

Chapter 2

Asynchronous Text– Based Community: Proposals for the Analysis

Antonella Mascio
University of Bologna, Italy

ABSTRACT

The chapter starts with a short introduction to the complex phenomenon of Virtual Communities as part of media convergence process. The aim of the chapter is the analysis of Text-Based Communities through methodologies of ethnography and socio-semiotics, with specific focus, and analysis, of some virtual groups related to TV-Drama and linked to Fashion genre. The last part of the chapter is about the analysis of these virtual groups.

INTRODUCTION

The Web actually hosts different kind of *communities*, subdivided into several typologies according to type of communications (synchronic or asynchronous), and by the way they present themselves on the screen (that is, in text-only or graphic versions). Through socio-semiotics and online-ethnography it is possible to describe – in a way - how Virtual Communities work. Those two methodologies are used in distinct steps of the analysis: in the former the virtual community is analyzed through the observation (whether

participatory or not, it depends from case to case); in the latter the observed community can be delimited on specific boundaries and studied as a “text.” Through the analysis of a – limited – body of online socialization settings dedicated to the connection between tv series (Gossip Girl) and *fashion discourse*, the chapter will focus on typical features in *fandom*, to highlight topics, value-laden features and dynamics which are offered to media fans of fashion products: *fandom*, therefore, as a practice for the setting-up of “elective” communities, as a space where identity-building elements are engendered, as a possibility of creating specific idiolects.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-4666-0312-7.ch002

1. “VIRTUAL COMMUNITIES”

“Virtual communities” are social aggregations finding their place in specific Internet locations. They were established even before the birth of the Web (the BBS¹ for example) as a spontaneous and anarchical phenomenon. Since the second half of the 1990’s the *communities* have become one of the most studied, analysed and explored elements of the Internet. A vast and heterogeneous literature has in fact developed around the concept of *virtual community*.

Virtual communities are quite varied: group members may *meet* by electronic means in some Internet spaces, or can exchange messages without ever experiencing actual moments of real-time *conversation*. The expression “virtual community” works therefore as a sort of umbrella term (Eco, 1979): its value does not lie in its expressing an unambiguous concept, but in its referring to a vast universe of meanings and values, where mailing lists, forums, e-groups may be found, as well as MUD, MOO and the 3D world of the web, environments describing and representing different inter-subjective relations. The configuration of the “virtual community” has further developed in recent years, thus coinciding with some forms of social network: Facebook, Linked In, Twitter and others also enable the establishment of forms of community, although according to new parameters and configurations. To some extent they may be seen as a clear evolution of communities, as the former share with the latter similar elements such as a shared culture and are characterised by a constantly changing outlook, so that making a correct and definite definition of what they are turns out to be quite difficult. Certainly the web 2.0 is contributing to change the idea of on-line community, thus stretching the boundaries of previous classifications².

On-line social aggregations are mostly characterised by the specificity of their environments where, despite the absence of a physical space,

the *sense of place* is perceived quite strongly and is very present. A place to meet is there, it exists, although with different qualities than concrete environments, and the members of these aggregations perceive and experience it as a space they have in common. Or, at least, as the possibility of sharing a space they have in common. As Meyrowitz wrote, the idea is there that electronic media have substantially changed the meaning of physical presence, which is no longer necessary in some circumstances to experience social events. According to the author, “Electronic media have altered the significance of time and space for social interaction” (1986, p. viii).

The *communities* may be studied as laboratories where dynamics relating to the exchange of meanings, the construction of meaning, and the establishing of a culture may take shape and find their place.

As is often the case – and we will attempt to demonstrate it in the present article - virtual communities may also be linked to medial *source* texts: as for example the communities of fans meeting in the web to discuss their favourite *TV show*.³ Audiences may also extend the pleasure deriving from the experience of watching by looking for further information regarding the series or by trying to enter into a Web community where the show is the focus of exchanges. And text boundaries would be blurred as a consequence.

This is why in studying these items, via the adoption of a socio-semiotic perspective⁴, the notion of *textual network* becomes effective in describing the “network” which is generated around other texts, starting from *discursive formations*⁵. This is a process which is parallel to the process of *convergence*, referring to both the productive work expressed by participating communities, and the use of technologies enabling their existence⁶.

In this article a textualist perspective has been adopted: both TV serials and on line discussions are analysed as texts. Discursive productions developing around the series are observed through

17 more pages are available in the full version of this document, which may be purchased using the "Add to Cart" button on the publisher's webpage:
www.igi-global.com/chapter/asynchronous-text-based-community/66893

Related Content

Seeking Accessible Physiological Metrics to Detect Cybersickness in VR

Takuro Magaki and Michael Vallance (2020). *International Journal of Virtual and Augmented Reality* (pp. 1-18).

www.irma-international.org/article/seeking-accessible-physiological-metrics-to-detect-cybersickness-in-vr/262621

A Review of Augmented Reality in K-12 Education Environments

Adam C. Carreon, Sean J. Smith and Kavita Rao (2020). *International Journal of Virtual and Augmented Reality* (pp. 32-61).

www.irma-international.org/article/a-review-of-augmented-reality-in-k-12-education-environments/283064

Privacy-Preserving Techniques and User Anonymity in the Metaverse

Brij B. Gupta, Chunjia Han and Priyanka Chaurasia (2024). *Metaverse Security Paradigms* (pp. 304-317).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/privacy-preserving-techniques-and-user-anonymity-in-the-metaverse/354655

Politics in Virtual Work

Shawn D. Long, Marla D. Boughton and Rachel Widener (2010). *Communication, Relationships and Practices in Virtual Work* (pp. 193-206).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/politics-virtual-work/44422

Do We Really Care About Artificial Intelligence?: A Review on Social Transformations and Ethical Challenges of AI for the 21st Century

João Guerreiro (2020). *Managerial Challenges and Social Impacts of Virtual and Augmented Reality* (pp. 234-251).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/do-we-really-care-about-artificial-intelligence/248306