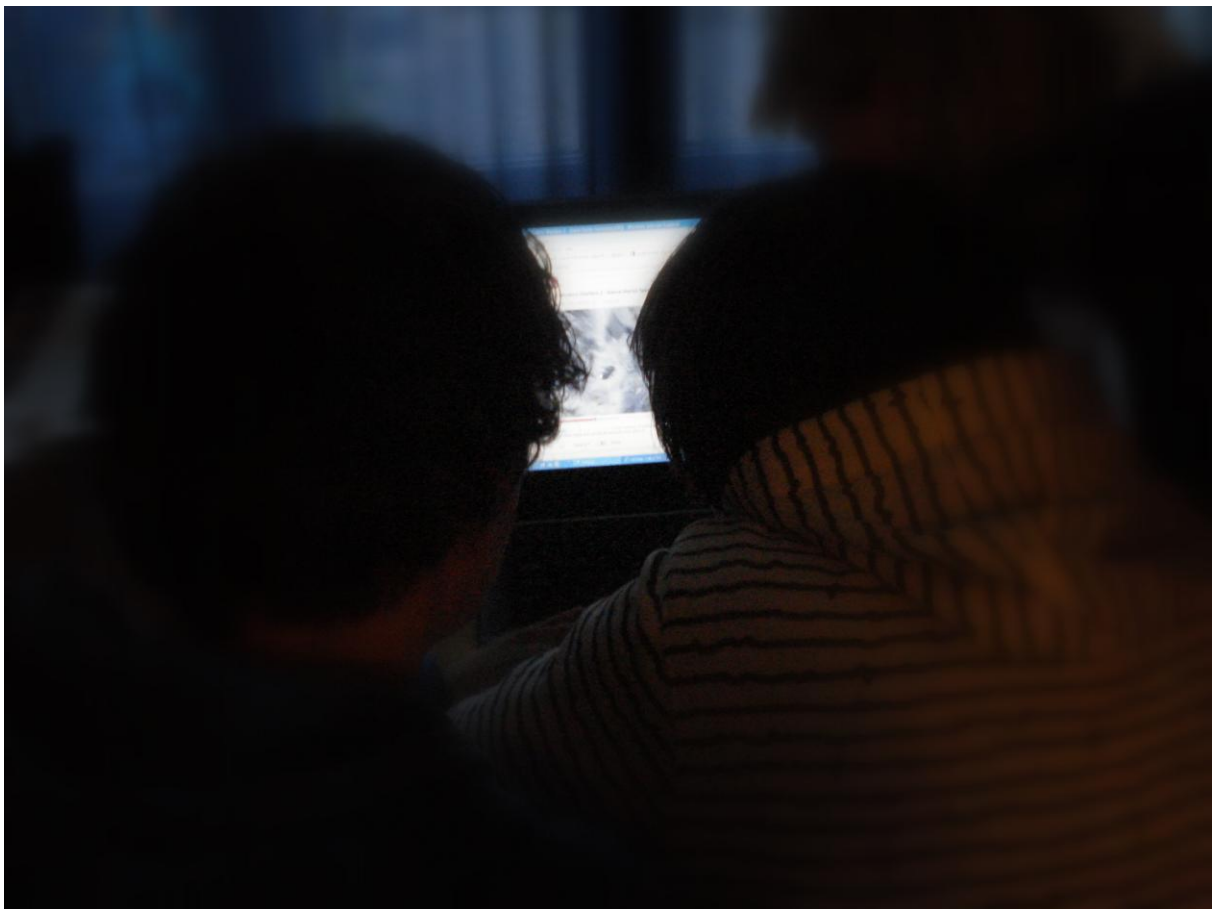


Participating Media Audiences2.1

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Participating Media Audiences2.1

A lecture given on the occasion of the public acceptance of the appointment as extraordinary professor of Communication and Media in the Department of Media and Communication (Faculty of History and Arts, Erasmus University Rotterdam) on Friday 13 November, 2009,

by

Prof. Dr Jeroen Jansz

Dear Rector Magnificus of the Erasmus University,
Dear Executive Board of the Erasmus University,
Dear Dean of the Faculty of History and Arts,
Dear members of the Board of the Foundation Trustfonds Erasmus University,
Dear colleagues, students, family and friends,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Inaugural lectures are typically very ritualized acts of communication (Wyatt, 2008). They usually start with people being asked to turn off their cell phones, but this afternoon I am going to break with this tradition by inviting those of you who are on Twitter to turn them on so that you can share your tweets with me, either during or after my lecture.¹

One of the attractions of studying media is the almost perennial clash of opinions about it and its effects. What's more, the ubiquity of new media has recently been applauded by scholars, journalists, and even a few politicians. Indeed, some are almost euphoric about the impact and possibilities of, for example, social networking via *LinkedIn*, or the instantaneous communication we see on *Twitter*. The sense of celebration is particularly felt on behalf of young users. Contemporary adolescents and young adults are seen as a special breed, possessing qualities in communication and information processing that the over 25 demographic lacks. Of course, they owe these special qualities to growing up in a world saturated with new media. Take, for example, video and computer games. The Americans Beck and Wade argue that playing games moulds us into individuals who think quickly, are not put off by uncertain prospects and dare to try, fail, and try again (Beck & Wade, 2004). And, they claim, the mindset of these gamers is reshaping business forever. Wim Veen, professor of educational technology at the TU Delft, takes a wider view, arguing that the so-called *Homo Zappiens* are experienced multi-taskers, switching almost effortlessly between multiple communication channels (Veen, 2009). They are a cohort of little 'Einsteins', who are smarter, faster, and more open to social exchanges than earlier generations (Boschma & Groen, 2006).

On the one hand, I welcome this euphoria as a counterbalance to the widespread public concerns about the negative effects of gaming and surfing the Internet. These concerns are justified to a great extent, as research has shown that children and adolescents do

¹ See on Twitter.com: @jj58

sometimes take unacceptable risks online, for example when they share too much private information or become victims of cyber-bullying (Livingstone & Haddon, 2009). On the other hand, I fear the consequences of the black and white contrast between utopian and dystopian positions. I believe that I have a serious responsibility as a university professor to communicate views that are based on sensible theorizing and sound empirical research. Such views are balanced, and quite possibly boring, but they are the necessary building blocks for social and scientific debate about the media.

To avoid the risk of boredom today, let me state well in advance:

- I am for: extreme entertainment fare (although I may not like it myself)
- I am against: banning violent games by legal means
- I am against: moral panic exaggerating negative media effects
- I am for: hypes (*e.g.*, Web2.0; Twitter)
- I am for taking user generated content seriously as a source of creativity

The title of my lecture, of course, owes a debt to the Web 2.0 hype. Internet entrepreneur, Tim O'Reilly, came up with the label in 2005 to emphasize the new opportunities for accessing and using the Internet that exist today (O'Reilly, 2005). The version number suggests a new technology, but in fact that is generally not the case. Web 2.0 is instead an update to the World Wide Web in which it is as easy for users to publish their own content as it is to retrieve that created by others. The video sharing site, YouTube, is the paradigmatic example, but Web2.0 also includes social networking sites like Facebook or Hyves. Actually, what Web2.0 is really all about is audience participation. The key role that we Internet users play is elegantly expressed in the December 2006 issue of Time Magazine. Every December, Time publishes a person of the year issue, generally honoring people like Barack Obama, Martin Luther King, or Gorbatsjov. Yet, in 2006, the person of the year was 'You' ("Yes, You! You control the information age. Welcome to your world"). With the benefit of hindsight, at the end of 2009 we can now confirm that the Internet audience did enthusiastically embrace the opportunities provided by Web2.0 platforms. What's more, we did so together: the driving force of Web2.0 is the creation of (virtual) communities, hence the preference for the term 'social web' (Frissen, 2008; Jankowski, 2006). In summary, audience2.0 is characterized by the unprecedented shared activities of Internet users.

Yet this is the right moment to take a step back and reflect on the risks involved in using this software generation terminology of 1.0 and 2.0. The term, Audience2.0, may

suggest that user activity is unique to new media, but this isn't the case: decades of cultural studies' work, as well as research into the uses and gratifications tradition, have shown that media audiences have always been active (Barker, 2006; Hall, 1997; Rubin, 2002). It is quite simply wrong to regard media as a hypodermic needle injecting messages into a passive audience. The media audience is, in fact, engaged in actively decoding the media fare that was encoded at an earlier point in time by media producers. In other words, audiences are actively interpreting media content. This argument is corroborated by psychology, which happens to be my mother discipline. Indeed, research and theorizing in the field of cognitive psychology have shown that human beings are active processors of information, who try to make sense of their world by assigning meaning to whatever stimuli they are confronted with (J. R. Anderson, 2005; Neisser, 1976). This applies as much to our everyday reality as it does to the mediated reality of TV, newspapers and films, and the virtual reality of new media. And it also applies to you, the audience in this auditorium. You are all working hard, trying to make sense of what I am saying; and some of you are even being a little more active by using the new media channel of Twitter.

To help you with your decoding of what I have encoded in the past few weeks, I will share my roadmap with you.

1. New media audiences
2. The active audience: gamers (the players)
3. The creative audience (the creators)
4. Valorization of research: what is it good for?
5. Future projects
6. Words of thanks

1. New media audiences

In science, our task is to reduce the variety and complexity of everyday life. Concepts are used to subsume a diverse set of phenomena under one heading, and this is exactly what I am doing when I talk about 'new media'. This refers to a diversity of instruments for communication and information processing purposes: it includes the computer, of course, and the network of all networks called the Internet. But it also includes videogames and mobile phones. Sometimes, the term multimedia is used as a synonym for new media, and to characterize new media in more detail I will focus on three defining features borrowed from Jan van Dijk's work (2006). The first of these is integration. New media imply a convergence

between telecommunications, mass communication and data communication. The second is digital code. This technical characteristic relates to the zeros and ones, the bits and bytes of the computer technology that enables convergence. The third feature is interactivity. This particular characteristic ties new media to an audience of users, and so I will address it in more detail now.

‘Interactivity’ is concerned with the way in which users relate to media and media content. It is a process of communication between users and media. Particular forms of media, or media content, *push* users to interact, in the same way that a user’s desire for participation functions as a *pull* factor (Cover, 2006). Interactivity implies that user activities are consequential for the media content that users are engaged with, and that users receive feedback about these consequences. This is obviously the case in videogames, where players’ actions largely determine how the game unfolds, and feedback is an integral part of playing. However, interactivity isn’t confined to games. For example, it also occurs when you send your text message supporting your favorite candidate in *Idols*, the *X-factor*, or any other TV talent show. Your vote increases the chances of your candidate making it to the next round, and the candidate’s success or failure in doing so is a form of feedback in itself. This illustrates that interactivity is a leveled concept: it can be minimal as in the case TV talent shows and it can be maximal as in the case of games. Of course, it is wise to make the mental note here that participation differs greatly between audience members; not everybody is that active.

Interactivity also underlines that new media are inconceivable without participating audiences. So, if we want to understand new media developments we must, therefore, include in our analysis both the technological properties of the artifacts and the activities of audiences. The social arrangements of media use is a third aspect that must also be covered if we are to get a complete picture (Lievrouw & Livingstone, 2006). Theoretically, this emphasis on the dialectic between technological and social domains is indebted to the Social Shaping of Technology (SST) perspective in science and technology studies (MacKenzie & Wacjman, 1999). SST warns us media researchers against the pitfalls of technological determinism directing our attention to what audiences actually *do* with new media. So, before I discuss my own research into what particular new media audiences do, I will first address audience activity on a more general plane.

Creators and lurkers

Consider the following anecdote. Last September I started teaching the course *Introduction to Human Communication* in our IBCoM program, which is part of the International Bachelor of Media and Communication degree. I created a dedicated Twitter account inviting students to share their tweets with me during my lectures.² Although about 90 students attended each week, only 3 became followers on Twitter. This surprised me and I thought hard about why this might be. It wasn't an issue of access, as many students brought their laptops, organizers and Internet phones to the lecture. It may have been an issue of age, since Twitter seems to be more popular with those who are over 25 (Sysomos, 2009). Or, it may simply have been too early to throw in this application. This latter hunch is confirmed by the fact that my student Twitter followers increased by 100 percent in October to 6 followers. But actually participating is still a bridge too far for many.

This anecdotal piece of evidence is confirmed by recent research in the United States and the Netherlands. Most users of new media are *lurkers* rather than creators, which means that they are interested in what is published online by others, but generally refrain from publishing content themselves (van Dijck, 2009). These are the figures. About thirty percent of American broadband users could be regarded as content creators because they have shared a product they created themselves, for example, a blog, a story, or a video. Male users were a little more active than females, but the difference was marginal (Horrigan, 2006). Age turned out to be a relevant factor, since 43% of the youngest group, 18 to 29 year olds, were content creators, which was more than in the older groups. But, despite this, the over 65s still contained 18% of creators. The results with respect to teens underlined the importance of age. About 50 percent of American teens were sharing self-created content online, and although their Dutch counterparts were a little less active, they could definitely also be categorized as content creators (Duimel & De Haan, 2007; Lenhart & Madden, 2005). What's more, the massive popularity of social networking sites (*e.g.*, Hyves, Facebook) among female as well as male adolescents, as well as the importance these users attribute to social networking itself (Valkenburg, Schouten, & Peter, 2005), strongly suggests that these are the most important Web2.0 platforms for publishing self created content.

The conclusion about the participation of new media audiences is necessarily tentative, since patterns of use can change as we speak. In summary though, the majority of

² On Twitter: @jdmc09

new media users are not really engaged in creating and sharing content online. To use Prensky's provocative terminology, those who are, are mainly "digital natives" (Prensky, 2001a, 2001b). Yet, audience creativity is not confined to the youngest age group, because the data also reveals that a substantial number of older "digital immigrants" (Prensky) have apparently acquired the necessary skills to create and publish too.

In the next part of this lecture, I will focus on the prototypical example of an active audience, namely the players of videogames. This is an excellent opportunity to provide a brief overview of my past and present game research at the University of Amsterdam and here at Erasmus University. Most of the studies have been concerned with explaining the appeal of games to their audiences.

2. The active audience: gamers (the players)

Audiences of videogames are, by definition, participating, because playing requires a constant exchange of messages between the artifact and its users. When players refrain from communicating, the game simply ceases to exist (Grodal, 2000; Kioussis, 2002). From a theoretical perspective, the link between game features and player experiences is realized by the concept of affordance (Tan & Jansz, 2008). This notion was originally developed by the perception psychologist, J. J. Gibson, in his attempt to systematically connect perception and action to the world in which the actor functions. Affordance refers to the opportunities for action offered by a given environment to an organism (Gibson, 1979). In other words, physical or social features of the environment are automatically perceived as fit for and inviting us to act upon them. As an example, without explicit instruction or even thought, humans approaching a staircase perceive it as "climbable". Conceptualizing game features as affordances allows us to identify their appeal to gamers. Game features are turned into affordances when players have specific abilities that allow them to perceive these features and act upon them (Linderoth, Lindström, & Alexandersson, 2004; Yates & Littleton, 1999). For example, most titles require players to have achieved certain levels of cognitive development; they must, after all, be able to read the on-screen instructions. Specific titles require specific abilities; for example, you need background knowledge of the rules of football when playing a *FIFA* game.

When affordances are realized, a game becomes appealing, resulting in an enjoyable experience for the players. But this is only part of the story about the appeal of games. Playing generally includes setbacks, goals are frustrated and gamers need to invest more time

and effort to reach the next level. We have called this the *paradox of gaming*, and it refers to the remarkable persistence that gamers show, even when they are not sufficiently rewarded (Neys, Jansz, & Tan, under review). In summary, gamers, as our prototypical active new media audience, realize affordances in playing despite the frustrations they inevitably run into.

In retrospect, research in three key areas contributed to a more detailed understanding of the appeal of gaming. The first set of our studies was concerned with the player experience side of affordances. We asked the question: what needs do players aim to satisfy by playing a game? The uses and gratifications' approach provided the theoretical framework (Rubin, 2002). It emphasizes the active role of the media user, arguing that selecting and using the medium is a resolute, goal directed activity that is largely determined by the individual's motivations (Ruggiero, 2000). We used in-depth interviews, as well as large-scale online and offline surveys, to investigate these needs. Let me summarize a few of our results for you. Firstly, the shortlist of motives. Although we investigated games as diverse as, for example, *Counter Strike* and *The Sims*, the results revealed that a just a few reasons could explain the players' dedication across genres, although the intensity of each motive is genre specific: fantasy, diversion, challenge, competition, control, enjoyment and social interaction (Jansz, 2005; Jansz, Avis, & Vosmeer, 2010; Jansz & Martens, 2005; Jansz & Tanis, 2007). That social interaction is a prominent motivation across genres may come as no surprise now, given that many of us are accustomed to the widespread proliferation of online gaming, but a little more than five years ago our results were seen as debunking the stereotype of the *nerd* playing in isolation in his proverbial attic. The social shaping of technology perspective helps us to understand how, when games were taken out of public gaming arcades and introduced into the private domain of the family home, they were re-socialized as an artifact through social arrangements of play after their affordances were individualized by the market (Berker, Hartmann, Punie, & Ward, 2006; Van Zoonen, 2002).

In our research we obtained a counter-intuitive result regarding gender. Let me note briefly that gaming **is** a gendered issue (Vosmeer, 2010). Although the number of female players has increased significantly in the past decade, females still play fewer games and spend less time doing so than their male counterparts (Kafai, Heeter, Denner, & Sun, 2008). The persistent gender differences in gaming could be interpreted as a simple matter of taste: men tend to prefer fishing too, and are noticeably more enthusiastic about model railways than most women. I am convinced, however, that it is necessary to continue the investigation of gender differences, because a better understanding of female game preferences may

contribute to greater insight into the more complex issue of unequal participation in information technology and the subsequent unequal distribution of power (Jansz & Vosmeer, 2009). The results of our research about *The Sims 2* showed that female players were far less driven by social motives (Jansz, Avis & Vosmeer, 2010; Vosmeer, 2010; see also Lucas & Sherry, 2004). This contradicts the general pattern in gender role theory, where it was found that women invest far more into social relationships, including playful ones, than men (Eagly & Wood, 1999). Mirjam Vosmeer (2010) argues that the adult female gamers she interviewed were drawn to *The Sims2* as a way of taking their minds off the usual everyday worries and concerns. Here, we find a parallel with earlier research about female media use in traditional families: mothers enjoyed reading women's magazines because it gave them some leisure time away from family obligations (Hermes, 1995).

In conclusion, it is necessary to compare genres in motivational studies because it also enables us to disentangle common patterns across genres. We now also know that gendered patterns of play interact with social arrangements, in other words the context.

The second point of interest was concerned with the emotions afforded in play. I tried to explain the appeal of games, in particular violent ones, using cognitive emotion theory and research on gender differences in emotion (Fischer, 1993, 2000; Frijda, 1986). I incorporated research results about the so-called *restrictive emotionality* showing that men, in particular adolescents, tend to find it difficult to recognize and express their own emotions, and to cope with intense feelings (Jansz, 2000). Playing a videogame provides a kind of training ground, because games afford the experiencing of a wide range of emotions. The game functions as a safe laboratory where players can choose to confront themselves with negative situations. For example, you can learn how it feels when you miss a penalty in the most important virtual match of the season, or, more extremely, how it feels to take out your virtual enemy with a headshot. And, of course, game features and game play also bring about positive emotions like, for example, joy or surprise. The laboratory is safe for two reasons. Firstly, because the gamers themselves decide which emotional situations they confront and how profound the confrontation will be. Secondly, the laboratory is private, and if there are other people present they will be like-minded individuals. So, there is not much risk of being criticized for executing horrible virtual actions or, even worse, being laughed at by outsiders (Jansz, 2005). Recently, we proposed that the incorporation of interest and enjoyment, as emotions that are omnipresent in gaming, colours all other incidental emotions. They clearly have motivational properties, which in the case of interest extends beyond the actual game experience, since it acts as a motivational disposition in-between separate gaming sessions (Tan & Jansz, 2008).

A third topic area in our research into the appeal of games was specifically concerned with persistence. We conducted a very large-scale survey study among about 8,000 gamers, aimed at achieving a detailed understanding of the motivational structures behind persistence as an aspect of the entertainment experience (Neys et al., under review; Tan, 2008). In our theoretical model we went beyond the motivations for media choice and media use, instead incorporating a psychological theory that has proven its worth in explaining motivations for both work and leisure activities. Self-determination theory (SDT) holds that human behaviour is determined by three basic psychological needs: autonomy, competence and relatedness (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryan, Rigby, & Przybylski, 2006). In the case of games, the persistence to play would be explained by the satisfaction of these basic needs, whereas the frustration of needs would predict the abandonment of playing. We also included the gamers' expertise in our research because we wanted to know if the motivations of aficionados were different to those of less experienced gamers. In order to determine the gamers' expertise, we asked our participants to classify themselves using insider labels that are common in game communities: *casual gamer*, *heavy gamer* and *hardcore gamer*. So, let me share two interesting results with you. Firstly, motivation was a stronger predictor of persistence than expertise. Secondly, competence was the major need fulfilled in gaming, followed by autonomy. Somewhat unexpectedly, relatedness produced lower overall scores, but turned out to be the most important motivation for our hardcore gamers.

In conclusion: videogames are unique artifacts for mediated entertainment because they invite players to take part in a variety of activities. The actual appeal is, first and foremost, dependent on game features affording particular experiences to male and female players, but also depends on the social arrangements of play.

Now that I have positioned gamers as the prototypical example of a participating audience2.0, it is only a small step to go on to discuss that part of the media audience that is even more active: audience2.1.

3. The creative audience (the creators)

The Web2.0 landscape is packed with easy to use platforms and applications, enabling audience members to publish their own texts, photos or videos. I will use *YouTube* as an example today because of its massive popularity. It is beyond the scope of my lecture to

summarize what is published on this online video sharing platform, so let me just note that amateur cat videos are incredibly popular.³

The material published on YouTube is generally categorized as *user created content* (UCC). The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development defines it briefly as “content made publicly available over the Internet, which reflects a certain amount of creative effort, and which is created outside of professional routines and practices” (OECD, 2007, p. 4). It involves creativity, a special kind of “imaginative activity fashioned so as to produce outcomes that are both original and of value” (Loveless, 2002, p.11). In psychology, creativity is generally valued for its contribution to individual well-being (Sternberg, 1999). Economists in capitalist Western countries have been appealing to creativity ever since the Soviets surprisingly launched the Sputnik rocket in 1957. In the United States, for example, the federal ‘Operation Head Start’ targeted at preschoolers in urban poverty areas aimed to develop the children’s intellectual and creative potential (Van Drunen & Jansz, 2004).

Nowadays, “audiences and users of new media are increasingly active – selective, self-directed, producers as well as receivers of texts” (Livingstone, 2004, p. 79). This results in convergence between the traditional role of the media user as a consumer with a new role of the media user as producer. The convergence of consuming and producing media content is a fundamental characteristic of the emerging participatory culture (Jenkins, 2006). The increasing accessibility of new channels for creative expression, and the democratic potential of participatory culture, must be applauded, but it is, at the same time, necessary to approach the growing dependence on new media technologies critically. Take YouTube for example. Its history conforms to the Silicon Valley myth of being launched in the proverbial garage by a bunch of independent innovators. That was June 2005. But when YouTube was acquired by Google in October 2006, it became firmly embedded in corporate business. It may not have impaired the platform function of YouTube, but it is a matter of fact that the less than transparent Google corporation monitors all YouTube traffic. They do this to prevent copyright infringement, but why else?

Today, YouTube-by-Google has achieved mainstream status, resulting in a platform hosting two sets of rather different activities (Burgess & Green, 2009). Luckily, it has safeguarded its platform function for sharing vernacular creativity as for example illustrated by Guillaume Remond’s Human Tetris project⁴, but it has also become a channel for the corporate entertainment industry to use to distribute its commercial products. I should add that

³ See, for example, Funny Cats, 1438201 views: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FZHtbAH-cSM>

⁴ see: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G0LtUX_6lXY

creative users have already tackled this issue to some extent. The website *YouTube Stars* publishes the ‘Non Corporate Top 100’ of YouTube videos. It is similar to YouTube’s most viewed page, but it filters out the content of known corporate parties.⁵

It is far too early to give an analysis of participatory culture that is, in any sense, complete. But independent, academic research can contribute to a critical understanding of the emerging practices of UCC. I will briefly discuss three cases from the research we have conducted recently: game modding, GodTube and Islam on YouTube.

The first case takes us back to the world of videogames. *Game modding* refers to a (re)creation of game content by amateur users who publish their playable creations online for other to enjoy. A *mod* can be anything from player shirts in the football game *FIFA*, cars in the action game *Grand Theft Auto*, to the completely recreated First Person Shooter in *Counter Strike*. Mods are created through hacking, or through altering the programming code of games. The participatory culture of modding enables individual modders to freely create their own content, but they generally need the tools provided by the industry, which limits their creative freedom. The power balance between corporations and modders is also reflected in the prohibition from selling your mod (Humphreys, Fitzgerald, Banks, & Suzor, 2005).

We were among the first to study the modding culture (Jansz & Theodorsen, 2009). We conducted in-depth interviews with 15 modders and published a quantitative online survey ($N = 363$) in order to gain insight into what motivated them to develop and share this very time-consuming kind of UCC. Entertaining oneself and others, and being part of a community, were the most prominent motivations. In contrast to earlier accounts, which analyzed modding as a stepping stone into the game industry (Deuze, Martin, & Allen, 2007; Nieborg & van der Graaf, 2008), the participants in our study were not particularly driven by self-marketing motivations. They were a dedicated group of enthusiasts of a particular game who liked to share their mods in order to sustain their community.

Our second case of UCC was concerned with online religion (Jansz & Revis, 2009). From the earliest Internet days onwards, religion has been a very popular topic online, probably because these practices could develop outside and beyond traditional religious institutions and official denominations. We studied the American website GodTube.com. Much like YouTube, it allows for the uploading of videos and comments online, the only difference being the Christian focus. We used a content analysis to investigate *what* users of GodTube were uploading, and an online survey to study why they were active on the website.

⁵ The Non Corporate Top 100 can be found at: <http://www.bkserv.net/YTS/YTMostViewed.aspx>

The results revealed that most GodTubers were not really very active at all: they confined themselves to watching the material posted by others. About one fifth of the respondents belonged to the audience^{2.1} category because they were actively engaged in posting their own videos. A slightly smaller group used another UCC option on this platform by uploading their personal prayers to the Prayer Wall.

The results for the ‘why question’ showed that GodTube users were clearly socially motivated. Additionally, they explained that they used GodTube to convey their faith. Uploading user created content was motivated by sharing personal religious experiences. Entertainment particularly encouraged a more passive consumption of what was offered on the site: many GodTube users visited to fulfill their need for decent entertainment with a Christian signature. This result underlined that the users were well aware of the nature of this type of media channel: like YouTube, GodTube's popularity depends heavily on the rich range of videos it offers.

The third case is concerned with the ways in which Islam is represented on YouTube (Mosemghvdlishvili & Jansz, 2010). In the fall of 2009, an average of 4,900 videos tagged with the word “Islam” were uploaded weekly, making it a salient and widely discussed topic. We studied the framing and visualization of Islam by analyzing 120 YouTube videos. Theoretically, the content analysis was guided by the concept of valence framing in order to identify positive and negative patterns (De Vreese & Boomgaarden, 2003). Using in-depth interviews, we also investigated the motivations of YouTubers for producing and sharing videos about this religion. The results revealed the presence of valence frames in almost all of the videos. With a very small margin, negative videos prevailed over positives one, but in general the tone of the ‘coverage’ was balanced, despite the fact that Islam videos on YouTube were often rather emotional, explicit and controversial. Indeed, YouTube often had footage that would be considered ‘inappropriate’ to broadcast by the mainstream media.

So far as the motivations of YouTubers were concerned, a social motivation was as prominent in this study as in our previous ones: Muslim and Non-Muslim YouTubers alike were driven by a need for social recognition. The need to express oneself drove the activities of Non-Muslim YouTubers. The third motive which was raised in the interviews, however, was quite different to the ones we had found in our earlier research. The Muslim YouTubers in our sample were particularly driven by a need to communicate Islam. The motivation is, accordingly, tied up with the context of YouTube. Since Muslim sources are under-represented in the Western mainstream media (Richardson, 2006), YouTube offers the

religion's followers a revitalized public sphere within which to present their own perspectives and interpretations of events.

To conclude, these three cases of Web2.0 applications show the development of social networks of users. Each user has the option to switch constantly between being a creator or a spectator, although most assumed the latter role. In the process, these creators/spectators construct an audience for each other, thus exemplifying the many-to-many characteristic of the Internet (Livingstone, 2004).

4. The valorization of new media research: what is it good for?

I believe it is important to reflect critically on the value of one's own research outside of the academic community. You may have sensed already that I am conscious of the importance of conducting research with which to inform public debate. Therefore, I am happy to see a steady increase in the amount of research on videogames in the Netherlands. Some colleagues published detailed analyses of the nature of play (*e.g.*, Copier, 2007; Nieborgh, 2009; Raessens, 2006; Sihvonen, 2009) others have been documenting game players' experiences (*e.g.*, Goldstein, 2005; IJsselsteijn et al., 2006; Konijn, Nije Bijvank, & Bushman, 2007; Lemmens, Valkenburg, & Peter, 2009). The results, our results, are sometimes contradictory, and we do not always agree on theoretical issues. Nevertheless, the studies carried out and the theories developed take the debate about gaming well beyond the simple pro and contra-games positions. My own conclusion from the available body of international research is that the unique entertainment experience afforded by games also carries risks when they are played by children below the age level for which the game was classified. Accordingly, it is very important to inform the public about what they can expect from a game and the harm it can potentially cause. PEGI, the Pan European Game Information system, provides the public with a systematic classification of age and game content.⁶

In our own research among parents and children aged between 8 and 18 years old, we found that both groups wanted to be informed about age classifications and content descriptors. Some children interpreted high age ratings as an indication of very attractive 'forbidden fruits', but this number was very small (Nikken, Jansz, & Schouwstra, 2007). Our studies also revealed that PEGI information is combined with different parental strategies to

⁶ see <http://www.pegi.info/en/>

regulate children's gaming. One strategy was evaluative. It amounted to arguing with children about why they were attracted to the games in the first place. Another was applied by a minority of parents and resulted in them joining the children in playing. The results indicated that the third, most straightforward, strategy was the most effective: namely establishing explicit rules about when and how long the children were permitted to play (Nikken & Jansz, 2006).

Another way to valorize game research is to study how games may function outside of the entertainment realm, for example in politics and education. Our study about political games on the Internet, for example, established that these simple games, which address complex political issues, functioned as a social facilitator. Playing inspired users to search for information about an issue and discuss it with friends (Neys & Jansz, in press). In the field of education, we are currently working on a project for *Kennisnet* which aims to inform teachers in primary and secondary schools about what scientific research tells us about the positive and negative effects of playing videogames. Our systematic discussion of what previous research has to offer aims to inform the ongoing debate about successes and failures of using games in class to teach knowledge and skills (Van Rooij, Jansz, & Schoenmakers, in press).

The valorization of my research about user created content is a little more abstract. In general, I embrace the OECD's argument that the creative potential of UCC contributes to innovation. Knowing in detail why people want, or like, to create something and share their creations online can be put into practice when developing dedicated online platforms for sharing particularly creative and innovative products. The importance of the social and entertainment motivations we found with respect to UCC points to there being a new opportunity for closing the participation gap. After more than a decade of effort by the Girl Game Movement and feminist researchers to encourage the use of videogames as a technology pipeline with which to enhance girls' interest in ICT, we now know that games are not the appropriate instrument to realize this goal. The enthusiasm of girls for creating a personal profile on a social network site, as well as the creative engagement of some with online virtual worlds like *Habbo*, *Go SuperModel* or *WhyVille*, opens up other possibilities for entertainment education 2.0 (Jansz & Vosmeer, 2009; Kafai, 2008; Slot, 2009; Van Reijmersdal, Jansz, Peters, & Van Noort, in press), namely using the affordances of online social entertainment media to enhance a positive attitude towards information technology in young girls.

5. Future projects

Two research projects are planned in the next couple of years. The first relates to the cultural classification of videogames, and is far more concerned with the content of games than my previous research has been. The project acknowledges the importance of videogames as creative products in contemporary popular culture. Today, they comprise a mature field of creative expression, incorporating the creative accomplishments of almost four decades of game design. The project investigates the quality criteria applied to games by three major groups of actors in game culture: game producers, players and critics. Theoretically and methodologically, the project builds on recent research into the cultural classification of the hierarchical evaluation of games as a process of what Pierre Bourdieu has called (retrospective) *consecration* (Bourdieu, 1984). This means that a few cultural products are classified as masterpieces, in contrast to large numbers of similar items that are deemed to be of a lesser quality. The data in this project cover a wide spectrum, from surveys and focus group interviews with producers, players and critics, to the contents of a huge set of online resources such as Top 10s and bestseller listings, as well as evaluative discussions on game sites. The inclusion of cultural consumers, *i.e.* players is rather unique, and is intended to enrich the understanding of consecration which, in the past, was focused on cultural elites. As the cultural field of games is very young, and quality standards are very much in the development stage, the project takes a comparative perspective. We focus on the intermediality of games and films in popular culture by comparing the consecration of the former with the more established consecration of the latter. The project continues the collaboration between Ed Tan (ASCoR, University of Amsterdam) and myself, and incorporates the contributions of my Erasmus colleagues, in particular Susanne Janssen, whose VICI project is a milestone in international research about cultural classification (Janssen, Kuipers, & Verboord, 2008; Janssen & Peterson, 2005).

Creativity on the Internet

The second project I am working on aims to contribute to a detailed and better understanding of Web2.0 applications as communicative tools and the people who use them. Our core question is: what motivates Internet users to make the effort to produce and publish self-created content online. Answering it requires us to investigate what is uploaded, who does it and why. The project obviously includes YouTube because of its popularity, but non-

commercial platforms such as, for example, Dropstuff.nl, will also be investigated. With respect to the users, we will concentrate on age and gender, since earlier research revealed that the appropriation of computer technology is age and gender sensitive. The YouTube star *Geriatric1927* (a.k.a. Peter Oakley) inspired me to compare young digital natives with the over 60s.⁷ In the past, this latter group was observed as being on the wrong side of the digital divide, but an increasing number of the present 60+ generation have become “digital immigrants” (Prensky, 2001a) who have acquired computer skills during working lives. Now that their time in the workplace has come to an end, a substantial number of pensioners are spending their leisure time publishing self-created content on the Internet. With respect to gender, the digital divide in access may have been bridged, at least in most Western countries, but the participation gap still is very much gendered (Jenkins, Clinton, Purushotma, Robison, & Weigel, 2006). We will investigate to what extent UCC functions as a “technology of gender” (De Lauretis, 1987), that is, how does the production of creative content contribute to the everyday performance of gender, or – in other words – how does UCC enable the ‘doing’ of masculinity and femininity?

The users/producers will be compared to users/spectators. The latter group are users who participate on UCC websites and enjoy what is offered, but do not upload their own (creative) content. The possible contrast between creators and spectators will be further investigated by questioning the spectators about what motivated them to remain relatively passive. Finally, this project is also concerned with the social and cultural consequences of user participation^{2.1}. Previous research has shown how popular culture, in particular the entertainment media, can be as constitutive of cultural citizenship as the domain of formal politics (Hermes, 2005; Van Zoonen, 2004). We aim to answer the question of the extent to which the applauded mass collaboration on Web2.0 enhances cultural citizenship through the development of real or imagined communities (B. Anderson, 1997) which are meaningful to their members.

6. Word of thanks

Ladies and gentlemen, we are making good progress towards the end of this talk, and I can see the drinks on the horizon. This is, therefore, the appropriate moment to express my gratitude, firstly to all of for being my participating audience this afternoon: you traveled to

⁷ see http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p_YMigZmUuk

Rotterdam, made the effort to organize your work and private lives so that you could be here, and you were kind enough to assume the role of audience in this auditorium. In the last couple of months, individual friends and family members have had very different roles. Some of you had to sit through my earlier ramblings about new media over a beer or a glass of wine, while others had no idea at all of what I was working on because I sometimes simply wanted to get away from it all. Whatever your role was, I want to thank you for being there and sharing your time with me.

A formal word of thanks is due to the University's board for appointing me to this position. I really appreciate the efforts of Dick Douwes, the Dean of the Faculty, in creating this special professorship for me. The Erasmus Trustfonds is also thanked for making this possible.

My career in media and communication research has not been particularly long. Ten years ago I took the giant leap from my mother discipline, psychology, to that of Communication Science at the University of Amsterdam. Game research was, by that time, rather controversial in both the Dutch and the international academic communities. I was very fortunate to be supported by my subsequent scientific directors, Valkenburg, Neijens and De Vreese. Patti, Peter and Claes, thank you very much for your personal and financial support. Earlier this year, I took the step of leaving Amsterdam and moving to the Erasmus University Department of Media and Communication, where I was warmly welcomed. Despite the diversity of their mother disciplines, their mother tongues and their nationalities, my Erasmus colleagues share one important characteristic. They are critical. Very critical, sometimes.

My dear students on IBCoM, the International Bachelor Communication and Media, the international MA in Media, Culture and Society, and the Dutch MA Media en Journalistiek, thank you for choosing our BA or MA program. It really is a privilege to teach young aspiring individuals from about 30 different countries around the globe including, of course, the Netherlands. Putting inter-cultural communication into practice on a day to day basis has not been the easiest task in my academic career, but you have really made it worth the effort.

There are many researchers and lecturers in both this country and abroad that I would like to thank and I will do so during drinks in a couple of minutes. My co-authored books and articles in psychology and the co-authored research articles and chapters I have mentioned in the past 40 minutes are witness to the fact that I enjoy the act of collaboration. To my co-authors, thank you for sharing your knowledge and ideas. Three and a half of them must be acknowledged separately. Liesbet van Zoonen is the first. She was the founder and caring

mother of the Centre for Popular Culture, and although I succeeded her as Director, I never made it to fatherhood status. Nevertheless, our relationship was productive. Liesbet's unbridled enthusiasm was always persuasive, and so we ended up writing grant application after grant application. Fortunately enough, the research we proposed was supported a couple of times too. Ed Tan is the second colleague I want to put the spotlight on. Ed, I confess that your decoding of my drafts was confronting at times. But reading our joint grant proposals and publications immediately shows how much our work profited from your knowledge and critical reading. Susanne Janssen is the next on my list. To mention Susanne as third in line is somewhat misleading, because she is actually in a very special position. Susanne is personally responsible for me standing here. Susanne initiated and developed IBCoM, and then hired me as her colleague. Over the past couple of months we have had to spend unforeseen amounts of extra time on managerial issues. I admire the good spirit in which you tackled the thorny problems we faced, and I have tried to copy your style as much as possible. I have experienced the fact that you are a real 'Rotterdammer' in the time-efficient way you make decisions. I am very glad that our collaboration also included scientific substance. My most recent grant application really profited from your enthusiasm about linking our fields of interest.

Now we turn to position 3 ½, which is occupied by Agneta Fischer. As a professor of emotion psychology she is a colleague with a tremendous influence on my thinking. That accounts for 50 percent. The other half will be addressed shortly, but not until after I have thanked Aly Fischer. You are my mother-in-law and I am so grateful that you are here today. Thank you very much for unconditionally supporting me for decades. There is, of course, 50 percent of thanks left for Agneta. Agneta, we go back a very long time. Being with you has never been boring and is often quite exciting. Thank you, darling, for being the love of my life as well as the mother of our sons, Sandro and Luca. Actually, my complete loving family must be thanked for creating and sustaining a very interesting laboratory at home. We have emotion expertise in the mix and two dedicated, if not addicted, gamers. Luca and Sandro, my gratitude to you is difficult to express in words (I am a man, after all), but I am really grateful that you play on when I did not make it past the first level.

Ik heb gezegd.

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