., Web 2.0 applications) and new technological platforms (e.g., smartphones) for enhanced public participation in news production (e.g. Bruns 2005; Benkler 2006), it remains an empirical question – with significant social and political implications – whether and how ordinary users in fact utilize these tools to influence public agendas.

Bibliography
Jensen, K.B., & R. Helles (2011) "The Internet as a Cultural Forum: Implications for Research", in: *New Media & Society* 15