Social media, cultural heritage and migrant communities in a globalized world

Laia Colomer*, Nuno Otero[§♯], and Julia Schmidt[§]
[§]Department of Media Technology, Linnaeus University, Sweden
*Department of Social Sciences, Linnaeus University, Sweden
[♯]CIS-IUL, Portugal

laia.colomer@lnu.se
nuno.otero@lnu.se

THIRD CULTURE KIDS (TCKs) AND THEIR USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

The open nature of social media enables the potential of new decentralized and less hierarchical social structures and promotes new dynamics of social and cultural practices. These new technologies can foster the perception among people that they belong to a larger community by virtue of the identity they share online rather than to where they physically lived or culturally belong. In this sense, social media is increasingly playing a key role in enabling *collective identity*, a *sense of community*, and supporting *collective cultural creation* among citizens across the globe.

The potential for online community creativity is relevant for migrant communities to whom social media is actually becoming a distinctive arena of social life. Accordingly, we argue that it serves as sources of community building among people with social and cultural affinities but with restricted possibilities of offline meetings. Considering this framing, we are exploring these circumstances among one of the most globalized migrant community: the Third Cultural Kids (TCKs), a migrant community spread globally who are not culturally defined by their passport, family background, origin and nationality, or their cultural affiliations, but by their multicultural rootless and restlessness regarding personal traditional personal identity issues (Pollock and Reken, 2009; Bell-Villada and Sichel, 2011). As a global nomad community, they take fully advantage of Web 2.0 media, not only to "feel connected to the world" and to "be connected between them", but basically to acknowledge and build their sense of community.

The material posted in social media is thus a source of information on TCK's personal and social self-perceptions, interesting enough to be analyzed by any researcher who wishes to relate their personal and collective experiences into cultural identity issues. Most of these materials are personal narrations/accounts and but by applying qualitative and quantitative analysis techniques we are exploring the possibilities of identifying familiarities, similarities and patterns from which we can create a vivid picture of the on-going construction of this community identity. This initial step seems fundamental to us if one thinks of creating digital tools with features that are in line with the characteristics of this community. More specifically, our current research is framed in accordance with the following research questions:

- How can we help reinforce the sense of identity of this group by fostering ways to build a stronger online community using social media? What particular features should the digital networking tools possess in order to support the creation and maintaining of this community?
- What public spaces are relevant for this particular community and in what ways can these be enhanced with digital technologies to promote communication? Are location-based services a possible technological solution? How can location based services be designed in order to connect TCKs and their meaningful places?

We expect that our understanding of this community identity can extend the notions of meaningful public spaces and consequently cultural heritage.

INITIAL EXPLORATORY INVESTIGATIONS

In order to start exploring the problem space suggested by the research questions referred to above we have conducted two pilot studies. In the first study, a discourse analysis of an unique Twitter chat on "global citizens" was run to explore how cross-cultural and global identities are constructed among a community of TCKs (Colomer & Schmidt 2015). More specifically, we analysed the twitter feed of #TCKchat for two weeks in 2015. TCKchat is organized by BateConsulting and is a biweekly event with questions aiming to start discussions and experience exchange between TCKs. The topic within our two-week span was "Global Citizenship Explored".

Our data collection for the initial study consisted of 832 tweets, generated by 51 contributors. Using discourse analysis we explored the contributors opinion on the term "Global Citizen" and how the community works together to create terms to describe themselves. "Global citizen" does not have a positive meaning to most contributors. From the additional hashtags in the posts we can see that "(global) nomad" and "expat" are often used. However, there was no deeper discussion on the terms which might be due to the limitation of 140 characters per tweet on Twitter. It is important to note though, that terms defined by researchers or experts do not always resonate as well as expected with the groups they are meant to describe.

In the second study, a wider analysis (using text categorization software packages NVivo 11[1] and Semantria[2]) of 24 open Facebook groups dedicated to TCKs was performed to identify what is important for members to share and discuss within the community. The findings show sharing experience, community and identity as the most important topics being addressed within the groups. Words like "moved" and "community" were among the most used in the texts written by TCKs. The main themes (so called nodes) identified by NVivo were Group, TCK, and Community. Semantria identified Identity, Globalization and Passport as the most mentioned categories out of a custom category list. The custom query results show TCK, Terms, and Culture as the main discussed topics, followed by Education, Globalization, and Identity. 225 places and countries from all over the world appear in the texts with France being far in the lead. (Schmidt 2016)

The results suggest that TCKs have a strong interest in building their community identity, sharing their experiences, and discussing the terms used to describe themselves, and that they do use social media in the process of creating community and identity.

CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE WORK

Our preliminary research efforts gave us a glimpse of the main topics and points of discussion that TCKs seem to be engaged with when taking advantage of social media channels.

We aim to understand the relevance of social media in the process of both meaning construction and community building for this community of global migrants. We will do it by further analyzing quantitatively and qualitatively the uses of social media among TCKs and other onward migrants. This analysis will be the starting point for our future explorations concerning the design of digital tools that will support this community. More specifically we will:

- Explore the design space of digital networking tools to help create and maintain a thriving TCKs online community.
- Explore to what extent it is possible to infuse public places with appropriate digital technologies that foster further engagement with this community and between members of the community.

TCKs might help us understand how to create communalities across places and cultures that will foster cultural mutual understanding and multi-cultural practices. In other words, TCKs can teach us something about the value of multiculturalism and how to promote digital technology based activities that support such value.

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[1] NVivo 11 by QSR International (www.qsrinternational.com)
[2] Semantria Excel Plugin by Lexalytics (www.lexalytics.com/semantria/excel)