

The impact of media change on understanding content

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ABSTRACT

Through contemporary matters of personal data protection, this paper deals with issues regarding the role of different media in transferring certain content. In order to indicate the differences in directness during content transfer between different media, a transfer from digital into print media has been made through the project Stalker which deals with the issue of personal data protection on social networks. Through a combination of a social experiment and design intervention, the aim of the project was to collect the project participants' personal data in secret (a sample of 25 individuals), which are available to every user of the Facebook social networking website and then reproduce them on leaflets, distributing and placing them in public spaces. The leaflet design mimics the cheapest form of an advertising circular precisely to demonstrate how much people are prone to easily give their personal data.

Keywords: Stalker, Facebook, leaflet, personal dat

Introduction

Is the message content more important than the channel, i.e. the media through which a message is transferred between the sender and consumer of the same message? Each new period in the history of human civilisation occurs with the appearance of new technology that significantly affects human life, and thereby, elevates the species of Homo sapiens one step further from all other beings residing on the planet Earth. The last in a series of such periods is precisely the modern era, the age of the technological revolution leading to the appearance of the World Wide Web. It is exactly the phenomenon that enabled a single individual of the human species to, in a matter of seconds, discover that which a human in a previous historical period needed countless time. All of it lead to the fact that the planet Earth became a global village where information flows at a remarkable speed. However, just like in any village, a massive information flow can lead to its abuse and repurposing which ultimately, in most cases, means somebody's personal gain. It is precisely why this paper deals with the matter of personal data protection and raising the awareness of social network users through the transfer of their personal data from digital into print media.

The importance of media as a value-added content

Back in 1964, the thesis "The medium is the message" was delivered in the book Understanding Media by a famous Canadian theorist of the media philosophy Marshall McLuhan, and contemplating it further while taking into account other McLuhan's theses on media, we will easily understand that he dares to say that which many before him have not had the courage to do which is that the role of media is equally important as its content. Through it, he does not undermine the importance of content, but also emphasises the significance pertaining to the power of its effect created within a media.

Taking this thesis as a starting point of an idea on transferring personal data from digital into print media, the goal was to find a corresponding print medium which would, without any subterfuge, show the matter in its most ruthless form with a

dose of provocation towards the target group. While contemplating on the matter, a conclusion was put forward stating that the leaflet is the cheapest form of advertising and a medium which directly and with a clear intention communicates with the consumer.

The Stalker project

As already noted numerous times by the scientific and social community, the system of learning and perceiving certain facts is best if an individual experiences something at first hand. Namely, the Stalker project was conducted as a combination of a social experiment and design intervention within the process of transforming information from a digital into printed form with the goal of directly confronting the individual with the matter of protecting their privacy, and also in order to prove that in modern media, more precisely social networks, as a main communication channel of the present, noises preventing the total agency of an individual's awareness are widely represented, leading them to make some ill-considered moves such as sharing personal data with everyone having access to social networks. In order to raise awareness in people and directly confront them with the issue of personal data protection, a transfer was made from a digital into analogue medium which they used to share personal data with complete strangers. Instead of social networks, printed leaflets were used as a conventional way of sharing and familiarising complete strangers with certain information. It is precisely this transfer that was meant to indicate how print media is, in certain segments, more direct in relation to the end consumer, and how that communication contains a lot less noise in relation to communication between digital media and those who consume such content. The Stalker project was implemented in four stages:

1. gathering available personal data of individuals (a sample of 25 individuals) who have a user profile on the Facebook social networking website
2. transferring the data into a corresponding printed form, i.e. a leaflet
3. distributing leaflets in public spaces
4. confronting individuals whose personal data were used with the entire project

The first two stages of the project were conducted in complete secrecy, i.e. individuals whose personal data were used did not have any knowledge related to this project.

The development of technology and its easy access for almost any individual has led to the development of a virtual world and social life within it. Humans are gradually, depending on their area of interest, grouped on certain social networks through which they also build a social life in a virtual world. In this vast virtual expanse, one social network stands out, becoming the carrier of a virtual social life for almost every human being with access to the Internet. It is certainly Facebook, the alpha network that holds primacy in communication within the virtual world. That is why Facebook was used for the purpose of collecting personal data. Personal data and photographs of individuals who have a Facebook user profile were collected in the way that the project author created a completely new user profile, under a false identity, avoiding any interaction with other users, with the goal to bypass algorithms through which this social network connects users. In this way, it was sought to, as realistically as possible, simulate a situation in which complete strangers can access personal data of individuals whose user profiles were used to collect the data.

"You own the information you share on Facebook. This means you decide what you share and who you share it with on Facebook, and you can change your mind. That's why we give you tools for deleting anything you've posted. We remove it from your timeline and from our servers. You can also delete your account whenever you want."¹

Since this project included 25 individuals with Facebook user profiles and the amount of data the people shared about themselves varied, it required the creation of a structure when designing the appearance of the leaflets so they would be additionally uniform and send a clear message. The leaflet structure was divided into three parts where the first part was designated for the Facebook username (in most cases, it was the real name and surname of the individual who has a user profile) which was emphasised so as to resemble a logo of a company, usually placed at the top of the advertising circular.

The second part of the leaflet was made out of data available under the option "About" on the user profiles. The last third of the leaflet was occupied by photographs which were also public on the individuals' user profiles. The first two items were centre-aligned, while the third occupied the whole

¹ Taken from Facebook's Privacy Principles, source: <https://www.facebook.com/about/basics/privacy-principles>, accessed 23rd December 2018

leaflet width. In order to enhance the impression of a low-budget design, a standard coloured paper in the size A5 according to DIN standard was used. Moreover, for the textual part, the font Times New Roman was used, which, owing to its everyday usage has become an obsolete trick from a design point of view. Upon completion of the data transfer from a

digital into printed form, the leaflets were distributed in public spaces and placed on public displays which was documented by a camera so as to finally confront the people, whose personal data were used, with the entire project.



Image 1: The Stalker project

The Stalker project was concluded in such a way that the individuals whose personal data were directly used through leaflets and photographs indicating ease of access to their data were faced with the consequences of publically sharing

personal data through social networks. For most participants, the project caused abhorrence, while a lot of them regained awareness and started paying attention to personal data protection in the digital world.

Conclusion

Looking back, we will see that the media is the one that drove human kind forward in every way. Contemporary society could not be perceived without media, especially the digital ones, but sometimes it is necessary to stop, look around and even step back to progress even further. The best indicator for this is the Stalker project where the step back was made when it comes to media, from digital into print, all with the goal of raising awareness on the shortcomings of certain parts belonging to digital

media and in order to improve them. Moreover, through this paper, we have successfully proved McLuhan's thesis that the medium by its nature affects the message content since the change in media created a difference in understanding the seriousness of content being transmitted, causing shock and discomfort for the project participants. New media lie before us, but we cannot forget their predecessors since it is precisely those media that can show us the right way to strive for.

References

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Uticaj promjene medija na shvaćanje sadržaja

SAŽETAK

Kroz suvremenu problematiku zaštite osobnih podataka rad se bavi pitanjima o ulozi različitih medija u prijenosu određenog sadržaja. Kako bi se ukazalo na razlike u direktnosti prilikom prijenosa sadržaja između različitih medija izveden je transfer iz digitalnog medija u tiskani kroz projekt Stalker koji se bavi problemom zaštite osobnih podataka na društvenim mrežama. Kroz kombinaciju društvenog eksperimenta i dizajnerske intervencije cilj projekta je bio u tajnosti prikupiti osobne podatke sudionika u projektu (uzorak od 25 ljudi), dostupne svakom korisniku društvene mreže Facebook, te ih zatim reproducirati na letcima koji su potom podijeljeni i zalijepljeni na javnim mjestima. Dizajn letaka oponaša najjeftiniju formu reklamnog letka upravo kako bi se prikazalo koliko su ljudi skloni olako ustupiti svoje osobne podatke.

Ključne riječi: Stalker, Facebook, letak, osobni podaci

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