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Literacy in a Social Media Culture: An Ethnographic Study of Literary Communication Practices.

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Joachim Vlieghe,

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"I'm quite illiterate, but I read a lot."

Jerome D. Salinger, *The Catcher in the Rye*, p. 18

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	I
TABLE OF CONTENTS	V
GENERAL INTRODUCTION	1
NEW LITERACIES STUDIES: STUDYING LITERACY DIFFERENTLY	4
<i>Ethnography and social linguistics</i>	4
<i>Literacy and new media.....</i>	4
<i>Participation through media and discourse.....</i>	5
<i>Digital media as affinity spaces</i>	5
<i>Literacy events and practices.....</i>	6
UNDERSTANDING LITERACIES: STUDYING MEDIA, DISCOURSES AND TRANSFORMATIONS OF CULTURE AND SOCIETY	7
<i>Literature and the shift from oral to written culture</i>	7
<i>Media plurality and the shift to multiliteracies</i>	8
<i>Social media and the shift to participatory culture</i>	9
PRESENTING THE RESEARCH: STUDYING LITERARY COMMUNICATION PRACTICES IN A SOCIAL MEDIA CULTURE	11
<i>Questions.....</i>	11
<i>Scope</i>	11
<i>Method</i>	12
<i>Structure and overview.....</i>	12
CHAPTER 1: A DEVELOPER'S PERSPECTIVE ON LITERARY COMMUNICATION IN SOCIAL MEDIA ENVIRONMENTS. 15	
ABSTRACT	16
INTRODUCTION	17
METHOD	18
<i>Rhetorical analysis of discourse.....</i>	18
<i>Identifying the field and collecting the data.....</i>	19
FINDINGS.....	24
<i>Social media as democratic social spaces.....</i>	24
<i>The "social spaces" metaphor as an overarching theme.....</i>	25
Scene-agent: identifying and obscuring roles.....	25
Scene-agency: providing space for confrontation and collaboration	29
Scene-act-purpose: showing and developing taste	30
<i>Representation of roles and action dimension</i>	32
The presence of recipients, producers and mediators	32
The apparent absence of post-processors.....	35
DISCUSSION	37
<i>Summary.....</i>	37
<i>Conclusions</i>	37
CHAPTER 2: LITERARY RECEPTION IN SOCIAL MEDIA ENVIRONMENTS.....	39
ABSTRACT.....	40

INTRODUCTION	41
METHOD	43
<i>Identifying the field</i>	43
<i>Selecting the informants</i>	44
<i>Collecting the data</i>	46
Phase 1 – Observing activities in the field	46
Phase 2 – Interviewing informants	47
<i>Data analysis</i>	47
Phase 1 –Content analysis of the observation data.....	47
Phase 2 – Thematic analysis of the interview data.....	48
FINDINGS.....	49
<i>Phase 1 – Literary communication practices</i>	49
Types	49
Frequencies	49
On the website	50
In the Facebook group	50
Comparing both environments: frequencies and design	51
<i>Phase 2 - Experiences and reflections</i>	59
A place to share reading experiences.....	59
A place to meet enthusiasts	61
A place to create identity	63
A place to acknowledge and encourage participation.....	65
DISCUSSION	69
<i>Summary</i>	69
<i>Conclusions</i>	69
CHAPTER 3: LITERARY PRODUCTION IN SOCIAL MEDIA ENVIRONMENTS	71
ABSTRACT.....	72
INTRODUCTION	73
METHOD	75
<i>Identifying the field</i>	75
<i>Selecting the participants</i>	75
<i>Collecting the data</i>	76
<i>Analyzing the data</i>	79
FINDINGS.....	80
<i>Author or Artist: Finding the right label</i>	80
<i>Tweeting as literary production: a comparison between print and social media</i>	85
Retrieving the practice of fragmented writing	85
Obsolescing opportunities for curating literary narratives.....	91
Reversing literary communication from solitary writing practice to responsive performance	95
Enhancing playful experimenting with literary communication practices	102
DISCUSSION	108
<i>Summary</i>	108
<i>Conclusions</i>	108
CHAPTER 4: LITERARY MEDIATION IN SOCIAL MEDIA ENVIRONMENTS	111
ABSTRACT.....	112
INTRODUCTION	113

<i>Digital media and literacy practices</i>	114
<i>Social media, conduction and communication</i>	114
<i>Passion, conflict and literacy education</i>	115
METHOD	117
<i>Identifying the field</i>	117
<i>Selecting the participants</i>	117
<i>Collecting the data</i>	118
<i>Analyzing the data</i>	118
FINDINGS.....	119
<i>Literary communication</i>	119
Constructing a virtual bookshelf.....	119
Evaluating content and comments.....	120
Sharing and contributing	122
Building networks (of friends)	123
<i>Literacy education</i>	124
Selecting books.....	125
Participating in cultural conversations via social media	126
Protecting students against bad influences.....	126
DISCUSSION	128
<i>Summary</i>	128
<i>Conclusions</i>	128
CONCLUSION.....	131
INTRODUCTION	133
<i>From literature and monoliteracy</i>	133
<i>Towards multiliteracies and participatory culture</i>	133
<i>Studying new literacy practices in social media & literature</i>	134
INNOVATIVE METHODOLOGY	135
<i>An ethnographic approach</i>	135
<i>A system-oriented approach</i>	135
SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS	136
<i>Chapter 1: developers as initiators of change</i>	136
<i>Chapter 2: new modes of reading</i>	137
<i>Chapter 3: new modes of writing</i>	138
<i>Chapter 4: new modes of mediation</i>	139
GENERAL CONCLUSIONS.....	140
<i>New keywords in culture and education</i>	140
Passion.....	140
Sharing.....	141
Conflict	141
<i>New forms of cultural expertise</i>	142
Situated expertise.....	142
Experts as learners	142
Balanced deep and wide knowledge	143
LIMITATIONS AND OPPORTUNITIES: STUDYING A FIELD IN MOTION	144
<i>Ensuring and facilitating continuity</i>	144
<i>Developing a deep understanding</i>	144

<i>Maintaining a broad perspective</i>	145
<i>Studying the effects of media AND people</i>	145
NEDERLANDSE SAMENVATTING / SUMMARY IN DUTCH	147
INLEIDING	149
<i>Literatuur en geletterdheid</i>	149
<i>Nieuwe media en meervoudige geletterdheid</i>	149
VOORSTELLING VAN HET ONDERZOEK	151
<i>Onderzoeksvragen</i>	151
<i>Afbakening</i>	151
<i>Methodologie</i>	151
BEVINDINGEN	153
<i>Hoofdstuk 1: ontwikkelaars van sociale media</i>	153
<i>Hoofdstuk 2: lezers en literaire receptie in sociale media</i>	153
<i>Hoofdstuk 3: schrijvers en literaire productie in sociale media</i>	154
<i>Hoofdstuk 4: bemiddelaars en literaire bemiddeling in sociale media</i>	154
ALGEMEEN BESLUIT	155
<i>Nieuwe kernbegrippen ten aanzien van cultuurparticipatie</i>	155
Passie.....	155
Delen	155
Conflict	156
<i>Nieuwe vormen van expertise</i>	156
Gesitueerde expertise	157
De lerende expert.....	157
Evenwichtige verhouding tussen diepe en brede kennis	157
REFERENCES	159
ACADEMIC OUTPUT	179
INTEGRATED CHAPTERS.....	181
RELATED ACADEMIC OUTPUT	182
<i>Publications</i>	182
<i>Conferences</i>	182
<i>Invited lectures</i>	184

“If it were possible to define generally the mission of education, one could say that its fundamental purpose is to ensure that all students benefit from learning in ways that allow them to participate fully in public, community, and economic life. Literacy pedagogy is expected to play a particularly important role in fulfilling this mission.”

The New London Group, *A Pedagogy of Multiliteracies*, p. 60

¹ This introduction is partially based on:

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Vlieghe, J., Rutten, K., & Soetaert, R. (2011). *State-of-the-Art report on studies of literacy and learning in and through social media* (D2.2.1). Brussels, Belgium: EMSOC reports.

Literacy is often considered a cornerstone of education that empowers people to participate in economic, social and cultural life. But what does it mean “to be literate”? Educational researchers, policy makers and teachers often feel tempted to present literacy as a fixed and universal set of skills, knowledge and attitudes (Livingstone, Bober, & Helsper, 2005; Buckingham, Banaji, Carr, Cranmer, & Willett, 2005). This conceptualization facilitates the construction of tests, benchmarks and teaching materials. However, scholars have demonstrated that literacy is not fixed or universal, but always situated in a social and cultural context (Street, 1993; Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Barton, Hamilton, & Ivanič, 2005). Based on this insight, they have questioned the dominant “skills and benchmarks” approach in education which conceives literacy as neutral, monolithic and measurable (e.g. The New London Group, 1996; Gee, 2004). Scholars within New Literacies Studies² have convincingly argued for an alternative approach to literacy in research, theory and education (see Street, 2003; Coiro, Knobel, Lankshear, & Leu, 2014).

In the following sections of this introduction I will first present a brief overview of the empirical and theoretical insights that have contributed to the conception and development of New Literacies Studies. This analysis will also include a discussion of the two main questions that underlie much of the research from the New Literacies Studies tradition. In addition, I will focus more thoroughly on the historical connections between of literacy and media in general, and between literacy and literature in particular. In light of this discussion I will argue that the increasing ubiquity of social media presents a new opportunity for studying the transformations of literary culture and traditional print literacy. Finally, I will outline the research questions and focus of my research as well as the structure and argumentation of this dissertation.

² In academic literature, “new” literacies have acquired various names, including: multiliteracies, new media literacies and 21st century literacies (see Mottart, 2002; Snyder, 2003). However, to refer to the actual field of study, scholars mostly use the label “New Literacies Studies” (see Coiro et al., 2014), which I will also continue to use throughout this dissertation.

New Literacies Studies: studying literacy differently

Ethnography and social linguistics

New Literacies Studies has brought together scholars from various academic disciplines, but initially originated in ethnographic and sociolinguistic studies of literacy (see Street, 1993; Gee, 2005; Heath & Street, 2008). Seminal work by ethnographers Shirley Brice Heath (1983) and Brian Street (1984) showed that literacy practices take different forms in different social and cultural contexts. This insight reinforced the criticism of the dominant ideology of literacy as a universal tool for empowerment and social mobility or what has been called the literacy myth (Graff, 1979, see also Street, 1988; Verdoodt, 2004). Similarly, socio-linguists examined how literacy discourses contribute to the perpetuation of traditional political and social hierarchies and power (e.g. Gee, 1986, 1996). Their research indicated that literacy is typically an aim set by powerful and dominant groups in society. By presenting literacy as a neutral and empowering set of skills and knowledge, traditional discourse obscures its ideological foundations and the power struggle that gave rise to it. Researchers and educators thus faced a serious problem as the core concept that inspired their endeavors “comes already loaded with ideological and policy presuppositions that make it hard to do studies of the variety of literacies across contexts” (Street, 2003, p. 78) or complicate “build[ing] learning conditions leading to full and equitable social participation” (The New London Group, 1996, p. 60). In order to address this problem, numerous attempts have been made to redefine the concept of literacy. Many scholars have focused on the connection of literacy, cultural diversity and mediated communication (e.g. Selfe, 1989; Gee, 1998; Livingstone, 2004a; Buckingham, 2006; Lankshear & Knobel, 2008).

Literacy and new media

Undoubtedly, the most influential attempt of redefining the concept of literacy is the article “A Pedagogy of Multiliteracies: Designing Social Futures” (The New London Group, 1996). In this manifesto, a group of multidisciplinary scholars, problematizes literacy and traditional literacy education as a project that is “restricted to formalized, monolingual, monocultural, and rule-governed forms of language” (p. 61). It is restrictive and authoritarian because it focuses solely on the promotion of reading and writing of page-bound texts composed in standardized language. In light of increased intercultural contact, globalization and the ubiquity of new media’s multimodal representation, The New London Group identifies the need for a pedagogy of multiliteracies. This alternative approach to literacy education “focuses on modes of representation much broader than language alone” in which all “modes of meaning are dynamic representation resources, constantly being remade by their users as they work to achieve their various cultural purpose” (1996, p. 64). This approach reflects an understanding of literacy development as a situated, multilayered and flexible process. It aims to

prepare and empower people to design their own social futures by helping them to access, interpret and create meaning represented in various modes – i.e. different media forms.

Participation through media and discourse

Socio-linguist James Paul Gee, a member of the New London Group, provides crucial insights for a better understanding of how literacy empowers people to participate in society and to forge social identities by focusing on media engagement. In his widely cited book *Social Linguistics and Literacies: Ideology in Discourses*, Gee (1996) explains that “literacy” represents a discourse that instructs people on how to act and communicate within a given context “so to take on a particular social role that others will recognize” (p.127). Gee argues that literacy thus inevitably perpetuates dominant ideologies, but at the same time gives people the necessary tools and insights to create new meanings and social identities. Based on an extensive review of the academic literature on literacy and orality, Gee (1986) concludes that those tools must necessarily include the ability to create meaning through various media. In general, he does caution that “we should not fool ourselves into thinking that access to literacy automatically ensures equality and social success or erases racism or minority disenfranchisement. But, nonetheless, ... there is no access to power in the society without control over the discourse practices in thought, speech, and writing of literacy and its attendant world view” (p.743).

Digital media as affinity spaces

In more recent work, Gee (2004) assesses and continues to criticize traditional education for failing to socialize people in the variety of discourses and modes of meaning-making which they will encounter on a daily basis. While formal education thus remains unsuccessful in implementing a pedagogy of multiliteracies, Gee (2003, 2005) sees powerful learning environments emerging in and around digital media. Based on studies of digitally mediated popular culture, Gee argues that digital media allow people to create *affinity spaces* where they can “‘bond’ first and foremost to an endeavor or interest and secondarily, if at all, to each other” (Gee, 2007, p. 98). People at all levels of experience and expertise are able to enter and leave the *affinity spaces* at any time, participate in many different ways, create and transform content, and affect negotiations about expertise and leadership. This last feature is particularly important because it shows that the creation of meaning and social identities is situated: “Different people lead in different areas or on different days and being a leader means in large part, resourcing, mentoring, and helping people, not bossing them around” (Hayes & Gee, 2010, p. 188). As such, digital media environments embody the pedagogy of multiliteracies, because they allow people to participate fully and equally to society and to design their own social futures. Gee’s work suggests

that a close study of media is vital to detect and take advantage of new media's opportunities to understand and re-imagine literacy and literacy education.

Literacy events and practices

After problematizing core concepts and shifting the focus of research more towards educational settings outside of school, the New Literacies Studies had to redefine object of study and formulate new research questions. In "What's 'new' in New Literacies Studies? Critical Approaches to Literacy in Theory and Practice", Brian Street (2003) describes the focus of the New Literacies Studies in terms of "literacy events" and "literacy practices". The first concept refers to situations in which people are engaged in interaction and interpretation through the use of media texts. The second concept denotes the actual process of interaction and interpretation and how they are perceived by different actors. Street points out that in both instances literacy is conceptualized as a social practice.

Based on this new approach to literacy research, Street formulates two distinct but related questions that should underlie New Literacies. The first question involves analyzing and contesting what counts as 'literacy' by exploring "what literacy events and practices mean to users in different cultural and social contexts, but also what are the 'limits of the local'" (Street, 2003, p. 88). The second question considers "how literacy relates to more general issues of social theory regarding textuality, figured worlds, identity and power" (Street, 2003, pp. 87-88). Street points out that ethnographic fieldwork can provide the necessary data to answer these questions, but also stresses that ethnography itself is insufficient to answer them fully. He suggests that the ethnographic data need to be assessed from various disciplinary perspectives and triangulated with other research, both in- and outside the multidisciplinary field of the New Literacies Studies.

Understanding literacies: studying media, discourses and transformations of culture and society

“The personal and social consequences of any medium result from the new scale that is introduced into our affairs by each extension of ourselves, or by any new technology.”

Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, 1964, p. 7

Literature and the shift from oral to written culture

Early work in New Literacies Studies furthered the pivotal works of literary critics and cultural historians such as Raymond Williams and Walter Ong (see Kelder, 1996). These foundational works provide a crucial context for the empirical findings of literacy research. In his epistemological study *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*, Raymond Williams (1976) traces the origin of the term “literacy” back to the term “literature” which was used for 500 years to denote primarily the act of learning through reading. This type of learning was performed almost exclusively by a small elite who had access to the expensive hand-written codex. This continued until the first half of the 19th century, when the production of books suddenly increased dramatically due to the introduction of the printing press. Literature gradually became a label to refer to “well-written books of an imaginative or creative kind” (Williams, 1983, p. 186). The term became a way to distinguish “literature” from other kinds of writing. At this point, the term “literacy” was introduced, replacing literature as a label to denote a person’s ability to read (and write) and the status of being well-read (p. 184).

Walter Ong (1982) relates this history of literacy to a gradual shift from oral to written culture in his influential work *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*. He notes that this shift has greatly supported the development of science, but at the same time has made it “quite impossible to use the term ‘literature’ to include oral tradition and performance without subtly but irremediably reducing these somehow to variants of writing” (Ong, 2013, p. 12). The shift from orality to writing also represented an increase in distance and neutrality. Indeed, literary texts are often perceived as a form of communication that allows people to distance themselves from the topics, as well as the recipients of their writing. This creates an aura of neutrality and objectivity surrounding literature (see also Gee, 1986) while obscuring the social aspects of literary communication (see also Long, 1993). As Ong points out, this realization only occurred after the introduction of new media, which confronted us with new ways to create, circulate and access meaning. This also sensitized us to contrasting ways in which knowledge is developed and managed in different cultural settings, forcing us “to revise our understanding of human identity” (Ong, 2013, p. 1).

Media plurality and the shift to multiliteracies

In *Keywords: a Vocabulary of Pedagogy and New Media*, Ilana Snyder (2003) presents an updated account of the history of literacy leading up to the arrival of Digital Media. According to Snyder, the attention for new modes and practices of communication has helped “to destabilize the close association so often made between literacy and the printed word” (p. 10; see also Snyder, 2001). She states that every new medium has had an impact on how literacy is practiced and perceived. Indeed, as I have briefly argued in the previous section of this introduction, the increase in available media has also been reflected in a myriad of literacy definitions. Academic literature refers to concepts such as television literacy (e.g. Buckingham, 1993), computer literacy (e.g. Selber, 2004), video game literacy (e.g. Squire, 2008), and internet literacy (e.g. Livingstone, 2008a). Sometimes more elusive terms arise such as techno-literacies (e.g. Lankshear, Snyder, & Green, 2000), electronic literacies (e.g. Selfe & Hawisher, 2002), silicon literacies (e.g. Snyder, 2002), digital literacies (e.g. Glistner, 1997; Lankshear & Knobel, 2008) or media literacy (e.g. Livingstone, 2004b).

The sudden explosion of media forms and practices also brought about moral panic and a discourse of crisis. In “Orality and Literacy: From The Savage Mind to Ways With Words”, James Paul Gee (1986) argues that the idea of “literacy in crisis” emerges as a result of the gap between the mainstream perception of literacy represented in formal education and the alternative perspectives represented by subcultures. The discourse of literacy in crisis is spurred on by an increase in drop-outs and unemployment figures (to some, symptoms of academic, economic and social failure) which is then linked to the decline of reading and book sales (e.g. Iyengar & Ball, 2007). Both discourses persist (see Soetaert, 2006; Striphias, 2011) and are continuously fed by ominous research reports and news articles (e.g. Bradshaw, Nichols, & Ball, 2004; Gardner, 2008; Birkets, 2013). In his later work with Elisabeth Hayes, Gee contests the discourse of “literacy in crisis” and instead suggests that “school is in crisis” (Hayes & Gee 2010, p.64). Referring to empirical research by scholars such as Henry Jenkins (2006a, 2009), Mizuko Ito (Ito et al., 2010) as well as his own work on digital media and *affinity spaces*, Gee notes that: “As policy makes, politicians, and educators debate school reform, there has been a massive and sweeping reform not of schools but of learning in society outside of school. This reform has been facilitated by digital media. It represents the deepest competition schools have ever had” (Hayes & Gee, 2010, p. 69).

In the past decade, other researchers have drawn similar conclusion about people’s engagement with digital media. Many of them have also attempted to identify the characteristics of social and cultural participation through digital media in order to map out the challenges faced by policy-makers and educators. One of the most comprehensive and successful attempts is the white paper *Confronting the Challenges of Participatory Culture: Media Education for the 21st Century* (Jenkins, 2009). In this elaborate document, lead researcher Henry Jenkins describes how digital media have helped to create a *participatory culture* that is characterized by affiliation, expression, collaboration and circulation.

These features create “opportunities for peer-to-peer learning, a changed attitude towards intellectual property, the diversification of cultural expression, the development of skills valued in the modern workplace, and a more empowered conception of citizenship” (p. xii).

While expressing great optimism about these opportunities for reimagining literacy, education and participation, Jenkins also cautions for a deterministic interpretation that might lead to unwarranted enthusiasm and new inequalities. He identifies three main issues, which policy-makers and educators must address: the participation gap, the transparency problem and the ethics challenge. As a response, Jenkins states that:

“Educators must work together to ensure that every young person has access to the skills and experiences needed to become a full participant, can articulate their understanding of how media shapes perceptions, and has been socialized into the emerging ethical standards that should shape their practices as media makers and participants in online communities.”

(2009, p. xiii).

Jenkins recognizes that a new ideology is emerging in and around digital media and calls it *participatory culture*. While Jenkins and his colleagues have already performed extensive research on literacy events and literacy practices related to digital media and participatory culture (see Black, 2005; Jenkins, 2006b; 2013; Thomas, 2007; Ito et al., 2010; Ito, Okabe, & Tsuji, 2012), much remains to be done.

Social media and the shift to participatory culture

Social media appear to be the epitome of the ideology and the actualization of *participatory culture*. In their widely cited article “Users of the world, unite! The challenges and opportunities of Social Media”, Andreas Kaplan and Michael Haenlein (2010) define social media as “a group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content” (p. 61). Despite what the term suggests, Web 2.0 is not used to refer to structural changes in the World Wide Web, but is instead primarily used to denote a series of functionalities that have been crucial for the development and increasing ubiquity of social media (see also Anderson, 2006). This includes features such as mobile and cross-platform access made possible through wireless internet, tablets and smart phones. These functions have greatly contributed to the integration of digital media practices in people’s everyday life. Today, many young people and adults are “always on” (see Turkle, 2012). Through their handheld and pocket-size devices people are always connected to the network, ready to access, share and create content at any moment, in any place and with anyone.

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Most research on social media has focused primarily on a small segment of the every widening range of platforms, namely: social networking sites. Moreover many studies have examined the developments and effects of social media on culture and society from a cognitive or behavioral point of view. These studies often point to increased levels of deception, aggression, narcissism and feelings of loneliness (e.g. Toma, Hancock, & Ellison, 2008; Ryan & Xenos, 2011; Schrock & boyd, 2011). Furthermore, in some research it is even argued that social media are actively eroding concepts like "friendship" and "community" (e.g. Donath & boyd, 2004; boyd, 2006, 2008; boyd & Ellison, 2007). In retrospect, pioneers like Sherry Turkle explain that initial optimism (e.g. Turkle, 1995) has been replaced by slight disillusionment and serious concerns about the evolution of our engagement with media and people. In her recent book *Alone Together: Why We Expect More From Technology and Less From Each Other*, Sherry Turkle (2012) suggests that social media are making us less rather than more social. Interestingly, like many other scholars, Turkle struggles to explain why social media are so popular despite their obvious negative effects on our compassion for and social connection to others. In the conclusion to her book she frames engagement with social media as a choice to take part in a series of experiments where people act like robots, where technology decreases or even dissolves privacy, where digital environments seduce us to think of them as places to live in. Turkle believes that "we have reached a point of inflection, where we can see the costs and start to take action. We deserve better. When we remind ourselves that it is we who decide how to keep technology busy, we shall have better" (p. 296).

Turkle's research does reveal some of the important downsides and dangers of social media use, but it also misses some fundamental opportunities provided by the introduction of social media. Her closing words show us an interesting paradox that is present in much of the research on social media. On the one hand, scholars often speak about the power of human beings to intervene and shape their own environment. On the other hand, they seem to leave developers of social media completely out of the equation. As such, social media become a new obstacle, rather than an instrument that enables people to overcome restrictions on communication and participation.

Disregarding the role of the developers implies skipping a crucial step in the assessment of social media's effects on culture and society. Ignoring the developers' perspective means that the research immediately focuses on the practices and perceptions of users. It also means that social media are studied as neutral rather than intentionally shaped tools. This increases the risk of developing a technologically deterministic understanding of the effects of media. To avoid this, research should begin by studying how developers of new media – i.e. designers and promoters – intend to change culture and society.

Presenting the research: studying literary communication practices in a social media culture

Questions

In this dissertation, I study how the development and use of social media inspire new practices and understandings of literacy and how this contributes to the innovation of cultural institutions. Building on a theoretical framework acquired from the review of New Literacies Studies, I will present an ethnographic and linguistic exploration of various literacy events that occur in environments mediated by social media. Each chapter focuses on a particular event that includes detailed descriptions and analysis of literacy practices and the context of social media. In addition, each chapter includes an elaborate discussion of the discourse that surrounds these events and practices, focusing on one perspective at a time. Based on these *thick descriptions* I examine:

- (1) What counts as “literacy” in a social media culture by exploring the meaning and limits of literacy events and practices from the perspective of different users and user groups?
- (2) How do these new “literacies” or instructions affect perceptions of media and media engagement, of identity and participation, and of power and hierarchy in the social system surrounding literature?

Scope

The field of social media covers a vast array of platforms and practices: from documenting one’s life on *Facebook*, to editing videos on *Youtube*, sharing music on *Soundcloud*, reviewing books on *Goodreads*, and much more. After a careful review of the academic literature and an observation of social media’s impact on traditional institutions of literacy, I decided to direct my attention on literacy events that focus on literature and literary communication. This choice is based on two arguments.

The first argument relates to the historical connection between literature and literacy and its continuing importance in formal education. Studying people’s engagement with literature in social media environments will allow me to analyze how literary communication practices are transformed and new understandings of literacy are formulated. In order to allow such an analysis, the practices must first be carefully documented and described. I have done this by building on the ethnographic tradition of the New Literacies Studies.

The second argument relates to the wide variety of discourses that surround literature and literary communication practices – including a rich body of academic publications. As I have pointed out above, literacy is a social practice and its features are largely defined through the discourses

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

surrounding various modes of meaning-making. By assessing and comparing these discourses about literature and social media based on system-oriented approach, I will be able to analyze how dominant practices of literary communication are being contested and how power and hierarchies surrounding literature are being re-imagined. The system-oriented approach builds on the theory of *Art as a Social System* (Luhmann, 2000; see also Luhmann, 1995), and more specifically, the adaptation of this theory within empirical literature studies (see Schmidt, 1989, 1997).

From a system-oriented perspective, literature is described as the object of a series of communicative actions which give rise to a particular organization of social roles. This constellation or system represents a set of “standards which people invent for specific purposes in specific sociocultural situations, especially for the purpose of drawing distinctions in their experiential reality” (Schmidt, 1997, p. 122). Empirical studies have shown that the variety of communication practices and social roles related to print-based literature are traditionally distributed onto four dimensions or cultural institutions: “production”, “mediation”, “reception” and “post-processing” (see Schmidt, 1997, 2010). Therefore, each study in this dissertation focuses on a specific dimension in order to examine how social media contribute to the negotiation of new standards and the innovation of cultural institutions. Both the traditional and the “new” perspectives or understandings of each dimension are discussed in detail in the corresponding chapters. However, for reasons which I have discussed above, I have started my research by considering the role of developers who contribute to the transformation of culture and society by designing and introducing new modes of meaning-making.

Method

The relevant methods that were used in each study will be described in detail in the corresponding chapters. This chapter-by-chapter explanation of the methodology will increase clarity and research transparency, as it creates greater understanding of the different decisions and steps of the research. This aims to gain an increase of the transfer potential of the methodology to other areas of the research on literacy and social media.

Structure and overview

In Chapter 1, I establish a framework for my research by assessing the discourse of social media developers. As I have discussed above, this is vital for understanding the effects of media on the practice and perception of literacy. The study comprises a rhetorical analysis of the discourse of social media developers based on documents and observations related to 27 unique platforms. This rhetorical analysis allows for a reconsideration of the ideology behind the design. The findings from this study are presented through a detailed overview of the literary communication practices in social

media environments, as well as related features and purposes as identified by the developers. The overview also includes a discussion of rhetorical ambiguities which allows for a further interpretation of the concept of “social media”, and the promise of social media for a participatory culture. As such, I provide a tentative overview of the instructions and ambitions expressed by developers of social media. Finally, these are related to the identification of various user groups, namely: recipients, producers and mediators of literary works.

Building on the material and insights from Chapter 1, the following three chapters explore how the shift of literature to the domain of social media affects users’ opportunities to participate and acquire social positions in literary culture. Each chapter addresses the main research questions from a different perspective. The chapters present a detailed ethnographic description and linguistic analysis of the practices and discourses in which a particular user group (recipients, producers, and mediators) engages. The order in which chapters are arranged is based on the prevalence of each user group in the discourse of the developers.

Chapter 2 focuses on recipients of literary work – i.e. readers – and their engagement in the social media environments related the Flemish initiative *Iedereenleest.be*. The study involves an observation of 490 users who participated on the website or in the Facebook group of *Iedereenleest.be*, and includes in-depth interviews with 10 highly active participants and the developer and supervisor of the initiative. I identify five main types of literary communication practices in which recipients engage. By comparing the frequency patterns revealed in the results of the content analysis, I point out the impact of media design on practices and perception. Based on qualitative thematic analysis of the interview data I discuss four ways in which recipients characterize literary communication and social media. The study provides insight into recipients’ understanding and appreciation of the social aspects of literary communication practices. It also shows how they perceive and negotiate their role within social media environments. Finally, these findings can also be used to assess the adequacy of concepts such as “social reading”.

Chapter 3 focuses on producers of literary work – i.e. writers – and their engagement in the *2012 Twitter Fiction Festival*. Data for this study include reflections from 14 authors who participated in this innovative online, literary experiment. It includes transcripts of two one-hour focus group discussions mediated through *Twitter*, source material relating to the participants contributions during *2012 Twitter Fiction Festival*, and observation material relating to the participant profiles, network and online activity. Based on an extensive and iterative thematic analysis of these data, I present a detailed description of the types of literary communication practices that have emerged during and in the wake of the *2012 Twitter Fiction Festival*. Moreover this chapter also includes a close examination of the participants’ reflections regarding their literary communication practices, outlining how producers of literary work interpret their engagement in these practices through language and discourse. The

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

description consists of five main clusters that indicate how producers experience and contribute to the negotiation and redistribution of identities and social roles related to literary communication.

Chapter 4 focuses on mediators of literary work – i.e. teachers – and their engagement in the social media environment *Goodreads*. In this chapter I present the results of the thematic analysis of an elaborate auto-ethnographic document. The document was compiled during a six-month period by 79 students enrolled in the teacher training program at Ghent University. Based on the thematic analysis, I discuss how literary mediators weigh social media's affordances for users who are passionate about reading against its downsides for novice or occasional readers. I also show how discussions about the infrastructures and practices of social media inspire the mediators to reflect on the importance and characteristics of engagement, trust, and value assessment. Finally, I indicate how mediators relate their observations and reflections to their understanding and perception of education and the role of the teacher. As such, the chapter offers an overview of how mediators describe, experience and negotiate literary communication practices and their own role(s) within social media environments.

In the conclusion, I present a summary of the main findings from the analysis of the discourses of developers, recipients, producers and mediators. Based on these findings, I formulate a number of general conclusions. Firstly, I extract a number of key terms that express a shared understanding of what counts as literacy in social media environments. I also consider how these terms reflect a new understanding literacy, identity and authority. Secondly, I focus on the notion of cultural expertise as it is defined within a participatory culture. I consider how the new understanding of expertise empowers and challenges "regular" users, but also "professional" users who are affiliated to traditional cultural institutions. In conclusion, this final chapter discusses the limitations of my research and outlines the opportunities for future research.

CHAPTER 1: A DEVELOPER'S PERSPECTIVE ON LITERARY COMMUNICATION IN SOCIAL MEDIA ENVIRONMENTS³

³ This chapter is based on:

Vlieghe, J., & Rutten, K. (2013). Rhetorical Analysis of Literary Culture in Social Reading Platforms. *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture*, 15(3). doi: 10.7771/1481-4374.2244

Vlieghe, J., Rutten, K., & Soetaert, R. (2013). *On the theoretical frame and empirical tool for analysing the case-studies* (D2.2.2). Brussels, Belgium: EMSOC reports.

Abstract

In this chapter, I establish a framework for my research by assessing the discourse of social media developers. As I have discussed above, this is vital for understanding the effects of media on the practice and perception of literacy. The study comprises a rhetorical analysis of the discourse of social media developers based on documents and observations related to 27 unique platforms. This rhetorical analysis allows for a reconsideration of the ideology behind the design. The findings from this study are presented through a detailed overview of the literary communication practices in social media environments, as well as related features and purposes as identified by the developers. The overview also includes a discussion of rhetorical ambiguities which allows for a further interpretation of the concept of "social media", and the promise of social media for a participatory culture. As such, I provide a tentative overview of the instructions and ambitions expressed by developers of social media. Finally, these are related to the identification of various user groups, namely: recipients, producers and mediators of literary works.

Introduction

In his theory of media systems, Siegfried Schmidt (2010) has stated that these social systems can be studied by exploring the concepts and discourse surrounding them. As I have argued in the introduction, language allows people to formulate instructions on how to use media, but also to interpret the actions of others. This enables us to construct and recognize identities and social positions (see Gee, 2008; Livingstone, 2008b). The social systems surrounding media thus come to life and evolve as people discuss, describe and name actions and processes of use (Schmidt, 2010). Based on his empirical study of the discourse on literary phenomena, Schmidt (1997) concludes that "in 'modern' societies, the acting possibilities of actors in the social system of literature are institutionally distributed onto four action dimensions: production, mediation, reception, and post-processing" (p. 124). He argues, however, that these dimensions are prone to change: with every new medium that is introduced, the opportunities to act and participate change (Schmidt, 2010). In order to study the transformative effects of "new" media, Schmidt proposes to examine and compare the uses and meanings of concepts related to media phenomena in and across various media systems. As indicated in the introduction, this dissertation explores the collision between literature and social media.

The first step in the exploration is to examine how developers of social media describe acts of literary communication in social media environments. Accordingly, this chapter presents a detailed overview of the action dimensions and their features as they are discussed by the developers. Given its function as a monitoring and regulating mechanism (see boyd, 2010, p. 95), analyzing this discourse will provide insight into the ambitions and instructions expressed by the developers of social media. On the one hand, an overview of the developers' ambitions will increase our understanding of the promise of social media and the meaning of the term "social". On the other hand, an overview of the instructions will provide a solid basis for further exploration of the reallocation of literary communication practices to the domain of social media and how this affects users' opportunities to participate and acquire social positions in literary culture.

Method

Rhetorical analysis of discourse

The research presented in this chapter also represents a methodological exploration within literacies studies, focusing on language as symbolic and situated action. Language can be considered the most fundamental tool by which people conceive, comprehend and communicate meaning. Different uses of language can be studied as indicators of how people perceive a situation and the choices and actions they see available, thereby offering insights into the motives for acting (Foss, 2004). Using tools from rhetorical criticism we can analyze these situated meanings and the motives that are generated through our use of language (see Brummett, 2006). In particular, I adhere to Kenneth Burke's Dramatistic theory and apply the Dramatistic Pentad as an analytical method for "analyzing discourse by focusing on how it attributes motivation to human action" (Blakesley, 2002, p. 32).

From a rhetorical perspective, Burke (1966) describes the human being as "the symbol-making, symbol-using, symbol-misusing animal" (p. 16). He claims that we can learn to understand how these symbols work by analyzing literature, speeches, or even accounts of what people do and why, as Dramatistic situations. The aim of the analysis is to understand the attributed motives of social interactions by addressing the question: "what is involved when we say what people are doing and why they are doing it?" (Burke, 1969, p. xv). Dramatistic theory has been adopted by different scholars in order to study popular culture (e.g. Kimberling, 1982; Brummett, 2006), film (e.g. Blakesley, 2003), video games (e.g. Voorhees, 2009; Bourgonjon, Rutten, Soetaert, & Valcke, 2011), and theater (e.g. Rutten, Mottart, & Soetaert, 2010).

To analyze Dramatistic situations, Burke developed the Dramatistic Pentad. The Pentad incorporates and divides the question of "what is involved" into five distinct segments or elements: the "act" (what happens), "agent" (who carries out the act), "scene" (the setting in which an action takes place), "agency" (the means by which the act is carried out), and "purpose" (the goal or objective of the act). When starting the analysis, the first step is to identify the terms or concepts that represent these five key elements. The next step is to apply ratios that pair two different elements in order to examine their mutual influence and to detect the dominant pentadic element. The final step is to look for patterns in the associations or relations in order to map out different clusters (Foss, 2004, pp. 72-75). Based on the results of the analysis, a pentadic cartography can be constructed. The technique of pentadic cartography was developed in order to "locate the featured term[s] that coordinate transformation of one vocabulary into the terms of another at pivotal sites of ambiguity" (Anderson & Prelli, 2001, p. 80). In this article, I apply the technique of pentadic cartography to identify the strategic points of ambiguity and to trace transformations of uses and meanings of concepts relating to literary communication practices. This will also provide a first insight into the ambitions and instructions expressed in relation to the convergence of literature and social media.

Identifying the field and collecting the data

The data presented in this chapter were obtained through online participant observation in social media environments starting from September 2011 to June 2012. All source material and initial observations were recorded and documented both in an online weblog (see <<http://joachimvlieghe.tumblr.com>>) and an offline digital archive. The recorded sources contain texts and audio-visual material produced by developers to describe literary communication practices in social media environments. In accordance with the open-ended character of the exploration, no data or field restrictions were made prior to documenting the observations collected through participatory immersion (see also Hine, Kendall, & boyd, 2009). After a lengthy period of observation, I identified 27 social media platforms which focus on engagement with literature (see Table 1).

Once these platforms were identified, I continued my observation to collect textual and audio-visual material used by developers to describe literary communication practices. This material was later recorded and coded using a *Microsoft Access 2010* database (see Figure 1). The database was customized for the purpose of rhetorical analysis and contains five sets of tables corresponding to the elements of the Dramatistic Pentad: [act], [agent], [scene], [agency], [purpose]. All descriptive information provided by the developers was segmented to word-groups. These were imported into one of these five main tables. A numeric identifier is assigned to each piece of information. The segments were then paired based relationship to each other within the syntactic context. These pairs were stored in distinct subtables which represent possible pentadic ratios (e.g. the subtable [act-scene] contains segments from the table [act] paired with segments from the table [scene]). Accordingly, there are 20 subtables in total: [act-scene], [act-agent], [act-agency], [act-purpose], [agent-scene], [agent-agency], [agent-act], [agent-purpose], [scene-agent], [scene-agency], [scene-act], [scene-purpose], [agency-scene], [agency-agent], [agency-act], [agency-purpose], [purpose-scene], [purpose-agent], [purpose-agency], [purpose-act]. In addition to these subtables for relational information, each set also holds one subtable which contains thematic information. The process of clustering helped to overcome small variations in terminology used by developers. Given the explorative nature of the study, the themes and their labels were not predefined for the elements [act], [scene], [agency] and [purpose]. For the element [agent], however, predefined labels were used in correspondence with the labels identified by Schmidt (1997, p. 124): "producer", "mediator", "recipient" and "post-processor". In total, 54 themes were recorded in the database.

Name	URL
BookCountry	http://bookcountry.com/
BookCrossing	http://www.bookcrossing.com/
Bookfriend	http://www.bookfriend.co.uk/
Bookglutton	http://www.bookglutton.com/
BookIDO	http://www.bookido.be/
BookLamp	http://www.booklamp.org/
BookMovement	http://www.bookmovement.com/
BookRabbit	http://bookrabbit.com/
BookWormr	http://www.bookwormr.com/
Copia	http://www.thecopia.com
Findings	https://findings.com/
Gnooks	http://www.gnooks.com/
Good Reads	http://www.goodreads.com/
Iedereenleest.be	http://www.iedereenleest.be/
LibraryThing	http://www.librarything.com/
Openmargin	http://www.openmargin.com/
Read Social	https://www.readsocial.net/
Reader ²	http://reader2.com/
Readmill	http://readmill.com/
Revish	http://www.revish.com/
Scribd	http://www.scribd.com/
Shelfari	http://www.shelfari.com/
Social Books	http://apps.facebook.com/social_books/
SubText	http://web.subtext.com/
The Amanda Project	http://www.theamandaproject.com/
Unbound	http://unbound.co.uk/
You Are What You Read (Scholastic)	http://youarewhatyouread.scholastic.com/

Table 1: Documented and analyzed social reading platforms and URL of the platforms homepage on the world wide web, sorted alphabetically.

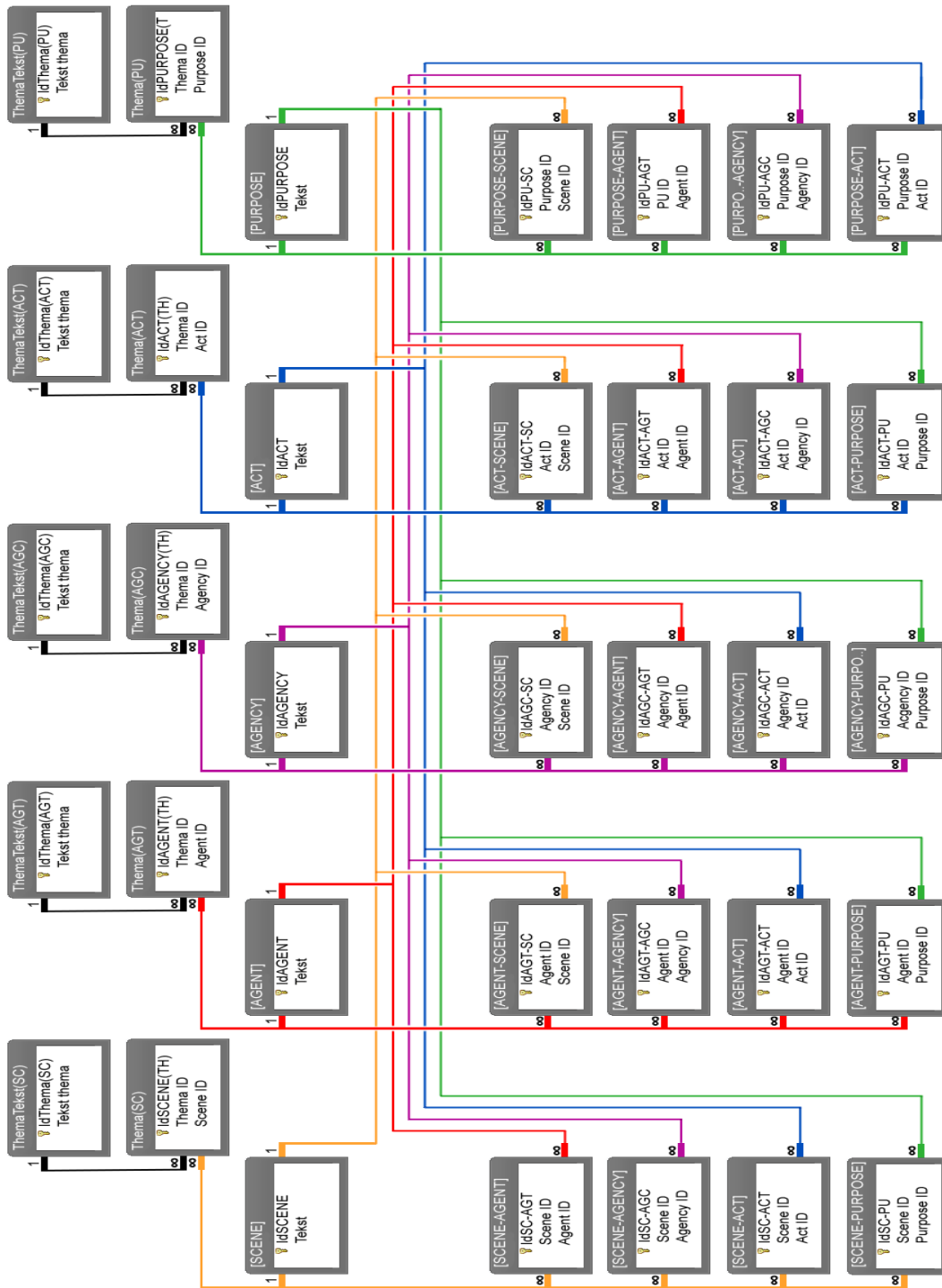


Figure 1: Schematic overview of the database structure used for analysis in the developers case-study. Color code: red [scene], purple [agency], yellow [agent], green [act], blue [purpose].

CHAPTER 1

After pairing and coding the information, all collected data from the *MS Access 2010* database was exported to a CSV-file (i.e. comma separated value) and then imported in the software package *Gephi*. Using this software package, I analyzed the pattern data by comparing the weight of every relation and every theme. I also generated a graph using *Gephi* to visualize the outcome of the analysis and to present a map of the developers' discourse on social reading platforms. As is apparent from the visualization (see Figure 2), the result of the pentadic analysis is highly complex. While describing the results, I try to maintain as much the complexity and richness of the discourse by combining numeric data with representative examples and relevant insights from academic literature. Based on the results, I identify (1) the dominant element and (2) how it influences the other pentadic elements, by revealing the strategic points of ambiguity in the developers' discourse on literary communication practices in social media environments. Given the wide variety of themes and the scope of this chapter, I limit the discussion to the most general trends in the developers' discourse. This means I only address those themes that occur in relation to at least one third of the selected social media platforms.

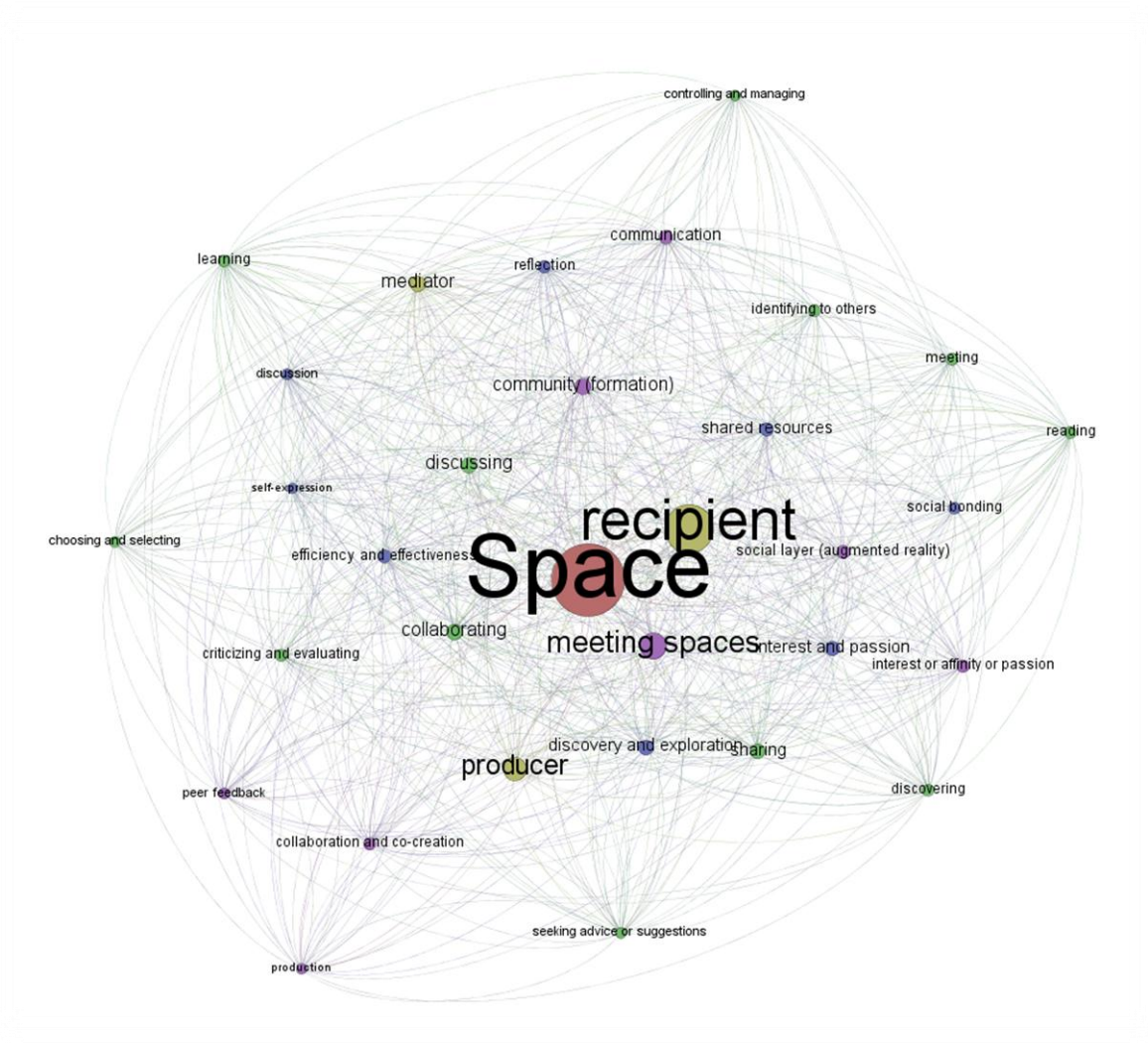


Figure 2: Pentadic cartography of developers' discourse on literary communication practices in social media environments. This figure depicts themes that appear in relation to least 30% of all selected platforms. Color code: red [scene], purple [agency], yellow [agent], green [act], blue [purpose].

Findings

Social media as democratic social spaces

Ideally, a pentadic analysis focuses on all five elements of a Dramatistic situation. However, developers do not always elaborate on every element of the Dramatistic Pentad. This is most striking when it comes to the element “scene”, which is only featured in the discourse related to 18 of the 27 studied platforms (see the items marked in bold in Table 1). An important reason for this could be the fact that digital environments like social media embody features that make it very different from physical environments. The absence of physical bodies and the possibility of asynchronous social interaction often lead to the dismissal of online environments and actions as “not real” (see also Hine 2000, 2005). Perhaps this is why various developers stay clear of defining social media platforms scenically. When the developers do focus on the element “scene”, it is always to refer to a social space.

“Book Country is a place where readers and writers of genre fiction come together to read original fiction, post work or comments, and make a name for themselves. ... Book Country aims to be useful, egalitarian, and merit-based while fostering an atmosphere of encouragement and creativity.”

(Book Country LLC, 2012)

“Shelfari is a gathering place for authors, aspiring authors, publishers, and readers, and has many tools and features to help these groups connect with each other in a fun and engaging way.”

(Shelfari, 2012)

“It is a place where you can see what your friends are reading and vice versa. You can create ‘bookshelves’ to organize what you’ve read (or want to read). You can comment on each other’s reviews. You can find mind-blowing new books. And on this journey with your friends you can explore new territory, gather information, and expand your mind.”

(GoodReads Inc., 2012)

“We all get more out of books when we can talk about them. And now there is a way I can talk with my students right in the pages of digital books. It’s called Subtext. And it allows the whole class to be in a book together.”

(SubText Video, 2012)

As the element of “scene” is often missing from the discourse of the developers, its potential as a dominant element seems minor at first. However, in the context of the debate about the democratic potential of digital environments, the importance of “scene” becomes clear. Developers use the

concepts of “space” and “place” to construct a recognizable and comprehensible metaphor which describes social media platforms. The metaphor of the social space is primarily used to celebrate the lack of physical determinants. As such, the “social spaces” metaphor alerts us of the “aspects of group identity, socialization, and hierarchy that were once dependent on particular physical locations and the special experiences available in them” (Meyrowitz, 1985, p. 125). By focusing on social media as spaces for diversity and equal opportunities, developers relate to the idea of the democratic Internet, often professed by Internet pioneers and hacker-activists. In light of this idea, social media become democratic social spaces where people are represented mentally rather than physically, allowing them to be recognized in different social roles based on “what they say and think, not what they look like” (Blakenship, 1986, para. 9). By idealizing the potential of physical anonymity and impression management, the metaphor stresses the importance of social media as spaces that create equal opportunities for interaction inspired by personal interests and free from discrimination based on physical appearance or institutional symbols (Meyrowitz, 1985, p. 118).

The “social spaces” metaphor as an overarching theme

Analysis shows that the element “scene” is consistently used to establish a connection between other pentadic elements, by establishing the “social spaces” metaphor as an overarching theme. Based on the average weight, the pentadic elements can be placed in the following hierarchical order: scene (22304); agent (3717); agency (772); act (674); and purpose (593). The theme “space” appears as a central node in the pentadic cartography, as it is the only theme that shows connections to all 53 other themes in the pentadic cartography (see Table 2 for a selective overview). In the next subsections, I provide further descriptions of these relationships as I examine the pentadic ratios [scene-agent], [scene-agency], [scene-act], and [scene-purpose].

Scene-agent: identifying and obscuring roles

With regard to the [scene-agent] ratio, I made two important observations. The first observation focuses on the descriptions of potential users of the services of a social media platform. While identifying potential users, developers refer to the following roles identified by Schmidt (1997): “recipient”, “producer” and “mediator”. Labels referring to these roles are often used in navigational structures of the platform to allow users to locate and access areas dedicated to practices of each action dimension (see Figure 3 and Figure 4). Explicit descriptions of the roles and their differences are almost never provided, creating the opportunity for users to interpret the labels freely. By providing details about the tools featured in each dedicated area, as well as instructions on what they are used for, the developers do provide implicit instructions on how the label should be interpreted.

Themes	Element	Platforms	Weight
space	scene	18	22,304
recipient	agent	17	14,088
meeting spaces	agency	18	6,448
sharing	act	18	2,656
discovery and exploration	purpose	18	2,640
interest and passion	purpose	18	2,456
interest or affinity or passion	agency	17	1,736
community (formation)	agency	16	2,960
identifying to others	act	16	1,608
social bonding	purpose	16	1,576
discovering	act	16	1,496
choosing and selecting	act	16	1,208
controlling and managing	act	16	1,176
communication	agency	14	2,176
shared resources	purpose	14	2,160
efficiency and effectiveness	purpose	14	2,048
collaborating	act	13	3,000
reflection	purpose	13	1,848
self-expression	purpose	13	1,080
meeting	act	12	1,712
seeking advice or suggestions	act	12	1,320
discussing	act	11	2,792
collaboration and co-creation	agency	11	1,672
criticizing and evaluating	act	9	1,544
reading	act/purpose	9	1,512
discussion	purpose	9	1,392
producer	agent	9	5,392
mediator	agent	9	2,824

Table 2: Overview of themes that appear in relation to least 30% of all selected platforms. Items are sorted by weight and representation across platforms.



Figure 3: Screenshot of Unbound's Project Page <<http://unbound.co.uk/books>>. Emphasis added in red.



Figure 4: Screenshot of LibraryThing's About Page <<http://www.librarything.com/about>>. Emphasis added in red.

CHAPTER 1

The second observation in relation to the [scene-agent] ratio is that the themes of “agent” never refer to the developers. The data show that explicit self-references by the developers are scarce, though not entirely absent. When developers do refer to themselves, they do so by the name of a social media platform. This means that the name of the platform is used interchangeably to refer to the elements “scene” and “agent”, blurring the boundaries between both elements and thus revealing a first strategic point of ambiguity. As I discuss other ratios and points of ambiguity, it will become clear how this allows the developers to present their creation – i.e. the social media platform – as a direct expression of their ambition or mission statement, while also providing clear instructions on how to act. For now, however, it is important to note that by not identifying themselves as agents, the developers contribute to obscuring their own roles in the social system as designers of social spaces.

“At Scholastic, we believe that literacy is the pathway to success and to realizing a complete life. Books play an important role in shaping who we are and who we will become. You Are What You Read provides a unique opportunity for readers all over the world to connect with each other through their shared ‘Bookprints,’ as we celebrate the books that bind us together and make us who we are today.”

(Scholastic Inc., 2012a)

“BookCountry aims to be useful, egalitarian, and merit-based while fostering an atmosphere of encouragement and creativity. Book Country also offers a convenient and affordable way to self-publish eBooks and print books. With a variety of services available, we want you to be able to put your book on the map.”

(Book Country LLC, 2012)

“Shelfari introduces readers to our global community of book lovers and encourages them to share their literary inclinations and passions with peers, friends, and total strangers (for now). Shelfari is a gathering place for authors, aspiring authors, publishers, and readers, and has many tools and features to help these groups connect with each other in a fun and engaging way. Our mission is to enhance the experience of reading by connecting readers in meaningful conversations about the published word.”

(Shelfari, 2012)

Scene-agency: providing space for confrontation and collaboration

In relation to the [scene-agency] ratio, I also made two observations. The first observation concerns one particular theme, namely "meeting spaces". As is clear from the overview in Table 2, this theme appears in relation to 18 different platforms and concentrates 6448 data connections. The unique position of the theme of "meeting spaces" becomes clear by tracing where coding overlaps with the theme "space" [scene]. This occurs quite frequently, given that the concept of "space" is often used to simultaneously present social media platforms as social spaces [scene] and a means for confrontation and communication [agency]. The concept of "space" thus denotes two different things: an environment that enhances democracy or a means that enhances discussion (see also Papacharissi, 2012, p. 11). This second strategic point of ambiguity reveals another ambition of the developers, namely: supporting confrontation and discussion. This strengthens the image of social media environments as social spaces where diversity and equality of participation is crucial.

This second observation pertaining to the [scene-agency] ratio relates strongly to the first and also focuses on the central position of the theme "meeting spaces". The following themes appear consistently alongside the theme "meeting spaces": "interest or affinity or passion", "community (formation)", "communication", and "collaboration and co-creation". These themes complement the characterization of social reading platforms as social spaces for confrontation and discussion. They also indicate a particular focus for that confrontation and discussion: a shared interest or passion. In this case study, that shared interest is literature. Developers' often refer to "communities" or "community formation" to stress this shared interest. Indeed, it has been argued that online communities formed through shared engagement can be understood as "imagined communities" (see Acquisti & Gross, 2006; boyd, 2008; Gruzd, Wellman, & Takhteyev, 2011). This concept was originally coined by Benedict Anderson (1983). Based on a close study of nationalism, Anderson pointed out that "all communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact are imagined", since their members "will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them" (1983, pp. 5-6). The data show that developers use the concept "communities" accordingly to refer to an intricate network of loosely affiliated people who possess diverse knowledge, experiences and perspectives on literature. More importantly, however, reference to "communities" denote social groups as shared resources which offer new insights that benefit both the individual users and literary culture as a whole.

"Books can bring people together in unique ways, transcending geographic boundaries, structuring conversations, fostering ideas and new insights into each other."

(BookGlutton, 2012)

"Reading long-form written content ... has been a solitary experience for too long, but technologies now exist to bring people together through their shared interests."

(Scribd Inc., 2012)

"Where the collective thoughts and ideas of the community live on every page, bringing new meaning and insights to every word. ... Copia brings this idea to life in a digital world, so we can all read better together. This is the future of e-reading."

(COPIA Interactive LLC, 2012)

"People have always loved to talk about books. Now there's a way to talk about the book in the book. It's called Subtext and it's going to change the way you think about eBooks. It connects you to an entire community of people how love books just as much as you do. ... You'll get more out of your books... and more into your books. You know it's always being added, so you can revisit a favorite and learn something new. ... Subtext, it's a community in the pages of your book."

(Subtext Video, 2011)

Scene-act-purpose: showing and developing taste

A first observation in relation to the [scene-act] and [scene-purpose] ratios is that there is a considerable overlap between themes relating to the elements "act" and "purpose". So much so, that it is impossible to discuss them separately. Careful revision of coded data indicates that the overlap is not caused by a poor selection of thematic labels, but by a third strategic point of ambiguity in the developers' discourse. The data shows that the affordances [agency] of social media platforms are often presented in terms of opportunities. These opportunities are mostly formulated in terms of imperatives which can denote both actions [act] and goals [purpose]. Developers rarely differentiate explicitly between both, thus allowing users to interpret the imperatives both as instructions and ambitions for how to engage in literary communication in social media environments. The ambiguity is maximized when developers formulate imperatives that signify a sequential chain of acts and purposes, whereby the purpose of one sequence becomes the agency for the next sequence.

"Revish lets you:

- *Write reviews of any books you read,*
- *Maintain a reading list and share it with friends*
- *Keep a reading journal - look back and see what you were reading at any time*
- *Read reviews by other Revish members*
- *Create and participate in groups, to discuss books, reading or anything else*
- *Use our API and widgets to include your Revish content on your blog or website*
- *Receive books with Revish Connect (coming soon)"*

(Champion Internet Solutions Ltd., 2012)

A general pattern that runs across both ratios relates to the focus on shared interest and gaining new insights, which I have already touched upon in the previous subsection. The theme "discovery and exploration" [purpose/act] emerges in relation to the 18 platforms that are presented using the "social space" metaphor. In nearly all cases the "discovery and exploration" is accompanied by the themes "interest and passion" [purpose/act] and "sharing (shared resources)" [act/purpose]. Further analysis shows that both accompanying themes represent a particular aspect of the developers' perspective on "discovery and exploration". The theme "interest and passion" represents a focus on the personal aspect of "discovery and exploration" and often appears in relation themes such as: "efficiency and effectiveness" [purpose], "reflection" [purpose], "choosing and selecting" [act], "controlling and managing" [act], "reading" [act/purpose]. The theme "sharing (shared resources)" represents a focus on the social or collective aspect of "discovery and exploration" and emerges alongside themes such as "identifying to others" [act], "social bonding" [purpose], "collaborating" [act], "self-expression" [purpose], "seeking advice or suggestions" [act], "discussing" [act], "criticizing and evaluating" [act].

Analysis shows that developers often stress the personal and the social aspect of "discovery and exploration" simultaneously. A distinction between both is rarely made explicit, furthering the ambiguity between the elements "act" and "purpose" and strengthening the idea of communities as resources. In many cases, it is suggested that one's taste in books reflects one's taste in friends and vice versa. Using the concept of "company", scholars have indeed suggested that our taste in friends can reveal our tastes in books (see Donath & boyd, 2004), just like our taste in books can reveal our taste in friends (see Booth, 1988). As such, social media environments appear to support the creation, exploration and maintenance of "taste fabrics" or networks of interests and value (see also Lui, Maes, & Davenport, 2006).

"Whether online or on your reader, your library is an easy way to keep track of all the books you've read and want to read. And with tons of e-books for sales and millions of catalogue titles you can fill it up quickly. What is important to remember is that every book is a connection to new people. And the more people you follow, the better it gets."

(COPIA Interactive LLC, 2012)

"You Are What You Read provides a unique opportunity for readers all over the world to connect with each other through their shared "Bookprints," as we celebrate the books that bind us together and make us who we are today. Once you sign up, you'll be able to input your Bookprint - the five books that most influenced your life. You'll then be able to connect with others through your shared Bookprints, interact with a global community of readers, and discover new books to enjoy..."

(Scholastic Inc., 2012b)

"For centuries, people have been scribbling in the margins of books, taking notes and doing their best to pass the books along. With Readmill this is made easy. ... Build up your own personal network of readers and discover how good eBooks can be. Why make a book digital and not make it shareable?"

(Readmill, 2011)

"On Goodreads, when a person adds a book to the site, all their friends can see what they thought of it. It's common sense. People are more likely to get excited about a book their friend recommends than a suggestion from a stranger. We even created an amazing algorithm that looks at your books and ratings, and helps you find other books based on what fellow Goodreads members with similar tastes enjoyed."

(GoodReads Inc., 2012)

Representation of roles and action dimension

The presence of recipients, producers and mediators

Thus far, the analysis has indicated that only the following three roles are referenced by the developers in relation to literary communication in social media environments: recipient, producer and mediator. Due to the ambiguities in the discourse, many ambitions and instructions expressed by the developers apply to all three roles in a fairly similar fashion. However, if the scope is limited to one role at a time, small variations can be detected in the relative importance of certain themes. These variations suggest a different focus for each role (see Table 3, Table 4 and Table 5).

Cluster	Platforms	Total weight	Weight (Recipient)	Weight (Producer)	Weight (Mediator)
meeting spaces	18	6,448	485	221	100
interest or affinity or passion	17	1,736	163	42	12
community (formation)	16	2,960	258	42	70
communication	14	2,176	218	15	39
collaboration and co-creation	11	1,672	88	103	18

Table 3: Thematic clusters for the element "agency". Items are sorted by weight and representation across platforms.

Cluster	Platforms	Total weight	Weight (Recipient)	Weight (Producer)	Weight (Mediator)
sharing	18	2,656	219	80	33
identifying to others	16	1,608	156	22	23
discovering	16	1,496	118	55	14
choosing and selecting	16	1,208	76	42	33
controlling and managing	16	1,176	86	18	43
collaborating	13	3,000	211	91	73
meeting	12	1,712	145	40	29
seeking advice or suggestions	12	1,320	121	42	2
discussing	11	2,792	233	74	42
criticizing and evaluating	9	1,544	97	66	30
reading	9	1,512	159	30	0

Table 4: Thematic clusters for the element "act". Items are sorted by weight and representation across platforms.

Cluster	Platforms	Total weight	Weight (Recipient)	Weight (Producer)	Weight (Mediator)
discovery and exploration	18	2,640	227	90	13
interest and passion	18	2,456	208	83	16
social bonding	16	1,576	155	26	16
shared resources	14	2,160	195	54	21
efficiency and effectiveness	14	2,048	129	68	59
reflection	13	1,848	146	41	44
self-expression	13	1,080	81	33	21
reading	9	1,512	159	30	0
discussion	9	1,392	100	33	41

Table 5: Thematic clusters for the element “purpose”. Items are sorted by weight and representation across platforms.

In relation to the recipient, developers stress the themes “reading” [act/purpose], “communication” [agency], “social bonding” [purpose] and “identifying to others” [act]. As such, they highlight the social and conversational aspect of literary reception.

“Copia brings this idea to life in a digital world, so we can all read better together. This is the future of e-reading.”

(COPIA Interactive LLC, 2012)

“People have always loved to talk about books. Now there’s a way to talk about the book in the book.... Subtext, it’s a community in the pages of your book.”

(Subtext Video, 2011)

In relation to the producer, the data indicate that developers primarily discuss themes like “collaboration and co-creation” [agency] and “criticizing and evaluating” [act] are stressed. This emphasizes the collaborative and responsive aspect of literary production.

“Get a group of your peers together to read and discuss each other’s work. (...) Then you can have targeted discussions about each paragraph in order to hone your craft.”

(BookGlutton, 2012)

"Now we've adapted the idea for the Internet Age, so authors get to write the books they really want to write and you get to read real books that in a crowded celebrity-obsessed marketplace might otherwise never see the light of day."

(Unbound, 2011)

In relation to the mediator, the developers accentuate the themes "controlling and managing" [act], "discussion" [purpose], "efficiency and effectiveness" [purpose] and "choosing and selecting" [act]. Accordingly, the argumentative and managerial aspect of literary mediation is emphasized.

"BookGlutton has the only Web-only book publishing platform. Using the Epub book format, you can upload, set your price, and track your sales. Your readers are part of your publishing network, and we enable direct lines of communication between reading groups and you. It's not for everyone in publishing, but it's for the forward-thinking ones."

(BookGlutton, 2012)

"How Libraries Can Use LibraryThing. We love libraries. Let us count the ways. Fully integrate LibraryThing's social data into your catalog using LibraryThing for Libraries. LTFL lets you add tag-based browsing, book recommendations, ratings, reviews, series data, awards information, stack maps, virtual shelf browsers, and more to your OPAC, by integrating with LibraryThing and its high-quality book data."

(LibraryThing, 2012)

The apparent absence of post-processors

While the roles of the recipient, producer and mediator appear in the discourse on literary communication practices in a social media culture, specific references to the role of the post-processor seem to be absent. However, the developers' discourse echoes the idea that "meaning-making is an ongoing process [that] does not end at a pre-ordained place" (DuGay, Hall, Janes, Mackay, & Negus, 1997, p. 85) by focusing on literary communication practices as social or communal endeavors. The interrelatedness of production, mediation and reception is further highlighted by the ambiguities in the discourse. The developers' description of literary communication practices in social media environments thus presents an image of literary culture as an interrelated and spiraling social system. This image confers with the discourse on remix culture, which is popular in relation to other areas within the social media culture, such as music and film (see also Lessig, 2008).

CHAPTER 1

The discourse on remixing suggests that “the interdependence of our creativity has been obscured by powerful cultural ideas, but technology is now exposing this connectedness” (Ferguson, 2010). By stressing this idea of connectedness or intertextuality, the developers enforce the idea that everyone in social media environments is involved in the act of post-processing. Stated differently, within social media culture everyone engaging with literature becomes a post-processor. This increases people’s opportunities to switch between roles and reduces the notions of hierarchy related to the social system as identified in the system theory of literary culture (see Schmidt, 1997, 2010). This concurs with the developers’ focus on democratization of literary communication practices in social media culture. As literacy scholars have pointed out, this approach to cultural participation enables and stimulates people to observe, mimic and experiment with a variety of different roles and practices within real and meaningful contexts, allowing them to develop a varying set of attitudes, skills and knowledge (see Gee, 2005; Knobel & Lankshear, 2008; Jenkins, 2009). Research has only recently begun to consider meaningfulness and applicability of remixing in literature education (see: Jenkins, Kelley, Clinton, McWilliams & Pitts-Wiley, & Reilly, 2013).

Discussion

Summary

In this chapter, I set out to study the intentions of developers to transform literary communication practices within the confines of social media culture. This involved examining and comparing the uses and meanings of concepts related to roles and action dimensions as they are discussed by developers of various social media platforms. Based on a pentadic analysis and pentadic cartography of the developers' discourse, I located and presented three strategic points of ambiguity in the developers' discourse on literary communication in social media environments. The first point of ambiguity involves themes relating to the element "agent". By describing its strategic use, I showed how developers often obscure their role and position within the media system as designers of social spaces. The second point of ambiguity deals with themes relating to the element "agency". This allowed me to explain how social media platforms are being characterized as social spaces that welcome diversity and confrontation, rather than being restrictive and prescriptive. The third strategic point of ambiguity focuses on the elements "act" and "purpose". I argued that the ambiguous use of both rhetorical elements is used to highlight how social media facilitate the creation, exploration and maintenance of personal and social taste fabrics related to literature. In addition, I also detailed how these strategic uses of ambiguity are combined to reduce notions of hierarchy found with the social systems of traditional literary culture. I explained that this involves the presentation of social media as democratic social spaces and the redefinition of all literary communication practices as part of a continuous act of "post-processing".

Conclusions

The findings presented in this chapter suggest that the developers' intend or claim to make literary culture more social by creating opportunities for equal participation. Based on the developers' discourse, it appears that social media create the foundations for a social system of literary communication that recognizes the multiplicity and complexity of learning and participating in literary culture. According to the New London Group (1996), this is one of the core activities and key challenges of modern education. The study of developers' discourse is a first step towards understanding how technological change and discourse can aid the development of new ambitions and instructions for equitable participation and media use in social and cultural life. My analysis has shown how developers' intend to innovate by problematizing existing roles and their action dimensions, and by presenting an alternative approach which builds on personal and social networks of taste. This approach ascribes greater importance to personal experience and collective endeavors, as opposed to professionalization and individual development.

CHAPTER 1

This chapter is, however, merely a starting point for a much broader exploration of the transformative effects to which the introduction of social media gives rise. The next chapters present studies focused on different groups of users, each corresponding to one of the three roles identified by the developers. The studies examine how these users transform and develop their own ambitions and instructions for literary communication as they try to balance the ambitions and instructions encountered in the discourse of social media developers and the various other social contexts in which they participate. These studies will provide evidence to supplement the findings presented in this chapter, creating a detailed or *thick description* (see Geertz, 1973) of how the social and literary media system affect each other and how developers and users are involved in the formulation and transformation of ambitions and instructions regarding media use. The description will also provide insight into the specific ambitions and instructions that can inform a shared understanding of literacy in relation to literary communication in a social media culture.

CHAPTER 2: LITERARY RECEPTION IN SOCIAL MEDIA ENVIRONMENTS

Abstract

This chapter focuses on recipients of literary work – i.e. readers – and their engagement in the social media environments related the Flemish initiative *Iedereenleest.be*. The study involves an observation of 490 users who participated on the website or in the Facebook group of *Iedereenleest.be*, and includes in-depth interviews with 10 highly active participants and the developer and supervisor of the initiative. I identify five main types of literary communication practices in which recipients engage. By comparing the frequency patterns revealed in the results of the content analysis, I point out the impact of media design on practices and perception. Based on qualitative thematic analysis of the interview data I discuss four ways in which recipients characterize literary communication and social media. The study provides insight into recipients' understanding and appreciation of the social aspects of literary communication practices. It also shows how they perceive and negotiate their role within social media environments. Finally, these findings can also be used to assess the adequacy of concepts such as "social reading".

Introduction

Participating in literary communication practices is often considered to be fundamental for empowering people in leading fully equitable social and cultural lives. Ironically, dominant views in literary theory still largely regard literary communication practices as solitary activities, especially reading (Eagleton, 1985). In order to conceptualize the social value of literature, scholars have mainly focused on the impact of reading on individual development, rather than on the social processes involved in literary communication. Depending on one's political outlook, reading literature might strengthen knowledge of a culture's shared values and habits (Bloom, 1994) or increase our abilities for imagination and empathy with different cultures (Nussbaum, 1995). While it is a doctrine that becoming a reader is an indisputable social good (see Miller & Anderson, 2009; Sanden, 2014), practices like distributing or assessing texts are considered less suitable for the general public. They are regarded as more exclusive, because they require levels of expertise and authority that are often associated with institutional affiliations to publishing companies, newspapers, libraries, universities or literary journals (Benedict, 1996).

Academic discourse and empirical studies describe actors and their role in literary culture in terms of unique activities (e.g. Schmidt, 1989; Soetaert, 1990; Tötösy de Zepetnek & Sywenky, 1997). Actors can take up one of four distinct roles, each with its own area of expertise: production, mediation, reception and post-processing (Schmidt, 2010). Media research has shown that literature is now part of a complex overarching media system (Collins 2010; Striphas, 2011) and that this interaction between (new) media affects how people (can) act in relation to older media (Schmidt, 1990, 2010; see also Snyder, 2003). In the past decade, the media landscape has witnessed the introduction and increasing ubiquity of social media (see Turkle, 2012; Van Dijck, 2013). Chapter 1 demonstrated how these media are marketed as social spaces where everybody can participate equally in a variety of literary communication practices. I also argued that the design of social media environments provides support for all users to experiment with and often combine a variety of literary roles regardless of their education or expertise. As such, social media appear to contribute to the democratization of the social system surrounding literature.

Social media represent a broad set of Internet-based digital media that allow users to visualize, manage and share social connections and personal information such as reading experiences or one's taste in books (boyd & Ellison, 2007; Grosseck & Holotescu, 2012). In order to maximize empowerment and user engagement, most creators of social media environments provide little content or top-down control. Instead social media environments rely on user contributions (see Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010) and provide opportunities to autonomously produce and publish artistic, critical, informative content (Shirky, 2008; Gauntlett, 2011). Without these contributions the environments would remain empty containers. In addition to the production of content, the environments also focus on distribution and discussion of cultural artifacts by building on existing

practices (Standage, 2013), like reading groups or recommendation lists of favorite books (see Collins, 2010, 2013). Users are thus prompted to generate, circulate and assess content. As should be clear from the study presented in chapter 1, these prompts are featured prominently throughout the user-interface of the platforms in the form of imperatives such as “upload”, “comment”, “share” or “like”.

The strong focus on active engagement and peer interaction helps to reveal the social nature of literary communication practices. This calls into question the perception of literary communication as a series of solitary practices, as well as the univocally defined roles related to print literature (Collins, 2013). In addition, the developers’ discourse on empowerment of users focuses heavily on the “common reader”. Both aspects are reflected in the general concept often used in academic discourse to describe literary communication practices in social media environments: “social reading” (see Nakamura, 2013; Córdón-García, Alonso-Arévalo, Gómez-Díaz, & Linder, 2013). To some the concept may appear to be an oxymoron, which evokes and at the same time challenges the connotations of “reading” as a solitary act (Stein, 2011). Though it captures the central issues raised by the developers, the concept might not be the most appropriate one to describe the wide variety of practices in which users of social media can engage. In this chapter, I explore and describe the literary communication practices in which literary recipients – i.e. readers – engage through social media. I also analyze how recipients negotiate their role(s) in the social system surrounding literature. Based on this analysis, I will assess if and “how digital media are creating new social valences of reading” (Nakamura, 2013, p. 238)⁴ and whether the concept “social reading” is adequate to express the claim of the developers.

⁴ Research in other cultural domains affected by social media has benefited from this focus: e.g. research on practices surrounding popular music has produced detailed descriptions of the ‘professional’ activities performed by fans and of the new roles negotiated by musicians, producers and critics (see Baym, 2007; 2012; Baym & Burnett, 2009).

Method

Identifying the field

For the purpose of this study, the social media environment *Iedereenleest.be* [EverybodyReads.be] has been selected. The environment was created as part of an initiative for reading promotion organized and coordinated by *Stichting Lezen* [The Reading Foundation]. The institute is funded by the Flemish Government and aims to “inspire people from all walks of life to discover and experience the pleasures and benefits of reading, in order to stimulate their personal development and social participation” (Stichting Lezen, 2014a). Since its start in 2002, this institution has initiated a broad range of nationwide projects for reading promotion for preschoolers, middle and high school students as well as mature readers. The *Iedereenleest.be* initiative is primarily aimed at the latter category. The environment of *iedereenleest.be* presents an interesting case for studying literary communication in a social media culture from a recipient’s perspective given its name, history and structure.

The name of the initiative clearly references the popular claim that everybody is – or should become – a reader. This is also clear from the introductory message displayed on the projects main website:

“Out in the cold, in bed, on a lap, in a hammock, in secret and on the train of course. Everybody reads. But what do people read? On iedereenleest.be you’ll find thousands of reading tips. By and for readers. You can search books in different categories, but we can also provide a book that suits your current mood. Moreover, new reading tips are constantly being added. In fact, you can add books to the site yourself. Each month we hand out gift certificates ... so just do it!” [Note: I have translated this quote from Dutch]

(Stichting Lezen, 2014b)

Stichting Lezen initiates and designs its projects in accordance with the experiences and insights of practice and research. According to project manager Rune Buerman, the initial inspiration came from Nico Carpentier’s research (2003) on *BBC’s Video Nation* project. *Iedereenleest.be* was first set up in 2004 as a web platform for literary video bloggers. However, due to limited success, the project team decided to change the format of the platform from a focus on video messages to written reviews. People could access the website www.iedereenleest.be to create a personal account, to add books, to publish reviews and to read and respond to those of others. Today, the website allows users to publish written reviews of books which can be supplemented with ratings, tags or keywords, hyperlinks, video material and location information represented on a Google Map. While updating the platform in 2010, the project team also created a Facebook group named *www.iedereenleest.be – wat lees jij?* [What are you reading?] and located at <https://www.facebook.com/groups/16170829740/>. While the website focuses primarily on literary criticism, the Facebook group allows for more diverse types of

conversations about literature and reading, e.g. discussions about favorite reading spots or bookshops. In contrast to the main website, participants to the Facebook group can create posts and responses which supplement text with tags, hyperlinks, video material and images. In addition, polls or a variety of computer files can also be included.

Selecting the informants

During the study, 64 users participated on the website and 426 users contributed to the Facebook group. From this large body of users, 28 people were selected to become informants and take part in face-to-face interviews (see data collection Phase 2). The selection was based on the frequency of contribution to one or both platforms of *Iedereenleest.be* during the observation period (see data collection Phase 1). To balance the amount of information gathered from the website and the Facebook group, the selection process also included information about the total number of posted reviews. This information has been acquired from the website's participant profiles. All informants were selected in this manner, except for one participant whose presence at the social event organized by the participants of the Facebook group suggested a high level of interest and engagement, despite limited contributions to either environment during the observations.

The selected participants have been contacted via email, Facebook messaging or in person during the social event organized by the participants of the Facebook group on September 15th 2013. Ten participants agreed to become informants. Given the aim and scope of the study – i.e. to describe a fairly homogenous group of highly active users – this can be considered an appropriate sample size (see Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006). Table 6 presents an overview of the participants' contribution stats. Besides their shared interest in literature and high engagement in the environments of *Iedereenleest.be*, the informants share few other characteristics. Table 7 presents an overview of the participants' general demographic information. As stipulated in the informed consent signed by the informants, we ensure their privacy through the use of pseudonyms and the elimination of demographic information that would allow identification (see Hine, 2005; Zimmer, 2010).

Name	Website			Facebook group	
	Posts	Comments	Review total	Posts	Comments
Mark	0	0	0	4	17
Kurt	0	0	7	10	17
Albert	3	1	43	0	0
Rosie	1	0	261	17	25
Stephany	0	0	0	2	52
Koen	0	0	13	13	18
Tom	0	0	0	0	30
Herman	11	2	1385	2	10
Louis	0	0	0	2	3
Lisa	0	0	1	12	18

Table 6: Overview of the informants observed contributions to the website <www.iedereenleest.be> and the Facebook group *www.iedereenleest.be – wat lees jij?*

Name	Gender	Age	Residency	Occupation sector
Mark	Male	40-49	East Flanders	Sales
Kurt	Male	30-39	West Flanders	Food industry
Albert	Male	50-59	East Flanders	Education
Rosie	Female	50-59	Limburg	Finance
Stephany	Female	50-59	East Flanders	Fashion industry
Koen	Male	50-59	East Flanders	Education
Tom	Male	30-39	East Flanders	ICT
Herman	Male	60-69	Antwerp	Health care
Louis	Male	20-29	West Flanders	Student
Lisa	Female	30-39	East Flanders	Social welfare

Table 7: Overview of the informants demographic details. As stipulated in the informed consent, participant privacy is ensured through the use of pseudonyms and the elimination of demographic information that allows identification.

Collecting the data

The study presented in this chapter explores “reading culture ‘in the wild’” (Nakamura, 2013, p. 241) and was executed in collaboration with Jaël Muls. In order to gain insights about how literary communication is practiced and experienced in social media environments, the study builds on an anthropological framework. Many studies have successfully integrated this framework in their research on cultural practices and the negotiation of social roles in social media environments (e.g. boyd, 2010; Ito & Bittanti, 2010; Baym & Burnett, 2009; Wang & Kaye, 2011). An anthropological approach allows for research of “practice[s] as they occur naturally in sociocultural contexts” (Purcell-Gates, 2011, p. 135). Following this approach, the data collection process has been designed to consist of two phases. The first phase involves observation of the literary communication practices in the environment of *Iedereenleest.be*, both the main website and the Facebook group. The second phase consists of a series of face-to-face interviews with highly active participants.

Phase 1 – Observing activities in the field

Observation is a prominent method for data collection in anthropological research, and particularly within ethnographic research of digital environments (Hine, 2000, 2005; Boellstroff, Nardi, Pearce, & Taylor, 2012). In the current study, the procedure consisted in observing and capturing all publicly visible activities of the participants. The procedure was performed independently by two researchers. Considering the intrusive nature of observing leisure activities, the duration of this research activity was limited to three weeks to minimize the discomfort of the users. The observations commenced on July 15th 2013, after receiving formal approval from *Stichting Lezen* and notifying all users of the website and the Facebook group. Users were also extensively informed about the research, their right to withdraw from it and the procedures to do this. At the study’s start in July 2013, 5345 people had registered an account on the website and 3490 people had joined the Facebook group. Given the size of both user groups, gathering written consent from each individual user within a reasonable timeframe was impossible. Instead, group messages were sent informing users of the opportunity to be removed from the data set. Only three participants chose to opt out. The data was stored using time-stamped screen captures and *MS Excel* spreadsheets with daily observation notes. When the observation period ended on August 2nd 2013, the researchers had collected 145 reviews and 8 comments from the website and 525 messages and 1674 comments from the Facebook group.

Phase 2 – Interviewing informants

Interviewing key figures or informants is another prominent method for data collection in ethnographic research. Its main uses are to reduce the risks of deception, to avoid fragmented information associated with online observation (Hine, 2000; Rutter & Smith, 2005) and to counteract the observer's bias while increasing the potential for triangulation (see Williams, 1996; Hine, 2000; Orgad, 2005). All selected informants were interviewed between November 26th and December 6th of 2013. During that period, the researchers also interviewed project manager Rune Buerman. The interview sessions lasted between 30 and 90 minutes. Each participant was interviewed by one researcher, while the second researcher observed and took notes. A pre-composed list of open-ended questions was created in advance, but the interviewing researcher was free to pursue additional lines of questioning as new topics presented themselves during a session. This document was also used to take notes and record additional questions during the interviews. Before each session, each participant was informed of the recording, transcribing and eventual use of the data for research. All participants signed a consent form, agreeing to the recording and use of the data, whilst retaining the right to access and alter those data if they considered them incorrect or harmful. Every session was registered and copies of the recordings were stored on the researchers' laptops and an external hard drive. The recordings (from an audio recorder and a digital video camera) and notes were transcribed and stored in *MS Word* document. The document totals 66018 words. In order to facilitate data handling, all collected materials were imported in *NVivo10*.

Data analysis

Two analytic techniques were used to identify types of literary communication practices, and to analyze the informants' descriptions and reflections about these practices and their role in literary culture. Firstly, content analysis was applied to the observation material from the first phase of the data collection process. Secondly, thematic analysis was used to assess the interview material collected during the second phase of the study.

Phase 1 –Content analysis of the observation data

Content analysis is frequently applied for studying online interaction, both in experimental settings (for an overview see De Wever, Schellens, Valcke, & Van Keer, 2006) and in natural environments (for an overview see Berg & Lune, 2014). The latter approach relies on iterative and reflexive coding, rather than on pre-determined categories and inter-rater reliability scores (Altheide, 1987). In this research, the iterative approach has been applied to quantify the large body of observation data, to reveal trends that are hard to detect otherwise and create labels that can be consistently used to identify

different literary communication practices. In order to do so, researchers should ensure “that all units of analysis have received equal treatment” (Krippendorff, 1989, p.404). This study has taken great care of this by inspecting each post in the data set through various cycles of coding and documenting all problems and changes.

The iterative process started with the creation of a tentative coding scheme, based on observation notes. Next, a first round of analysis was performed by two researchers. Issues that arose during the coding process were registered in a logbook (see Markham & Baym, 2009). During a second analysis, the dataset were re-assessed to determine the accuracy of the categories and to check if each category or code was used appropriately. The researchers also addressed and resolved all issues that arose during the first round. A frequency report was generated to allow comparison of the activities performed in environments of *Iedereenleest.be*. The results from the content analysis were also used to compile an open-ended questionnaire and to select candidates for the interviews.

Phase 2 – Thematic analysis of the interview data

Interview material was analyzed through thematic analysis (Guest, MacQueen, & Namey 2012). Like content analysis, this technique can take the form of an iterative process (Braun & Clarke 2006; Grbich 2012). In this study, interview notes were used to construct a coding scheme consisting of recurring themes relating literary communication practices and literary roles. A first round of analysis was then performed. New themes or topics were added or merged with existing ones. Every change was recorded in a logbook, along with a clear explanation. In addition, references to events and self-reported activity were marked and compared with evidence from the content analysis. During a second round of thematic analysis, the two researchers revisited the data and assessed all changes to the coding scheme. Problems were discussed and resolved. Finally, before reporting the findings, the researchers revisited the data to cluster the themes in accordance with the main research questions and to select representative quotes to illustrate the themes. These representative quotes are used in the presentation of the findings in order to balance the voice of researchers and the informants (Pratt, 1986; Van Maanen, 1988; Atkinson & Hammersley, 1994; Brueggemann, 1996).

Findings

The results of the case study are presented in two sections in correspondence with the research process. In the first section, I identify, describe and compare the types of literary communication practices in which participants of the *Iedereenleest.be* initiative engage based on the content analysis of the observation material. In the second section, I present the results from the thematic analysis of the interview data to examine how the informants experience and describe these practices and their role as literary recipients in social media environments.

Phase 1 – Literary communication practices

Types

Iterative content analysis of the website and the Facebook group of *Iedereenleest.be* has shown that there are five main types of practices: formulating opinions, sharing advice, sharing information, displaying reading activities, and discussing general topics. The first category, “formulating opinions”, refers to the act of sharing personal thoughts and opinions about a book or a series of books. The second type, “sharing advice”, covers acts of “requesting” or “offering” reading advice or reading tips. The third type, “sharing information”, relates to acts of “requesting” or “offering” information about a literary work (e.g. plotlines, quotes, publishing information etc.). The fourth category, “displaying reading activities”, refers to all expressions that provide explicit information about what a person is “reading”, “has read” and “wants to read”. The fifth type “discussing general topics”, denotes topics that do not relate to a particular book, but to reading and literature in general. The topics covered in these discussions include “expressions of appreciation or gratitude”, “anecdotes”, “humor”, “news”, “contests or promotions” and “literary events”.

Frequencies

Given the large difference between the number of units – i.e. posts – on the website ($n = 99$) and the Facebook group ($n = 2199$), the measured frequencies are also presented as percentages to allow comparison of the practice patterns and their relative weight in both environments (see Table 8). It is important to note that the frequencies are not cumulative because each unit of analysis can contain a combination of practices and thus represent multiple codes.

	Website ($n = 99$)	Facebook ($n = 2199$)
Formulating opinions	94 (94,9%)	600 (27,3%)
Sharing information	87 (87,9%)	89 (4,0%)
Displaying reading activities	14 (14,1%)	239 (10,9%)
Discussing general topics	5 (5,0%)	937 (42,6%)
Sharing advice	0	216 (9,8%)

Table 8: Measured frequencies and relative weight of activities observed on the website <www.iedereenleest.be> and the Facebook group *www.iedereenleest.be – wat lees jij?*

On the website

On the website of *Iedereenleest.be*, the participants formulated personal opinions in 94 cases (94,9%). They also shared information in 87 cases (87,9%), which always involved “offerings” but no “requests”. The participants displayed their reading activities in 14 cases (14,1%), which focused on what people “had read” in 9 cases, what they “wanted to read” in 6 cases and what they were currently “reading” in 1 case. Finally, the participants discussed general topics in 5 cases (5,0%), which included 4 “anecdotes” and 1 “expression of appreciation or gratitude”.

In the Facebook group

In the Facebook group, the participants discussed general topics in 937 posts (42,6%). These instances included 733 “expressions of appreciation or gratitude”, 93 “anecdotes”, 63 items of “humor”, 14 “news” facts, 13 topics about “contests and promotions” and 9 about “literary events”. In addition, the participants formulated personal opinions in 600 cases (27,3%) and shared advice 216 times (9,8%) covering 63 “requests” and 153 “offerings”. The participants also displayed their reading activities on 239 occasions (10,9%) mentioning what they were “reading” in 99 cases, what they “had read” in 88 cases and what they “wanted to read” in 52 cases. Finally, the participants shared information 89 times (4,0%) involving 36 “requests” and 53 “offerings”.

Comparing both environments: frequencies and design

These results show that there are only a few similarities between the practice patterns on the website and in the Facebook group (see Figure 5). Though the main focus of the *Iedereenleest.be* initiative is to stimulate the exchange of reading tips, sharing advice does not seem to be the core activity in either of the environments. In fact, on the website this practice does not seem to occur at all. Instead, the practice of formulating opinions appears to be more popular in both environments.

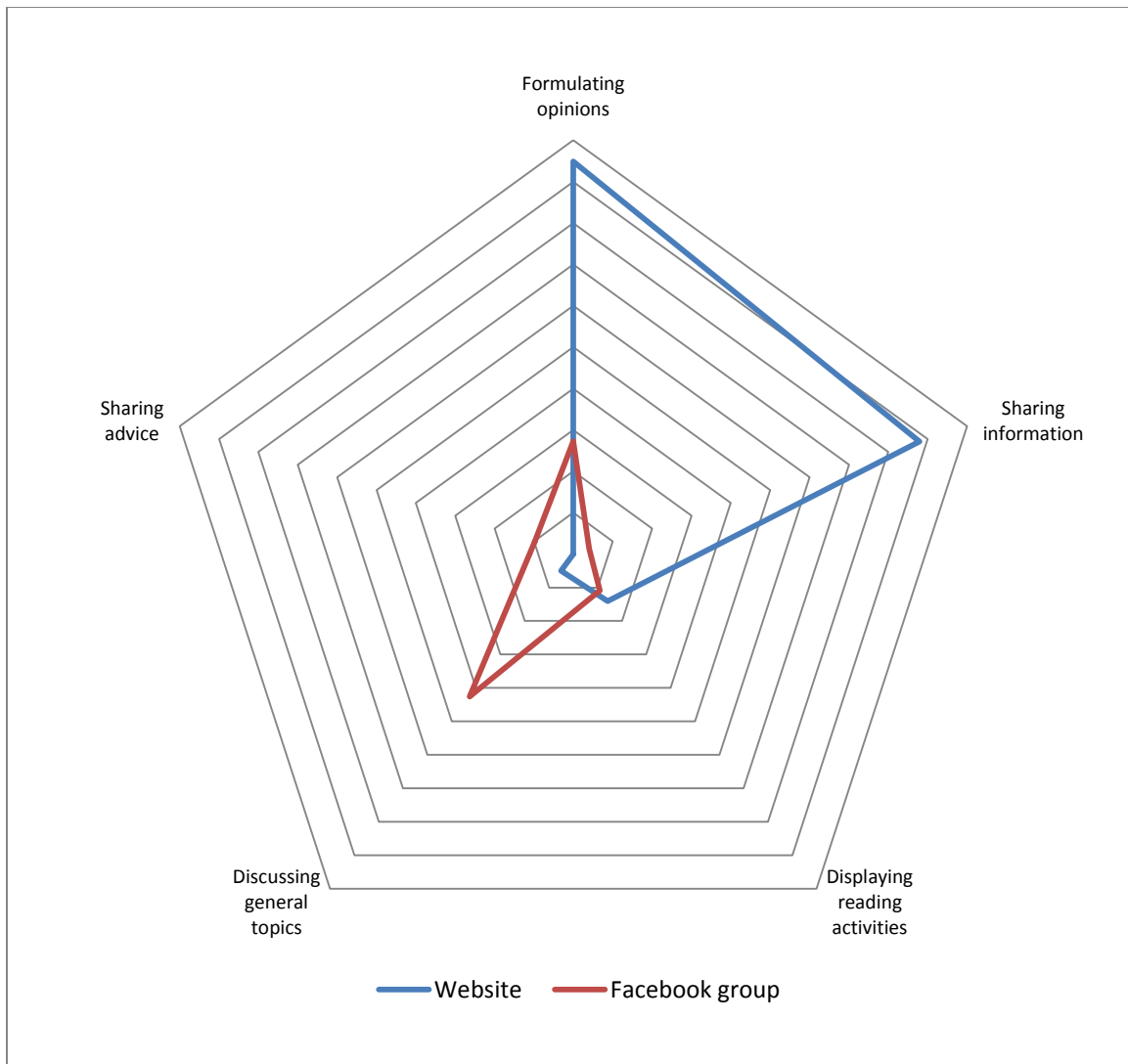


Figure 5: Visualization of the practice patterns observed in on the website <www.iedereenleest.be> and in the Facebook group *www.iedereenleest.be – wat lees jij?*

Formulating opinions is a dominant practice on the website, closely followed by offering information. There appear to be no explicit requests for information. Display of reading activities on the website seems to focus primarily on reading histories and plans. In comparison, participants in the Facebook group engage mostly in discussions of general topics with a clear tendency to express appreciation or gratitude for the contributions of others. Cross-referencing codes and their context in *NVivo10* indicates that these expressions of appreciation and gratitude consistently coincide with formulating opinions and sharing advice and information. In addition, participants in the Facebook group also frequently appear to offer as well as request advice and information. Finally, when displaying their reading activities in the Facebook group, participants appear to focus primarily on their current activities. These differences can be partly explained by comparing the design of both platforms.

The website allows users to browse an archive of books and to submit reviews. It does not provide access to a full list of users, nor does it allow users to communicate with others directly or to share a general request for advice. Users can only ask for information via a comment section which is provided under each review. Standard, however, this comment section is collapsed and thus hidden when the reviews are first displayed (see Figure 6). The website has an elaborate way of displaying recent activities in terms of books and reviews (see Figure 7 and Figure 8), but limits the display of active discussions to a small section on the main page (see Figure 8). As such, the website invites less direct interaction between users, while stimulating the practices of recording and accessing of opinions, information and reading histories. In light of this, it is also interesting to point out that the website provides limited means to search for other users directly, but instead allows users to search for others with similar interests in authors or genres (see Figure 9).

In contrast, the design of the Facebook group allows users to share general requests for information and advice, to access a full list of users and to communicate directly with them. The design of the Facebook group mimics the general structure of *Facebook* which features a live newsfeed and the opportunities to post status updates (see Figure 10). The newsfeed represents a complete overview of all contributions order in reverse chronological order, which is similar to other social media environments like *Twitter* (see boyd, Golder, & Lotan, 2010; Gruzd, Wellman, & Takhteyev, 2011). As the latest activities are presented on top, less active discussions are pushed to the bottom (see Figure 11). As discussion threads move up and down the page, it becomes increasingly difficult to keep track of particular conversations or to locate inactive discussions. Besides scrolling through the entire list, the Facebook group only provides limited options for targeted searching. Posts have no title or keywords and are not listed on the participant's profile page. It is also not possible to summon all contributions made in the Facebook group by a particular participant or to look for users with similar interests. As such, the Facebook group stimulates conversations, both related and unrelated to books, but at the same time limits the support for recording and accessing reading histories. Its design also stimulates people to keep conversations going as revisiting and reviving of past conversations can be quite daunting.

www.iedereenleest.be

Boeken Lezers Auteurs Agenda Extra Zoek Inloggen

auteur

De Kathedraal van de zee
Idefonso Falcones
Uitgeverij Sijthoff, 2007,
632 p.

DE KATHEDRAAL VAN DE ZEE
Idefonso Falcones

8 stemmen

Meer boeken uit:
Intens
Historische roman

De Kathedraal van de zee

Categorieën | Stemmingen | Nieuw op de site

Gelezen door: [Iedereenleest.be](#) (3 boeken)

Delen | | | | **Reacties (1)**

Gelezen door: [Iedereenleest.be](#) (38 boeken)

Delen | | | | **Reacties (3)**

Gelezen door: [Iedereenleest.be](#) (2 boeken)

Delen | | | | **Reacties (6)**

Figure 6: Screenshot of a book overview page <http://iedereenleest.be/?BoekID=2141>. Emphasis added in red.

www.iedereenleest.be

Inloggen

zoek

Boeken Lezers Auteurs Agenda Extra

Boeken

Categorieën | Stemminge | **Nieuw op de site**

+ geef zelf een leestip

Populaire categorieën op iedereenleest.be

auteur

(Auto)biografie

Business & economie

Cadeauboeken

Chicklit

citybooks

Cult

Detective / thrillers / misdaad

Dit is Belgisch

Dunne boeken

Engelstalig

Essay

Romantiek
483 boeken

Populair: **De gevangene van de hemel** (Carlos Ruiz Zafón), **The night bookmobile** (Audrey Nimmergeger), **De nieuwe nanny** (Tess Stimson) - **Laatst toegevoegd**; **Terug naar Wharfton Park** (Lucinda Riley), **Vanuit de verte** (Donna Milner), **Het kleine paradijs** (Hislop Victoria)

Nobelprijswinnaars
248 boeken

Populair: **Het rode korenveld** (Mo Yan), **Inner Workings Essays 2000 - 2005** (J.M. Coetzee), **In krabbengang** (Günter Grass) - **Laatst toegevoegd**; **Het geluid en de drift** (William Faulkner), **Ode aan een ster** (Pablo Neruda), **Siddhartha** (Hermann Hesse)

Figure 7: Screenshot of the overview of popular books <<http://iedereenleest.be/Default.aspx?GenreType=1>>. Emphasis added in red.



Figure 8: Screenshot detail of the main page of <www.iedereenleest.be>. Emphasis added in red.

www.iedereenleest.be

Inloggen

zoek

Boeken Lezers Auteurs Agenda Extra

Lezers

Iedereenleest.be is de grootste lezers-community van Vlaanderen. Je vindt hier duizenden leestips van en voor lezers.

Opzoek naar lezers met dezelfde literaire smaak als de jouwe?

Favoriete auteur: of favoriet genre:

Zoek

+ geef zelf een leestip

Lezers die recent een boek hebben ingevoerd op ledereenleest.be

1688 boeken, 1688 lezers, 1688 jaar

Laatst gelezen: De laatste twintig dagen van het Vaticaan (Antoine Emil), Cantus Firmus: gedichten 1993-2013 (H.C. Ten Berge), De Groote Klassenoeflog · 1914-1918 (Jacques R. Pauwels) - Favoriete auteurs: Tahar Ben Jelloun, Tom Lanoye, Geertrui Daem

lezer

Recent actief: (570)

H.C. Ten Berge (1688)

Jacques R. Pauwels (462)

Tom Lanoye (32)

Daem (29)

Antoine Emil (38)

Tom Lanoye (302)

Tom Lanoye (996)

Daem (51)

Figure 9: Screenshot of the overview of recently active readers <<http://iedereenleest.be/Default.aspx?Lezers>>. Emphasis added in red.



Figure 10: Screenshot detail of the main page of the Facebook group *www.iedereenleest.be – wat lees jij?* <<https://www.facebook.com/groups/16170829740/>>. Emphasis added in red.

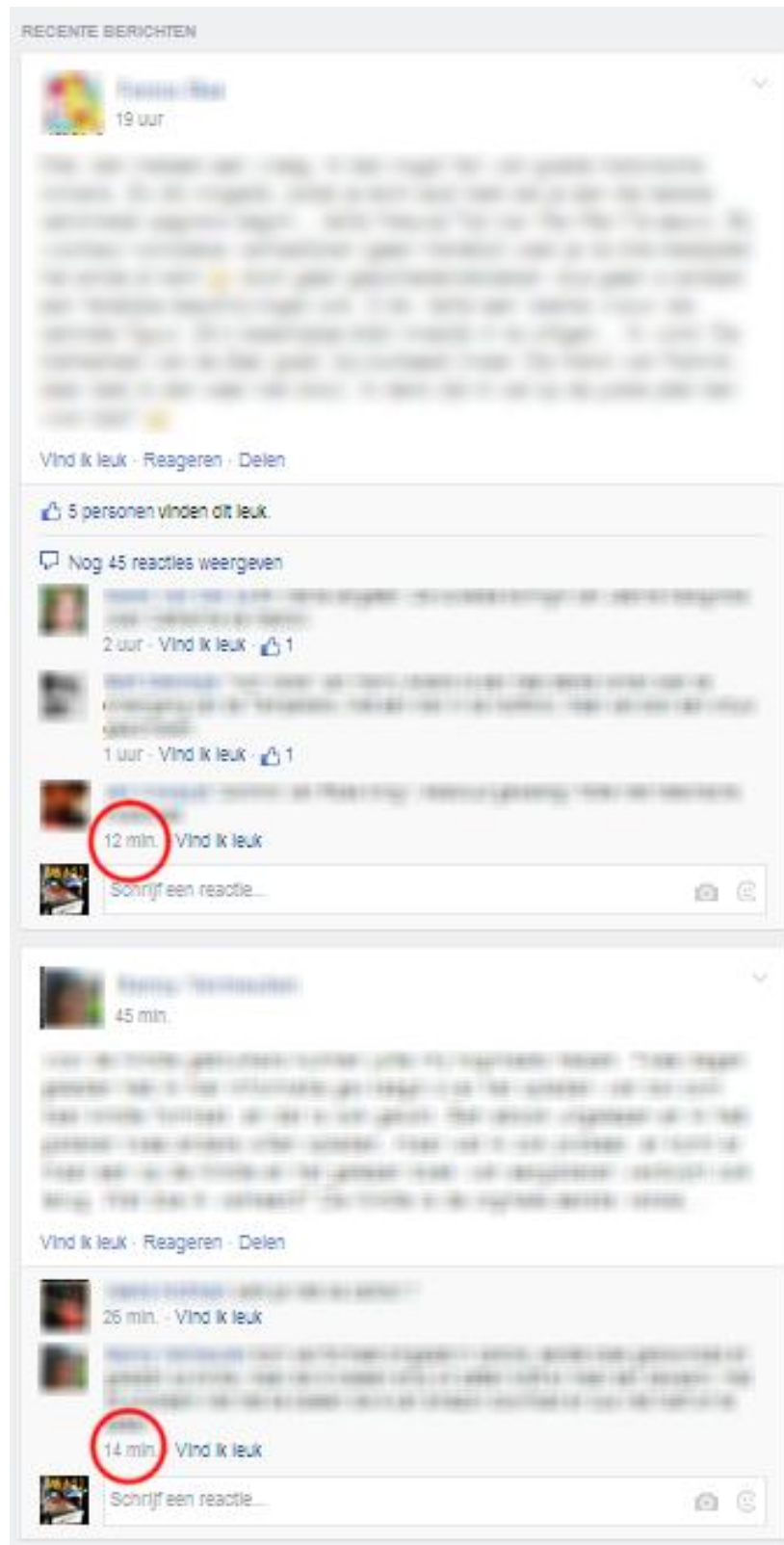


Figure 11: Screenshot detail of newsfeed on the Facebook group *www.iedereenleest.be – wat lees jij?* <<https://www.facebook.com/groups/16170829740/>>. Emphasis added in red.

Phase 2 - Experiences and reflections

In this subsection, I triangulate these findings by examining how the informants describe and make sense of their participation and role in the environments of *Iedereenleest.be*. Based on the thematic analysis of the interview transcripts I have identified four main themes. The first theme contains participants' descriptions of *Iedereenleest.be* as "a place to share reading experiences". It includes topics such as solitary reading, shared affinity and the desire to discuss reading experiences. The second theme comprises the participants' understanding of *Iedereenleest.be* as "a place to meet other enthusiasts". Here, topics like participation and social cohesion are discussed. The third main theme covers descriptions of *Iedereenleest.be* as "a place to create identity". This theme includes topics like self-presentation, trust and influence. Finally, the fourth cluster combines the participant's descriptions of *Iedereenleest.be* as "places to acknowledged and encouraged participation". This last cluster involves topics such as diversity, respect, social control and empowerment.

A place to share reading experiences

The majority of informants describe reading as a solitary activity, thereby perpetuating the dominant discourse on literary reading (see also Long, 1993). They indicate, however, that they do feel a strong need to share their experiences, thoughts and opinions about books with others. This often proves difficult because few people in their social circle have read the same books. According to the informants, the *Iedereenleest.be* initiative offers interesting opportunities to share. *Iedereenleest.be* can then be described as an affinity space, a space where people meet to engage in activities related to a particular interest or passion rather than to maintain prior social bonds (see also Gee, 2005).

I have the feeling that people are happy to be able to talk about books. In the end, reading books is a solitary affair. You sit there by yourself, in your chair, in your bed, or wherever you read. And you read a book that, well, it lets you experiences something, it brings about a certain emotion, or it creates something enduring or maybe it makes you think 'oh please, what is this?'. Eventually, most people need a place to express all that. But it is a very hard thing to do if you can only discuss it with people who know nothing about the book or have never heard of it. On Iedereenleest.be you have a forum with people who share the same interest.

(Lisa)

While discussing their opportunities to act within *Iedereenleest.be*, the informants clearly differentiate between the website and the Facebook group. Due to the structure and limitations, website activities on are felt more reminiscent of a solitary experience. The website is described as an archive, while the Facebook group is seen as a place for dialogue. Such insights provide further support for claims about

the relationship between design and literary communication practices posited in the first section of the findings.

The website of Iedereenleest has a detached character. But I think that that is its purpose. If someone wants to know something about books, that person can visit the website to check out what is being read frequently and to follow certain people. ... People see Iedereenleest.be, I think, more as an archive.

(Koen)

If you go to the website, you're still actively engaged, though in solitude. Instead, in the group, you sometimes get involved thanks to others, because they mention you for instance. You then get notifications et cetera ... As I said: the conversation is kept alive.

(Mark)

However, informants have opposing opinions when expressing their appreciation for the interaction on the website and in the Facebook group. Nonetheless, arguments are remarkably similar. Koen, who is mostly active in the Facebook group and has a background in education, explains his vision as follows:

I am reluctant to use the word 'shallow', but I do think that the communication about books [author clarification: on the website] is always a bit thin. But that's not surprising, because the medium doesn't allow for very thorough conversations about books. It does give you an idea about why a book is popular or not.

(Koen)

In contrast, Albert, who is only active on the website and also has a background in education, admits:

I am not so very Facebook-minded to participate in those discussions. I feel that they are thorough enough. Not that the discussions in our book club are very thorough, but in comparison people's reactions on the Internet are very shallow.

(Albert)

The informants feel that the structure of the Facebook group offers extensive opportunities to interact with others, and as such encourages elaborate conversations about literature. These elaborate conversations generate large quantities of information. As a consequence, they are encouraging and inspiring, as well as distracting and impractical. In addition, contributions in the Facebook group are also described as fleeting, although this is rarely considered to be a serious problem. On the contrary, some informants even perceive it as an asset.

It [author clarification: the Facebook group] has advantages, because it's easily accessible. It's practical: a lot passes by, but you don't have to visit a specialized website where you have to really search around. You have immediate access to a lot of information, which makes it fleeting, but at the same time makes it easy to access. Of course, for someone who is looking for very detailed information, this will be less convenient.

(Louis)

A place to meet enthusiasts

The discussions on interaction and communication inspire many informants to compare people's level of engagement in the different spaces. Based on their prior experiences, some informants estimate that only one in ten users actively contributes to *Iedereenleest.be*. Web statistics provided by *Stichting Lezen* confirm these estimates. The informants and developers also identify a significantly smaller subgroup among the frequently active participants: the "hard core" of *Iedereenleest.be*. This distribution of engagement coincides with distributions measured in other online environments (see e.g. Nielsen, 2006). Many of the recruited informants identified each other as part of the "hard core". Interestingly though, the informants never refer to themselves as such.

You always get responses from the same people. It feels as though there is a hard core on Iedereenleest.

(Lisa)

According to developer and project manager Rune Buerman, the contact and social cohesion between the members of this core group appeared to be rather limited before the introduction of the Facebook group:

We did have a group of regular users and a group of, well, what I call sporadic users, ... who discovered the website and then added a book, but after that contribute maybe once or twice, at most. So there were two major groups, and the hard core users were present, but it wasn't really a group, I mean, it wasn't a group of people who interacted a lot with each other.

(Rune)

The informants agree that the format of the Facebook group offers more opportunities to establish social contact and increase social cohesion among the participants. Studies have shown that this can help to increase the level of engagement and participation among users (e.g. Bishop, 2007; Bateman, Gray, & Butler, 2011). Many informants report to have experienced a strong form of cohesion among the members of the core group in the *Iedereenleest.be* environment on *Facebook*. They also admit

that they have been puzzled and surprised about this cohesion due to the fact that most members have never met each other in face-to-face encounters.

The Facebook group of Iedereenleest is more close. It's a group of people who are strongly connected to each other, which still makes me wonder 'do they really know each other', 'how does that connection work exactly'?

(Koen)

I've been shocked by how tight the group actually is. Then [author clarification: when he returned to the group after a few weeks of absence] I noticed that there is quite a bit of social control, that there is a strong cohesion in the group.

(Tom)

In some cases, the informants report that the social connections have been extended beyond the environments of *Iedereenleest.be* or even the digital sphere. One example is the social event organized by the participants in September 2013, which was the first of its kind. The informants do stress that the social connections established in the Facebook group, both digital and physical, contribute to the emotional value that they attach to their engagement in the *Iedereenleest.be* initiative. Herman explains:

If they ever close down the group, I think that that will be a day of mourning for many people. ... I got to know a lot of people on that Facebook group. Like Mark [pseudonym]. I would never have got to know him. Or Marianne [pseudonym]. Various people of that group. ... It is always nice to talk to people with the same ideas ... I really notice that. Friendships emerge on the Facebook group, simply through books.

(Herman)

Given the lack of demographic similarities among the informants and based on their descriptions, the core group seems to resemble what academic theory has called an "imagined community" (Anderson, 1983; see also boyd, 2006). A recent attempt to translate the theory of imagined communities to the online sphere has identified four major characteristics of imagined communities in social media environments: membership, integration and fulfillment of needs, shared emotional connection, and influence (Gruzd, Wellman, & Takhteyev, 2011). Considering the descriptions provided by the informants thus far it is reasonable to conclude that the first three elements can be applied to the participants identified as the "hard core" of the Facebook group of the *Iedereenleest.be* initiative. Discussion of the third theme will show that the fourth element, namely influence, also applies to the participants in the core group.

A place to create identity

As discussed in relation to the first theme, most informants joined the *Iedereenleest.be* initiative to take advantage of the opportunity to discuss their experiences, thoughts and opinions with others, rather than to establish strong social connections. Koen, for instance, describes his engagement as follows:

In the Facebook group I can get things of my chest. I can talk about what a book has done to me. I want to show people that I have read it.

(Koen)

Koen's statement suggests that the desire to share also includes an element of self-presentation. Later in the interview, he relates this element to the activities of the core group, arguing that they engage in expressing taste and experience:

... a way to create an identity for themselves, to present themselves to the outside world.

(Koen)

Other informants confirm Koen's assumptions as they describe how identity is created in the environments of *Iedereenleest.be* through sharing of reading experiences and histories, opinions and preferences, knowledge and advice. In addition to the descriptions, the informants discuss the importance of exhibiting taste and experience. They suggest that it instills a sense of familiarity and trust among participants, which increases as more information is shared. According to the informants, this allows them to engage in conversation with other participants or to be inspired and influenced by them. In light of this, many informants refer to members of the core group as reference points: people they follow or turn to for advice on literature and reading.

... of course there are always a number of people who share your taste, which allows you to exchange ideas et cetera.

(Kurt)

There's Herman [pseudonym] who writes a lot. Him, I check out quite frequently. And then there's that guy who reads the most comic books. ... There are a number of people that I really check out, because they write the most. Or I check out books that I am reviewing myself, I always do that to check out what others think of it.

(Rosie)

These reflections provide further insights into the creation and importance of identity in social media environments and add empirical support for theories discussed in the previous chapter. At first glance, the quantity of what people read and share appears to be the primary criterion for trusting and

following them. Rosie explains that it is the quantity that gives her an impression of the experience and potential expertise of a particular person. She adds that it is not just about the quantity, but also about the choice of books. She admits that following specific people's reading activity in the environments of *Iedereenleest.be* has influenced her own selection of books. In a similar fashion, Tom explains that his reading activity has been influenced by certain participants:

Because most of those people dare to share, for example, what they have read or how big their library is. Some of them even post pictures of them. So, those are people whose opinions I feel confident enough about to take serious. Because they have a significant background. ... I feel as though they now what they are talking about.

(Tom)

In addition to ample reading experiences, the informants also agree that a participant's contributions must meet a certain standard in order to be considered trustworthy. For many informants, reviews or reading suggestions consist of at least a few well-written sentences that touch upon the positive and negative aspects of literary work. Bullet point lists and overly positive or negative reviews are often met with suspicion. Many informants actively contribute to setting the standard through their own participation, while others experience inhibitions due to these expectations.

I would love to do that, write reviews like that, but I feel that I can't. I don't know, it's a feeling I have... I do try to share reviews in the Facebook group of Iedereenleest, but after a few sentences I already don't know what to say anymore. And I'm afraid to spoil everything ... to reveal the ending.

(Tom)

While Tom's quote indicates how setting an example can inhibit participation, it also shows how the act of sharing one's passion and enthusiasm might motivate others to do the same. For Tom the example has become something to aspire to. This can also apply to exhibiting reading activities. Several informants explain that the reading activities of others have inspired them to read more, to explore other genres or even to change their purchasing habits. In chapter 4, reflections from the participants will include similar statements.

Does it make people read more? One thing I noticed: I do buy more books now.

(Rosie)

Just now, in the car on the way over here, I was thinking about whether it has influenced me. Yes, I have really bought books that were recommended there, and that I would perhaps not have bought on my own accord before I joined the group.

(Stephanie)

If you buy books online for years on end, you no longer have an eye for independent bookstores. But then suddenly, that one Iedereenleest-meeting got things going. I started to gain a lot of respect for what those people do [author clarification: refers to Mark, who owns and runs an independent bookstore].

(Kurt)

Several informants point out that participants also actively ask and take advice from people. While the act of following is mentioned in relation to both environments of *Iedereenleest.be*, exchanging advice is only discussed in relation to the Facebook group. This is in line with the findings from the observation. Mark points out that requests for advice are mostly directed towards all participants in the Facebook group, rather than specific individuals. He suggests that requests to individuals, if they occur, are mostly communicated through private messages:

... by now, a lot of people know that I own a bookshop, so they also expect certain information from me through that forum or they ask me directly. ... But they generally do that through private messages. So that doesn't go on the forum.

(Mark)

Mark's quote indicates that he feels that his occupation as a literary professional has contributed to a particular authoritative status within the Facebook group environment. On various occasions during the interview, Mark states that he tries not to take advantage of his position and to remain a reader. He explains that this is one of his main reasons for redirecting personal requests for advice or information to private messages.

I try to really limit that [author clarification: public responses to personal requests]. Because, as I said before, I was a member of the forum first before I bought the bookstore. And that's why I have an account in my personal name. I could create an account for the bookstore as well, but I have made a conscious decision not to.

(Mark)

A place to acknowledge and encourage participation

During the interviews, the informants reflect on how mutual respect has stimulated them to participate in *Iedereenleest.be*. All informants explicitly state that mutual respect is a crucial aspect of the interaction between the participants from the core group of *Iedereenleest.be*.

I've noticed that there is some sort of mutual respect in the group ... that they feel as though everyone can openly express an opinion about what he or she likes to read and that it is treated with a lot of respect.

(Tom)

Discussions on this topic often include recollections of previous experiences within social media environments. The informants point out that openness and freedom of speech are generally well-established in social media environments, but that respect is often lacking. Many informants attest to witnessing a lot of disrespectful actions such as flaming in other social media environments. Studies of online behavior have shown that disrespect and aggression are indeed common in social media environments (e.g. Moor, Heuvelman, & Verleur, 2010; boyd, 2014) and become more frequent and intense when participants can contribute anonymously (e.g. Mungeam & Crandall, 2011; Lapidot-Lefler & Barak, 2012; Bishop, 2013). The informants explain that these experiences have often motivated them to stop contributing and to retreat from these environments. In contrast, the informants feel respected, appreciated and safe in the environments of *Iedereenleest.be* in general, and in the Facebook group in particular. Indeed, the observations have pointed out that participants in the Facebook group often express appreciation and gratitude for the contributions of others. These reflections stress the importance of acknowledgement (see also Gee, 2005) or self-affirmation (see also Toma, 2010).

*As for the Facebook group, I don't think there are enough of these initiatives, stimulating people to talk to each other in a kind and friendly manner. And that's what happens there: people don't use abusive language, because that gets removed. I think that people should be able to have a discussion without starting a rant, because I cannot deal with that. That's when I immediately disengage. I hardly visit discussion platforms because, well, either you are too left-wing, or too right-wing, or ... there's always something wrong. ... And on Facebook, on *Iedereenleest.be*, you can just say what you think without having to be afraid of being expelled because it is too ... well, like I said, it's the most friendly group that I know.*

(Herman)

Herman's example hints at the presence of some form of social control and self-governing in the *Iedereenleest.be* environments. Examples and anecdotes from the other informants corroborate this assumption. They point out that the *Stichting Lezen* seldomly interferes with the activities performed on *Iedereenleest.be*. Rune Buerman confirms and explains that the development team only engages in gentle post-moderation on the website and spam removal in the Facebook group. Other actions against abuse by the developers are always the result of an explicit request from the users. According to Rune and the informants, this rarely happens. They point out that in the Facebook group a couple

of participants from the core group have spontaneously taken responsibility for managing and resolving disputes. All informants express their appreciation for the way the developers and the participants handle the self-management in the Facebook group.

People's opinions are treated with respect there, which is quite different from other fora. Even if someone interjects by saying something like "if you think that's a good book, then you're an idiot". ... Than that person is immediately expelled from the group. If you can't act according to our norms, than you can just leave ... Respect for everyone's opinion! That's the main rule! ... I think it's something that emerged spontaneously. The group has administrators who, I guess, observe everything from a distance. But then you've got a number of very active members who start to moderate on their own accord, allowing the administrators to observe and think "okay, just let them handle it themselves" ... And I think that's good too. They don't have to participate. That's not their duty, as long as everything happens according to the 'rules' and check in once in a while on how things are going.

(Mark)

The informants' understanding of respect involves recognition and appreciation of diversity as well as the use of appropriate or non-violent language. Most informants indicate that it is this form of respect that motivates them to continue to contribute in the environments of *Iedereenleest.be*. Even so, some informants doubt whether this applies to other, less frequent users as well. Rosie, for instance, wonders:

... if there are still people who don't respond because they are afraid of doing something wrong or being laughed at. I don't know.

(Rosie)

Tom's reflections on his first contributions to *Iedereenleest.be* can provide a valuable clue:

Unfortunately, we live in a society that frequently spews negative comments. That contributed to my fear to share something in the group. Eventually I did just try it: ... But everyone responded positively. They even said things like: 'I might read it myself', 'I'm going to keep this in mind', 'I'm going to have a look at it', 'I'm going try it to see if it suits me'. I thought that was all very positive and so I started to contribute more and more.'

(Tom)

These reflections suggest that respect is crucial for encouraging less experienced contributors to continue their participation. Perhaps the enthusiasm and success of their peers can even provide a vicarious experience for these novices and thus convince them to make a first attempt at contributing.

CHAPTER 2

Nonetheless, Rosie's observation and Tom's earlier reflections call for caution. It is very unlikely that the exhibition of enthusiasm and respect alone is sufficient to inspire ambitions or to overcome inhibitions for cultural participation in everyone. Instead, the reflections from the informants have stressed the importance of an inherent passion for literature and reading, as well as a desire to share that passion through conversations with others. Enthusiasm and respect appear to be essential, however, for cultivating that passion and desire.

Discussion

Summary

Starting from a recipient's perspective, I presented a detailed description of literary communication practices in social media environments. Based on content analysis of an extensive body of observation material, I identified five main types of literary communication practices in which recipients engage: formulating opinions, sharing advice, sharing information, displaying reading activities, and discussing general topics. A comparison of the frequency patterns revealed interesting difference between both environments of *Iedereenleest.be*. I argued that these differences can be partly attributed to the design of each environment. In addition to this first set of descriptions, I also documented how the recipients of literary work describe these practices. Based on thematic analysis of the informants' reflections, I discussed four ways in which literary communication and social media are characterized: sharing reading experiences, meeting other enthusiasts, creating identity, and acknowledging and encouraging participation. This second set of descriptions confirms the findings of the observations and provides insight into how the informants understand and appreciate the social aspects of literary communication practices. They also reveal how the informants perceive and negotiate their role within social media environments.

Conclusions

The findings from this study provide a first opportunity to assess the claim that social media contribute to making literary communication practices more social. The reflections of the informants indicate that social media indeed function as affinity spaces and stress the social aspects of literary communication. They offer evidence that engagement in social media environments is primarily motivated by a passion, in this case for literature, as well as a desire to share that passion. The evidence also confirms the importance of acknowledgement and encouragement, and indicates how these can be stimulated by the design of the social media environments and the willingness of the participants to express appreciation and to honor diversity. This suggests that social media can indeed be perceived as democratic spaces where people can participate equally and assume various social roles, but it stresses the importance of establishing a community of practice that leads by example and takes action in case of conflict and abuse.

The results of my study also serve to problematize the concept "social reading" to refer to a myriad of literary communication practices in which users of social media engage. The concept of social reading primarily seems to stress the conversations about reading. The findings have shown that social media indeed support interaction and conversations about literature. However, the reflections of informants have also shown that the opportunities to interact also stimulate a form of impression management

CHAPTER 2

and self-affirmation. The informants have suggested that the expression of taste and experience are important for the creation of an identity of avid and passionate reader. This provides confidence to engage more frequently in offering advice and information and formulating opinions. As such, participants continue to develop their skills and extend their identity to include authority as an intermediary or a literary critic. As appreciation and recognition of their efforts increase, they also become instructors, leading others by example. This indicates that the claim of social media developers not only refers to the support of social interaction, but also to the support of acquiring different social roles – i.e. the democratization of the social system surrounding literature. In light of this, the reference to “reading” must be considered restrictive and inappropriate. Indeed, the implied contrast between “reading” and “social” only seem to accentuate the support of social interaction, while obscuring the opportunities for social promotion that social media claim to offer.

CHAPTER 3: LITERARY PRODUCTION IN SOCIAL MEDIA ENVIRONMENTS

5

⁵ This chapter is based on:

Vlieghe, J., & Page, K.L. (2013, October). *"Twitter, the most brilliant tough love editor you'll ever have."* *Literary Literacies, Social Reading and the Twitter Fiction Festival (#TFF)*. Paper presented at InfoSocial 2013: A Media, Technology, & Society Graduate Research Conference, Evanston, IL.

Vlieghe, J., Rutten, K., & Soetaert, R. (2014). *Cultural participation & professional development in social media culture (D2.2.3)*. Brussels, Belgium: EMSOC reports.

Abstract

This chapter focuses on producers of literary work – i.e. writers – and their engagement in the *2012 Twitter Fiction Festival*. Data for this study include reflections from 14 authors who participated in this innovative online, literary experiment. It includes transcripts of two one-hour focus group discussions mediated through *Twitter*, source material relating to the participants contributions during *2012 Twitter Fiction Festival*, and observation material relating to the participant profiles, network and online activity. Based on an extensive and iterative thematic analysis of these data, I present a detailed description of the types of literary communication practices that have emerged during and in the wake of the *2012 Twitter Fiction Festival*. Moreover this chapter also includes a close examination of the participants' reflections regarding their literary communication practices, outlining how producers of literary work interpret their engagement in these practices through language and discourse. The description consists of five main clusters that indicate how producers experience and contribute to the negotiation and redistribution of identities and social roles related to literary communication.

Introduction

The claim that social media are making literary communication practices more social pertains transcends the activity of reading. In this chapter, I examine this claim in relation to literary production – i.e. writing. By focusing on the social aspect of literary communication, the claim contests the common perception that literary practices are often performed and enjoyed in solitude. Historical studies of literary participation and language education have pointed out that formal education often contributes to the support and reproduction of this stereotype (e.g. Eagleton, 1985). Following a skills-based approach of traditional language education in the 1970's and 1980's, writing, reading, listening and speaking are conceptualized as detached units of study. They are often taught and assessed as separate skills performed in solitude following a rigid sequence of increasing competence (see Gee, 2004; Ray & Cleaveland, 2004; Cooksey, Freebody, & Wyatt-Smith, 2007). This approach highlights literature as a product, rather than as a communicative practice and cultural process (Mottart, Vanbrabant, & van de Ven, 2009). As such, this perspective obscures many of the social or interactive processes by which literary works are created, disseminated, consumed and appreciated (Long, 1993).

In contrast, prototypical examples of literary communication often take place in a social context and include literary festivals, poetry nights, author readings, book clubs, parents and teachers reading to children as well as the more formal writers' workshops. These events and practices are often marked as "authentic", suggesting that literature is supposed be performed in a social context. . Indeed, in *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*, Walter Ong (1982) explains that many cultures have a strong oral tradition in which literary texts are often passed exclusively through oral performance. This transaction of literary content occurred in a face-to-face interaction between speaker and listener and was thus by definition social.

Furthermore, literature also has a socializing function that enables people to gain insight into the practices and understanding shared by society. Wayne Booth (1988) argues that "*no human being, literate or not, escapes the effects of stories, because everyone tells them and listens to them. (...) fictions are the most powerful of all the architects of our souls and societies*" (pp. 38-39). However, by presenting and teaching literary communication skills as separate and solitary activities, this social function is gradually obscured and reduced. Literary events risk becoming something for experts, while ordinary people lose sight of the fact that literary communication practices support the development of writers and their work (Harris & Graham, 1996) as well as those who experience it. Through performances and discussions, writers are able to take advantage of the opportunities to express ideas, ask questions, and create meaning (Moll, 1986; Moll & Diaz, 1987; Goodman & Wilde, 1992; Flood, Lapp, & Heath, 2004). This dialogical process of performance of and discussion about literary practices allows writers to construct an identity and claim a social position (Ivanič, 1998; Barton, Hamilton, & Ivanič, 2005).

CHAPTER 3

The way social media are presented, however, emphasizes many of the social aspects of literary communication (see Scharber, 2009; Kiili, Laurinen, Marttunen, & Leu, 2012), which stimulates practices that “build upon habits and conventions that date back centuries” (Standage, 2013, p. 5). In his work *Bring on the Books for Everybody: How Literary Culture Became Popular Culture*, Jim Collins (2010) argues that social media are transforming our understanding of literary communication practices from “a thoroughly private experience ... [to] an exuberantly social activity” (p. 4). This transformation also involves a structural change within literary culture. Social media environments create new spaces and infrastructures for experiencing literature (Collins, 2010, p. 2). Within these social and cultural spaces, the distribution of social roles and expectations can be renegotiated. Empirical studies of literary communication have pointed out that “the acting possibilities of actors in the social system of [print] literature are institutionally distributed onto four action dimensions: production, mediation, reception, and post-processing” (Schmidt, 2010, p. 124; see also Schmidt, 1997). Based on Niklas Luhmann’s (2000) work *Art as a Social System*, writing is placed within the dimension of “production”. Drawing from these theoretical insights, this chapter examines (1) what type of literary communication practices emerge in social media environments, particularly in relation to literary production, and (2) how users describe and interpret their engagement in these practices. This second question will provide additional insight into negotiation and redistribution of roles or action dimensions related to literary production.

Method

Identifying the field

This study focuses on the social media environment *Twitter* and the practices related to tweeting as and about literature. Existing research on *Twitter* and the practice of tweeting has focused mainly on describing the phenomenon (e.g. Krishnamurthy, Gill, & Arlitt, 2008; for an overview see Williams, Terras, & Warwick, 2013). Nonetheless, a small but growing group of studies has examined the use of *Twitter* in relation to particular activities, such as advertising (e.g. Jansen, Zhang, Sobel, & Chowdury, 2009), political campaigning (e.g. Cetina, 2009), and protesting (e.g. Galer-Unti 2009), teaching (e.g. Parslow 2009), and collaborative learning (e.g. Holotescu & Grosseck, 2009). It has also been suggested that social media practices are changing who we perceive and experience reading and writing (see Greenhow & Gleason, 2012). Indeed, the practice of tweeting has inspired various literary experiments, from Teju Cole's non-fiction narrative series *Small Fates* (2011) to Jennifer Egan's fully tweeted novel *Black Box* (2012). It has even inspired experiments in literary criticism known as *TwitCrit* (Trubek, 2012). To date, however, explorations in relation to literary culture appear to be absent. By studying the use of tweeting practices for the creation of literary fiction during the 2012 *Twitter Fiction Festiva*/I have tried to fill this void.

In November 2012, Twitter Inc. curated the first ever *Twitter Fiction Festival* (#TFF) with the support of its @TwitterBooks account. According to organizer and spokesperson Andrew Fitzgerald the intent of this five-day literary event was to showcase live creative experiments in storytelling (Fitzgerald, 2012a). The festival included 30 invited festival participants who were selected from proposal submissions reviewed by a panel organized by @TwitterBooks. The participants originated from 5 different continents and tweeted in various different languages, including English, Spanish and French. In addition to the officially selected participants, other Twitter-users were encouraged to participate as well and share their own writings through public invitations.

Selecting the participants

Given the complicated and potentially intrusive nature of tracing and contacting these "regular" or leisure-time users (see Hine, 2000; 2005), this study draws exclusively from the experiences of the participants who were officially selected by the festival organizers. I contacted all 30 official festival participants via email or *Twitter* and received positive response from 21 participants. The participants were informed that their contribution to the research would involve a focus group discussion mediated through *Twitter* in real-time. Most participants were located in different time zones and due to scheduling difficulties, several of them had to drop out. In total 14 participants were able to contribute to the focus group discussion (see Table 9 & Table 10). Each of these participants

contributed to one of the mediated discussions, with the exception of Bituur Esztreyrn who participated in both sessions. All participants agreed or even insisted on being identified by their full name or Twitter handle in all publications related to the study.

Collecting the data

Three types of data have been collected. The first group of data consists of insights and reflections shared by the participants during two focus group discussions, as well as observation notes recorded during those discussion sessions. The second group of data consists of screenshots and observation notes relating to the participant profiles, network and online activity including – but not limited to – social media participation. The third group of data involves source material about the *2012 Twitter Fiction Festival*, relating specifically to the participants contributions during the festival.

The focus group discussions took place on Thursday 21st and Friday 22nd of February 2013. Each session was hosted in real-time over the period of one hour. Like the *Twitter Fiction Festival*, the discussions were set up in the social media environment of *Twitter* using the dedicated hashtag #TFFDiscuss. To inspire reflection and stimulate conversation, one researcher posted questions from a pre-designed list while a second researcher observed and documented. Tweets from the participants were captured and recorded in real-time using the Twitter API search function and the #TFFDiscuss hashtag. In order to ensure that no data was lost due to improper use of the hashtag, the participants were also tracked individually during the discussion sessions. Using a pre-designed algorithm, the results returned by the Twitter API were streamed live into a *Google Spreadsheet* and later exported into an *MS Excel* spreadsheet for archiving, resulting in a total set of 526 tweets (Thursday $n = 230$ tweets; Friday $n = 296$ tweets). The observations were recorded in a 3684 word field note document.

In addition to the focus group discussions, the participants' profiles were documented, as well as their network and online activity. This involved collecting data by visiting participants' Twitter profiles, documenting their tweeting practices and then following all hyperlinks provided in the profile descriptions. These links led to personal or professional websites, Facebook profiles or Facebook pages, as well as various other social media platforms. In order to compile a rich descriptive narrative for each participant, the data were combined with secondary material relating the participants' contributions during the *Twitter Fiction Festival*. The entire process of documentation was performed by two researchers via *Skype*. In addition to the evidence, the discussions and the individual observations of the researchers were also documented in a shared *Google Document* that consists of 19,463 words and 95 images.

Name	Gender	Country	Twitter handle	Followers	Tweets	Following	Created
Lucy Coats	F	UK	@lucycoats	2815	13644	1552	07/22/09
Stevie Ronnie	M	UK	@stevieronnie	249	333	260	10/27/11
Bituur	M	France	@bituur_esztreym	405	24889	321	12/10/10
Joseph Paris	M	France	@josephparis	1151	4000	388	09/21/08
ieoluwapo odedere	M	Nigeria	@hypoxia13	342	5815	475	01/10/11
			@daily nuggets	71	916	94	17/08/09
Lauren Beukes	F	South Africa	@laurenbeukes	12689	34274	325	04/13/09
Gregory Barron	M	Australia	@gregorybarron	1107	5188	1059	03/05/11

Table 9: Overview of the participants who contributed to the focus group on Thursday 21st February 2013. Information such as name, gender, location and Twitter handles was collected through observation and documented in field notes: 20th Feb – 16th May 2013. Details relating to the separate Twitter accounts were collected through API request 5th February 2013. Missing data was collected manually: 20th Feb – 16th May 2013.

Name	Sex	Country	Twitter handle	Followers	Tweets	Following	Created
Bituur	M	France	@bituur_esztrey	405	24889	388	12/01/10
Mélodie Etxeandie	F	France	@meloditx	416	4486	535	01/07/10
Claude Meunier	M	France	@dubalai	328	7919	477	04/11/10
Josh Gosfield	M	USA	@JoshGosfield	2766	459	511	07/23/09
			@FathomButterfly	2573	493	27	04/11/12
Dana Sachs	F	USA	@DanaSachs	189	873	289	08/15/12
Ben Schrank	M	USA	@BDSchrank	837	844	452	08/28/11
			@TedRothstein	9	105	12	24/11/12
Lauren Mechling	F	USA	@LaurenMechling	1328	2094	365	26/06/09
			@VeronicaPym	17	81	2	27/11/12
Andrew Shaffer	M	USA	@andrewshaffer	6002	43558	51944	03/16/09
			@ProudZombieMom	281	87	112	12/07/11
			@evilwylie	8826	19261	2658	23/07/10
			@emperorfranzen	2380	3004	1381	25/08/10

Table 10: Overview of the participants who contributed to the focus group on Friday 22nd February 2013. Information such as name, gender, location and Twitter handles was collected through observation and documented in field notes: 20th Feb – 16th May, 2013. Details relating to the separate Twitter accounts were collected through API request 5th February 2013. Missing data was collected manually: 20th Feb – 16th May 2013.

Analyzing the data

Based on the collected material, the researchers analyzed how the participants perform, describe and reflect on their literary communication practices in social media environments. They focused primarily on the activities during the festival. In addition, they also assessed the participants' broader discussions about literary communication, and literary production in particular, both in social media environments and traditional literary culture.

In order to facilitate this process, the tweets from the focus group discussions were collected on two separate *Storify* pages, which are available at <<http://storify.com/drkellypage/tffd Discuss-thursday>> and <<http://storify.com/drkellypage/tffd Discuss-friday>>. In each *Storify* document, tweets were first grouped according to the order of the questions asked during the discussion. The tweets were then organized by the conversational sequence or order. The sequence and context of each tweet was checked to confirm the correct order by using the nested conversation function of *Twitter*. Afterwards the order was checked again using the time stamps on tweets in the *Google* and *MS Excel* spreadsheets.

To analyze the collected data five main themes were developed based on initial observations of the discussion sessions. After the first reading, a second round of analysis was started, focusing on grouped conversations and individual tweets. The analysis consisted of an iterative process: moving back and forth between the tweets and the conversations around them, as well as the rich descriptive narrative of each participant. The five key themes were applied and more detailed subthemes were identified. The entire coding process was recorded in a *MS Word* document. To facilitate organization, the researchers used *Word's* paragraph-level and internal navigation function. This enabled the creation of a thematic map with different levels for themes and subthemes, providing easier navigation throughout the different forms of evidence. Similar to the previous chapters, the following sections present the outline of this thematic map or narrative while combining representative examples and relevant insights from academic literature to show the richness and complexity of the data.

Findings

Author or Artist: Finding the right label

Each discussion session started with a request for a short introduction by the participants. To emphasize the focus of the study, the request explicitly referred to descriptions in terms of authorship. The responses to this question immediately revealed a contrast among the participants. On the one hand, several participants adhered to the terms “author” or “writer”, which are traditionally used to refer to “producers” of literary work (see Schmidt, 1997). On the other hand, various participants problematized these labels and their connotations in light of the practices in which they engage as literary producers.

The first group consists of three types: descriptions that use the traditional labels “author” or “writer”, descriptions that use traditional genre labels for classifying literary work, and descriptions that use traditional audience labels for identifying targeted or intended readership. Some participants’ descriptions present a combination of these different types. All of these descriptions represent and reproduce the dominant discourse related to print literature.

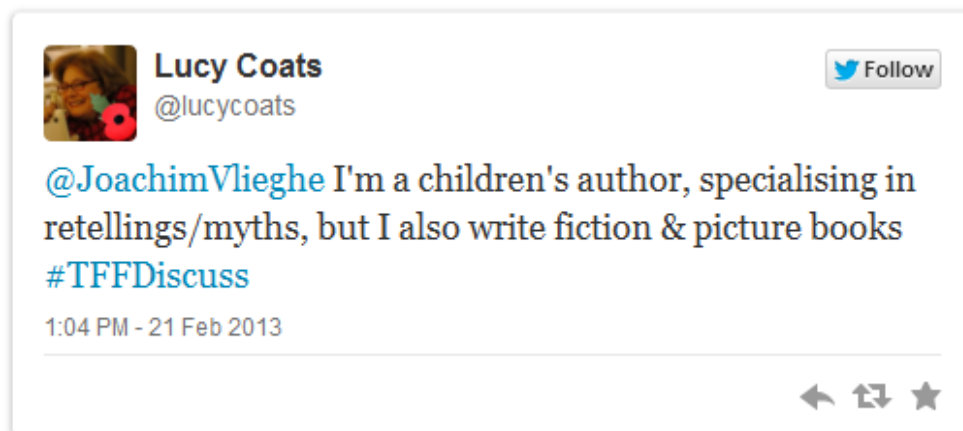


Figure 12: Tweet retrieved from <<https://twitter.com/lucycoats/status/304562117548322816>>

The participants recognize that these labels and self-descriptions also impose a number of limitations on literary producers, not only in relation to form and practice, but also socially. They feel that social media allow them to reach out and receive recognition for their work and engagement from others, both producers and recipients of literary fiction. Creating literary fiction is presented as a passion and related to a strong need to share. In addition, the *Twitter Fiction Festival* is presented as a place to explore that passion and discover interesting experiments of others.



Figure 13: Tweet retrieved from <<https://twitter.com/gregorybarron/statuses/304566984891326465>>

"Amen, brother! RT @gregorybarron: Being a writer means that I can write without feeling guilty."

"'Being a writer' is my job. But also my life. Can't disengage my brain from making up stories - ever!"

"I'm active, engaged, interested, happy to find new ideas/books/article/people & chat about books & reading."

(Lucy Coats)



Figure 14: Tweet retrieved from <<https://twitter.com/lucycoats/statuses/304569547036430336>>



Figure 15: Tweet retrieved from <https://twitter.com/bituur_esztrey/statuses/304571124837122049>

The second group of descriptions represent the participants' negotiation of alternative labels based on examples of their creative practices during the *Twitter Fiction Festival*. Various participants indicated that they find it hard to identify themselves with the labels "author" and "writer". They consider these labels to be restrictive because of the reference to a particular set of actions related to the production of print literature and the exclusion of various creative digital practices. They stress the constraints and shortcomings of the common labels "author" and "writer" by describing the creative practices in which they engage.

"I had an idea of form of #Twoetry: just as exist artist books, collaboration between a writer 1/n"

"2/n and a painter or illustrator, why not make "artist tweets": same collaboration, & let's apply same constraint: 140"

"it was itself a twitter thing, i mean, i write besides, but these were conceived on & for Tw[itter]"

(Bituur Esztrey)

"my twitter fiction poem existed as a performance and in print as an artist book"

(Stevie Ronnie)



Figure 16: Tweet retrieved from <<https://twitter.com/stevieronnie/statuses/304571849252143104>>

In order to question the use of traditional labels even more, Bituur Esztreym and Stevie Ronnie present additional examples that would typically fall outside the scope of existing definitions or images of the “author” or “writer”. As a way to address this problem, the participants propose alternative labels. Stevie and Bituur, on the one hand, suggest the label “artist” which is commonly used in other disciplines of the Arts to denote producers of creative work. Mélodie Etxeandia, on the other hand, puts forward the label “player” which aligns with the description of her contribution to the *2012 Twitter Fiction Festival* as a “game”.

"when the words disappear or the page / screen is less important, I'd say artist."

"I'm not sure there is a difference, but perhaps it is useful for an audience to have a label"

(Stevie Ronnie)



Figure 17: Tweet retrieved from <https://twitter.com/bituur_esztreym/statuses/304564558859735041>

Tweeting as literary production: a comparison between print and social media

Andrew Fitzgerald (2012b) describes the selected works of the *Twitter Fiction festival* as a diverse array of creative experiments. Indeed, data relating to the participants' contributions during the festival reveals literary texts in a wide variety of forms. Based on the participants' discussion of these texts and their conception, four characteristics can be identified in relation to literary production on *Twitter* in general, and production during the *2012 Twitter Fiction Festival* in particular. These characteristics are: fragmentation, curation, responsiveness and playfulness.

Retrieving the practice of fragmented writing

Some of the world's most famous long prose fiction narratives were first published as small fragments in literary periodicals, for instance *A Tale of Two Cities* by Charles Dickens (Grubb, 1945). Fiction writing on *Twitter* mimics this kind of fragmented publishing as the length of individual tweets is restricted to 140 characters at a time. In addition, tweets are instantly shared in the *Twitter* environment once a user submits them by clicking the "publish" button. The participants explain how these features of *Twitter* challenge them to adapt their writing practices.

"Real-time responses are part of the magic of Twitter, and cause you to think on your feet."

(Andrew Shaffer)

"I got some gray hairs due to technical difficulties - no rewrites on Twitter."

"How much useless crap you can cut out of your writing and not lose a thing."

(Josh Gosfield)



Figure 18: Tweet retrieved from <<https://twitter.com/JoshGosfield/statuses/305058230453813248>>

CHAPTER 3

Several participants refer to these challenges as the main difference between tweeting and traditional writing. Furthermore, they describe tweeting as quick, fun and unpretentious. In contrast, they describe traditional writing as a craft that demands a lot of time, hard work and sacrifice from the literary producer. Traditional writing as a form of literary communication is said to be cold, lonely and heartbreaking. The participants try to express this idea through the image of *The Poor Poet* (Spitzweg, 1839) which represents an impoverished poet working in a damp and dimly lit room (see Figure 19). As such, they confirm the dominant perception of traditional literary communication as a solitary practice (see also Eagleton, 1985; Long, 1993).

"quick, fun, unpretentious"

(Claude Meunier)

"Yes, "quick" and "fun" aren't normally associated with "writing." Twitter = outlet."

(Andrew Shaffer)

"Quick and fun" Yeah trad. writing is glacial and heartbreaking."

(Josh Gosfield)

Although tweeting is described as "quick" and "fun", the participants still indicate the need to invest time, thought and consideration into it. By providing details about their creative process, the participants point out that tweeting can actually involve rewrites and careful planning. This results in two interesting conversations about adaptation through literary practice. The first conversation relates to the embarrassment experienced when publicly making grammatical errors and the ability to see the poetic potential of these errors. The second conversation relates to literary genres and traditions and how they can be adopted and adapted in social media environments.



Figure 19: Tweet retrieved from <https://twitter.com/bituur_esztrey/statuses/305056145217814528>

CHAPTER 3

Conversation 1:

"@JoshGosfield but for lone tweets you can delete & repost sometimes. i do it sometimes for a typo or formulation not convincing"

(Bituur Esztreym)

"Ahhh @bituur_esztreym: so you've figured out how to game the system."

(Josh Gosfield)

"Well almost all typos, but definitely when reading my tweet me eyes bleed 8) or when i forget the"

"sometimes i let go. or got lazy :)"

(Bituur Esztreym)

"MT @bituur_esztreym: The TYPO are the scarlet letter(s) of shame on Twitter and I commit the sin often"

(Josh Gosfield)



Figure 20: Tweet retrieved from <https://twitter.com/bituur_esztreym/statuses/305052551231983616>

"MT @bituur_esztreym: \"i don't care, shame moment is fast forgone.\" I'm going to follow your example."

(Josh Gosfield)

"RT @dubalai: /twas a night... / oh? typo? happy typo, then, which gave such a nice word!"

(Bituur Esztreym)

Conversation 2:

"BTW, my project was about creating small sets of interconnected stories using linked tweets."

"I had the idea thinking about the fact that you (obviously) can link only to previously existing tweet.->"

"<- It occurred to me one could write a story backwards, linking from the end to the beginning."

(Alberto Chimal)

"@albertochimal wow, & pops the idea of linking to future tweets.. that would be something"

(Bituur Estreym)

"It was actually harder than I had thought, because I planned the structure in advance."

(Alberto Chimal)



Figure 21: Tweet retrieved from <<https://twitter.com/albertochimal/statuses/305060101423771648>>

"We have Ramos Sucre, Borges, Torri, Arreola and others as precursors."

"Perhaps traditional flash-fiction deals a lot more with building tension and character through allusion"

(Alberto Chimal)

"@albertochimal Flash Fiction is more elegant, I think, than Twitterfiction."

"Twitterfiction can't be a new literary genre."

(Ben Schrank)

"I think so, though the length restriction is even more spartan (and stimulating)."

(Alberto Chimal)

"@albertochimal one i love is @tejucole. his story-tweets are fantastic. [don't remember exactly, think discovered him +/- 4 TFF"

(Bituur Esztreym)

"MT @Geert_VanDerMee: Hemingway allegedly did one" Which inspired the 6 word memoir by @larrysmith"

(Josh Gosfield)

".@Geert_VanDerMee @JoshGosfield Ah, yes. A similar one by Mexican author L. F. Lomelí: THE MIGRANT "Forgot something?" "I hope.""

".@bituur_estreym Yeah, @tejucole makes a very interesting flash-almost-fiction. :) Another one I follow is @jeffnoon."

(Alberto Chimal)

Obsolescing opportunities for curating literary narratives

Henry Jenkins (2013) pointed out, in his work *Textual Poachers: Television fans and participatory culture*, that the fragmented production of texts inspires readers to move in and out of different media environments in search of text snippets. As they engage in this process of gathering and assembling narrative elements, the readers' ownership of their literary experiences increases. In some cases, that ownership is even more increased by producing additional elements often labeled as fan fiction. In other artistic disciplines, like music production, this process has been studied from a producer's perspective (e.g. Baym, 2007, 2012; Baym & Burnett, 2009). In relation to literature, however, the implications of participatory culture for the literary producer have remained largely unattended. Regardless, popular discourse about literature in the digital age often associates practices such as fragmented reading, remixing and self-publishing with the demise of attentive reading, rich narratives and printed books (see Soetaert, 2006; Striphas, 2011).

Analysis of the participants' contribution to the focus group discussions has indicated that the participants of the *2012 Twitter Fiction Festival* have a desire to guide or curate readers' literary experiences. Like Alberto Chimal, many other participants describe their creative practice in terms of planning and structuring of a reading path. These discussions touch upon both the challenges and opportunities presented in this respect by the *Twitter* environment. The absence of synchronicity and the variety of entry points into the narrative are simultaneously problematized and celebrated.

According to the participants, the main problem is presented by *Twitter's* focus on real-time experiences. *Twitter's* design is said to interfere with the flow of the narrative. Indeed, *Twitter's* newsfeed represents an endless live stream which combines unrelated text messages that originate from thousands of different sources (Gruzd, Wellman, & Takhteyev, 2011). These messages are automatically organized in reverse chronological order (boyd, Golder, & Lothan, 2010). Like *Twitter's* search function that only retrieves tweeted messages up to seven days old, the newsfeed favors recent activities. This makes it difficult for readers to trace the different fragments of the narrative or for the literary producers to attract the attention of new readers. Again, the participants compare tweeting and traditional writing.

"Being a writer is ultimately about conversation, and Twitter facilitates that quite easily."

(Andrew Shaffer)

"@andrewtshaffer Is being a fiction writer about conversation--about being in the conversation?"

(Ben Schrank)

"@BDSchrank I like to think so. Being in conversation, generating conversation..."

"Writing fiction is also about talking to someone 200-300 years in the future too. Time travel!"

(Andrew Shaffer)



Figure 22: Tweet retrieved from <<https://twitter.com/DanaSachs/statuses/305061934041034753>>

"@DanaSachs Yes, like so many great conversations I've had with friends, it fades away..."

(Andrew Shaffer)

At the same time, some participants also praise the real-time aspect of *Twitter's* design. They focus on the opportunities to create anchor points that allow readers to navigate from fragment to fragment. Indeed, *Twitter's* design presents a number of interesting opportunities to create links between fragments and thus to create a networked structure. As pointed out by Alberto Chimal's project for the *2012 Twitter Fiction Festival*, individual tweets have a unique URL address (see Figure 23). This allows literary producers to create direct links between fragments, thereby creating a reading path. Other design elements include the mention, retweet and hashtag function which allow literary producers to create conversations (see also boyd, Golder, & Lothan, 2010). In addition to creating a networked archive of messages (see Figure 25), these functions also allow the combination of multiple accounts or voices (see Figure 24). As such a "multidimensional realtime" can be created, as Bituur Esztreyrn explains. While the practices of the participants showcase attempts to add structure and linearity to the fragmented narrative, their reflections suggest that this is done mainly to create multiple entry points and thus multiple reading paths.



Figure 23: Fragment from Alberto Chimal's *MuchoPasados* (2012). Tweet retrieved from <<https://twitter.com/hkustos/status/273668926683086848>>



Figure 24: Fragment from Ben Schrank and Lauren Mechlings's *All Aboard the HMS Astute* (2012). Tweet retrieved from <<https://twitter.com/TedRothstein/status/274947097638359040>>



Figure 25: Sonnet from Joseph Paris, Claude Meunier, Mélodie Etxeandia and Bituur Esztreyim's #TwitRature series (2012). Image retrieved from <http://33.media.tumblr.com/tumblr_mearsctFXH1r4ils2o1_1280.jpg>

Reversing literary communication from solitary writing practice to responsive performance

Literary texts were communicated orally for many centuries (see Ong, 1982). Literary production and reception were part of shared real-time experiences before the introduction and commodification of books. It was only after books became popular and easy to produce that printed text became the dominant way to communicate literary texts. As a consequence, the direct contact between producers and recipients was diminished. Regardless, literary communication practices continue to have a performance aspect as authors still write their texts for an audience, and often even perform these texts live during author readings. Nonetheless, literary production is rarely seen as an act of performance (see also Bauman, 1984), as is clear from the image of the solitary writer.

Based on the reflections of the participants, the practice of tweeting and *Twitter's* focus on real-time experiences appears to reverse that perception by stressing the performance aspect of literary production. This includes taking on the role of a character in a story, but also being responsive towards the audience – i.e. the readers. Ben Schrank and Lauren Mechling's narrative *All Aboard the HMS Astute* (2012) is an example of embodiment. Another example which was discussed more extensively during the focus group sessions is Josh Gosfield's embodiment of @FathomButterfly in his *Twitter Fiction Festival* contribution *Memoir in tweets* (2012). Josh describes the character of @FathomButterfly as his alter ego. In addition, he also presents @JoshGosfield – i.e. his own voice – as a character in the story. Similarly, Andrew Shaffer states that he “manage[s] 3 or more acts a day” thereby also referring to his own @andrewtshaffer Twitter account as an act or a character.



Figure 26: Tweet retrieved from <<https://twitter.com/FathomButterfly/statuses/305045272772374528>>



Figure 27: Tweet retrieved from <<https://twitter.com/JoshGosfield/statuses/305046680976375809>>

"One of the frustrations of twitter is trying to manage the tweeting of yourself and your alter ego."

(Josh Gosfield)

"@JoshGosfield I manage 3 or more acts a day using Tweetbot on my Mac and iPhone."

(Andrew Shaffer)

"@andrewtshaffer you're a better identity thief than me."

(Josh Gosfield)

Josh's attempt and failure to take on the voice of both @JoshGosfield and @FathomButterfly (see Figure 26 and Figure 27) inspires another conversation about planning and structuring. In this case, the conversation focuses on the danger of automated tweeting and the lack of responsiveness. Andrew explains that the real-time and multidimensional nature of the *Twitter* environment necessitates flexibility and improvisation. He places tweeting and traditional writing in contrast, by referring to tweeting as stand-up comedy or improvisation art. In support of Andrew's plea for sensitivity to contextual changes, Josh introduces an image from the movie *Modern Times* (Chaplin, 1936) to suggest the disastrous effects of scheduled or automated tweeting. A conversation between Lucy Coats and Bituur Esztreyem presents a similar contrast. Bituur argues that a moment of delay in the traditional production process gives the literary producer the opportunity to take control of the situation. Instead, he observes that the directness of speaking "has you coping with conditions of expression at that moment" and "yourself is what you express".

"@JoshGosfield Scheduling is a dangerous thing!"

"Scheduling tweets is dangerous bcuz it's easy to mess up the time/date."

"Scheduling tweets is also dangerous bcuz if there's a disaster of bad news you look insensitive."

(Andrew Shaffer)



Figure 28: Tweet retrieved from <<https://twitter.com/andrewtshaffer/status/305051357470146562>>

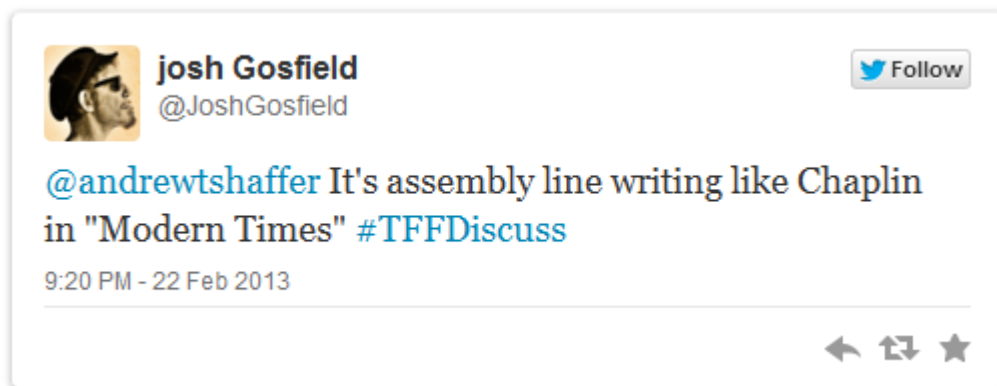


Figure 29: Tweet retrieved from <<https://twitter.com/JoshGosfield/statuses/305049423824711682>>

The metaphor of “tweeting as stand-up” also leads to a discussion about reader responses or reception and interaction with the audience. Both Josh and Andrew indicate that the opportunity to interact with readers represents a major attraction point of *Twitter*. This resonates with how other participants express their interest in *Twitter* and the *2012 Twitter Fiction Festival*. There are, however, distinct differences in how the relation between producer and recipient is perceived by the participants. This is apparent from the contributions of the participants to the *2012 Twitter Fiction Festival* and their reflections regarding the goal and design of these contributions.

"MT @Geert_VanDerMee: and you can get hecklers? A: Oh how I wish. That'd be fun."

(Josh Gosfield)

"@Geert_VanDerMee @ JoshGosfield Yes! Hecklers, trolls...better than no response at all."

(Andrew Shaffer)



Figure 30: Tweet retrieved from <<https://twitter.com/andrewtshaffer/statuses/305052736850886656>>

The different approaches to interaction and literary production are often reflected in the design of the participants' creative work featured at the festival. A first approach involves the use of a detailed script or a pre-existing text. The readers are described as “audience” and a sounding board. Here, reflections regarding interaction mostly refer to “feedback” and encouragement. This is the case for Ifeoluwapo Odedere's *#noLight – A Satire* (2012), Gregory Barron's collaboration on *Around the World in 80hrs* (Gemmell et al., 2012), and Lucy coats' *100 Myths in 100 Tweets* (2012).

"Feedback is important especially for fiction [because it] tells you if your audience is following."

(Ifeoluwapo Odedere)

"Good feedback fuels and buoys, but I can handle the other kind."

(Gregory Barron)

"Because I write for kids feedback/beta-readers are essential."

(Lucy Coats)



Figure 31: Tweet retrieved from <<https://twitter.com/lucycoats/statuses/304577616759902208>>

A second approach involves creative work that relies on improvisation. This type of work is often presented as live performance. Participants involved in this kind of work often discuss interaction in terms of "*connection*". Connection then refers to the intent to prompt readers to share their thoughts and feelings about the work. Examples of such work featured at the festival are: Stevie Ronnie's *e_L_L_i_p_s_i_s* (2012), Andrew Shaffer's *Proud Zombie Mom* (2012), and the *#TwitRature* project of Joseph Paris, Claude Meunier, Mélodie Etxeandia and Bituur Esztreyim (2012). It is interesting to note that each of these examples were started up several months prior to festival and continued during the festival to showcase the work to new readers – i.e. establishing new connections. For each of these examples, the participants note that it was difficult to establish these new connections.

"perhaps I wanted to people to share things that were too personal to them?"

(Stevie Ronnie)

"I didn't find that one week to build an audience/followers was sufficient for interaction"

(Andrew Shaffer)



Figure 32: Tweet retrieved from <<https://twitter.com/josephparis/status/304581954249048064>>

"I don't think a lot of people replied to us during the festival... #TFFDiscuss I think I lost followers ! :-D"

(Mélodie Etxeandia)

A third approach relies on improvisation, but focuses heavily on "participation". Dana Sachs' (2012a) *The Stone Soup Literary Dinner Party* and Lauren Beukes' (2012a) *#Litmash* are examples of this approach. Both examples rely primarily on prompts from its readers. Hence, interaction plays a crucial role in these projects, as is also reflected in their announcement by Andrew Fitzgerald on the Twitter Blog. In addition to these invitations on the Twitter Blog, Dana and Lauren also personally asked for participation via *Twitter* and other digital platforms. For Lauren, who already had a wide network on *Twitter*, establishing interaction appeared to present few problems. For Dana, who was relatively new to *Twitter*, it was much more difficult to engage other Twitter users. She concludes that it is a misconception to believe that people on *Twitter* are inclined to "participate naturally."

"Come to dinner with Dana Sachs (@DanaSachs), who will be working with different literary characters to serve up Stone Soup, a celebration of great writing and (perhaps) truly bizarre food. Saturday at 8pm EST (01:00 GMT)"

(Fitzgerald, 2012b)

"Tomorrow: Stone Soup #ltdinner at #twitterfiction fest. Characters come with grub they love. 12/1 8-10 pm EST More at <http://ow.ly/flcwY> "

(Dana Sachs)

"I'm inviting all readers and writers to make the party a tribute to our love of literature by tweeting contributions to the hashtag #ltdinner. (If you can't get involved at exactly that time, don't worry! The dinner has started already and will continue at #ltdinner after the showcase period ends.)"

(Sachs, 2012b)

"Writing from South Africa, author Lauren Beukes (@laurenbeukes) will challenge herself to write #LitMash stories: taking incongruous community suggestions (the weirder the better!) and telling a story that matches them. Wednesday, Thursday and Friday at 10am EST (15:00 GMT)"

(Fitzgerald, 2012b)

"#litmash is now open for suggestions! Hit me with your craziest genre/style mash-ups for the story I have to write #twitterfiction"

(Lauren Beukes)

"I'll be running #Litmash, a Tweet-sized story writing-game that relies on incongruous genre/style literary mash-ups. Everyone can play! ... It's open to everyone, so please play along and write your own in 114 characters (plus the hashtags #twitterfiction #litmash)."

(Beukes, 2012b)



Figure 33: Tweet retrieved from <<https://twitter.com/DanaSachs/statuses/305051530095112192>>

Enhancing playful experimenting with literary communication practices

New media often inspire producers of creative work to experiment with forms and conventions. In his book *The Language of New Media*, Lev Manovich (2001) argues that “the task of avant-garde new media artists today is to offer alternatives to the existing language of computer media”. (p. 10). In the call for participation in the *2012 Twitter Fiction Festival* (Fitzgerald, 2012a), that notion of avant-garde art and experimentation is also associated with content production through *Twitter*. The *Twitter* environment is presented as “a frontier for creative experimentation”, while participants are invited “to push the bounds of what’s possible with Twitter content” either by exploring existing content formats or by creating new ones (see Figure 35). Most participants agree that this is what attracted them most in the festival. They describe their interest in the festival in terms of experimentation and personal challenges, but also in terms of curiosity and inspiration.

The call for participation appealed to the curiosity of the participants, most of whom had already discovered *Twitter* as a place to learn about inspiring experiments. Various participants indicate that they had identified the *2012 Twitter Fiction Festival* as an opportunity to become familiar with the various ways in which literary communication practices can be adopted and adapted in social media environments. In a previous section of this chapter, I already presented an outtake from the participants’ discussions that is equally relevant here. During that discussion Stevie Ronnie expressed his interest in “how things can exist on many platforms”. Stevie recognizes that any form of communication, including literary communication, requires unique design choices that depend on the context of the medium (see also Kress, 2004). The participants note that contemplating these design issues presented an interesting and inspiring challenge as well as an opportunity to learn from the choices of others.



Figure 34: Tweet retrieved from <https://twitter.com/bituur_esztrey/statuses/304567032941252608>

"definitely more interested in using it as material, tool, place for writing #TFF was great for this"

(Bituur Esztreym)

"I wanted to know-who is gonna be the C. Dickens of Twitter?"

"I can't wait till we have our first bona-fide twitter fiction writing genius. Someone is going blow our minds."

(Josh Gosfield)

"I wanted to see how to make Twitter fun, goofy, a little bit inspiring."

(Dana Sachs)

"It kinda made me want to do it regularly. It was a really fun warm up exercise for longer writing projects."

(Lauren Beukes)

The participants frequently refer to their contribution to the festival as a "challenge" and describe it as a "fun" and "surprising" learning experience, as is clear from some of the quotes above. This suggests that the participants have introduced a certain degree of playfulness in their contributions. Indeed, for many participants the *Twitter Fiction Festival* presented an opportunity to play with constraints such as character and time restrictions. Though most participants refer to the same constraints, the design of their projects indicates a different focus. Lucy's project *100 Myths in 100 Tweets*, for instance, focuses on the adaptation of existing content. Other projects focused on the adaptation of existing literary genres, like Flash Fiction in the *MuchoPasados* project (Chimal, 2012) or sonnets in the *#Twittrature* project.

The references to literary tradition through content and genre provide support for observation that practices in social media environments often rely on existing forms of expression and communication (see Ingleton, 2012; Standage, 2013). Participant Bituur Esztreym even points out that this also applies also applies to the practice of playful experimentation through rules and constraints. He explicitly compares this practice with a French literary movement and practice from the 1960's known as "OuLiPo" or "Ouvroir de Littérature Potentielle". Some famous examples of OuLiPo are Rayond Queneau's *Cent-Mille Miliards de Poèmes* (1961) and Georges Perec's *La Disparition* (1969) and *Les Revenentes* (1972). Using the term "OuTwiPo", Bituur and his colleagues Claude and Mélodie embed the *#Twittrature* project in the tradition of this avant-garde movement. At the same time, they also use the term to indicate that the practices and techniques are not just imitated, but specifically designed and adapted to the medium of *Twitter*.



Twitter is a place to tell stories. Often those stories are about news, or politics, or perhaps sports or music, but it turns out Twitter is a great place for telling fictional stories, too. As one professor from Michigan State University [says](#), “Tweeting can be thought of as a new literary practice.” We want to celebrate that.

At the end of November, we'll host a five-day Twitter Fiction Festival — a virtual storytelling celebration held entirely on Twitter. The Twitter Fiction Festival ([#twitterfiction](#)) will feature creative experiments in storytelling from authors around the world.

Twitter has hosted great experiments in fiction already, from Jennifer Egan's “[Black Box](#)” to Teju Cole's “[Small Fates](#)” to Dan Sinker's [@mayoremanuel](#). And Twitter has even inspired [some literary criticism](#).

Now we want to go further! Twitter is a frontier for creative experimentation, and we want to invite authors and creative storytellers around the world to push the bounds of what's possible with Twitter content.

If you'd like to take part in the Twitter Fiction Festival, [submit your idea here](#). Tell us how you are going to explore content formats that already exist on Twitter — short story in Tweets, a Twitter chat, live-tweeting — or, even better, how you'll create a new one. How will you work with our real-time global platform, where anyone can contribute to your story at any moment? The proposal must fit into the time window of our five day festival — but that means that a project could run for the length of the festival, or just for an hour.

We'll announce the selected authors and festival agenda on Monday, November 19th and the festival itself will kick off on November 28th. We look forward to reading all of your stories.

Posted by Andrew Fitzgerald - [@magicandrew](#)
Editorial Programming, Media Team

Figure 35: Blog post by Andrew Fitzgerald (2012a). Retrieved from <<https://blog.twitter.com/2012/announcing-the-twitter-fiction-festival>>

"Recasting 100 myths as tabloid tweets for TFF was the ultimate storytelling challenge for me!"

"It seemed like an interesting exercise in experimental fiction – 140 concentrates the mind."

(Lucy Coats)

"In Latin America there is an old tradition of flash-fiction since the 20th century. Twitterfiction seems an upgrade sometimes :)"

"though the length restriction is even more Spartan (and stimulating)."

(Alberto Chimal)

"to let people see our #Twitration, and to try to do it in shorter time than before."

"To write coerced of little time (one hour for two sonnets) was an intense experience."

(Joseph Paris)

*"@josephparis yeah more ore less. *twoetry*-poetry as a digital creative form of base jump? #Twitration #OuTwiPo #TFFDiscuss"*

(Bituur Esztreym)

"@bituur_esztreym hé @meloditx OuTwiPo #Twitration? Nothing Po (Potential)..."

(Claude Meunier)

"@bituur_esztreym @dubalai OUvoir de TWIt POTentiel ??? It makes sense."

(Mélodie Etxeandia)



Figure 36: Tweet retrieved from <https://twitter.com/bituur_esztreym/statuses/305053629478469632>

CHAPTER 3

In some cases the playfulness of the experiment is maximized by referring to projects in *Twitter Fiction Festival* as “outlets” and “games”. The term “outlet” comes up in relation to Andrew’s project *Proud Zombie Mom* and Alberto’s project *MuchoPasados*. The term “game” is used to refer to the *#Litmash* project of Lauren, Dana’s *The Stone Soup Literary Dinner Party* project and the *#Twittrature* project from Bituur, Joseph, Claude and Mélodie. Both terms are used to express a desire to experiment and a need to interact with others. In nearly all cases the experiments involve improvisation, with the exception of *MuchoPasados*. In relation to interaction, however, each case appears to be quite different. For Alberto, who talks about his project in terms of an “outlet”, the interaction with others consists of sharing his writing quickly with a broader audience. Similarly, Andrew sees his contribution as an opportunity to reach out to new readers, but he also tries to include elements from the context like reader responses. Bituur, Joseph, Claude and Mélodie describe themselves as players who take turns and respond. The *Twitter Fiction Festival* gives them the opportunity to showcase this process of creative collaboration and to make it a more intense experience. Lauren also presents her project as a game, where she is challenged by the readers who provide her with inspirational prompts. Dana takes this one step further by engaging the readers as co-authors in her writing game. The first three projects depend on the input and creativity from the literary producers, while participation from the readers is pivotal in the latter two.

“I wanted an outlet, of course, and a chance to find new readers, as I tweet mostly in Spanish.”

(Alberto Chimal)

“How would I describe my TFF project... real-time storytelling?”

“However, I didn’t find that one week to build an audience/followers was sufficient for interaction”

“@dubalai Yes, “quick” and “fun” aren’t normally associated with “writing.” Twitter = outlet.”

(Andrew Shaffer)

“@andrewtshaffer “quick” and “fun” | smthing like music (jazz) : constraint + impro + others”

“|2 players, each time: 2+3+4+5 verses = sonnet !”

(Claude Meunier)



Figure 37: Tweet retrieved from <<https://twitter.com/dubalai/statuses/305053345385697280>>

"@dubalai yes, the time was a new rule in our game"

"fun because it's a game with nothing to win :-)"

(Mélodie Etxeandia)

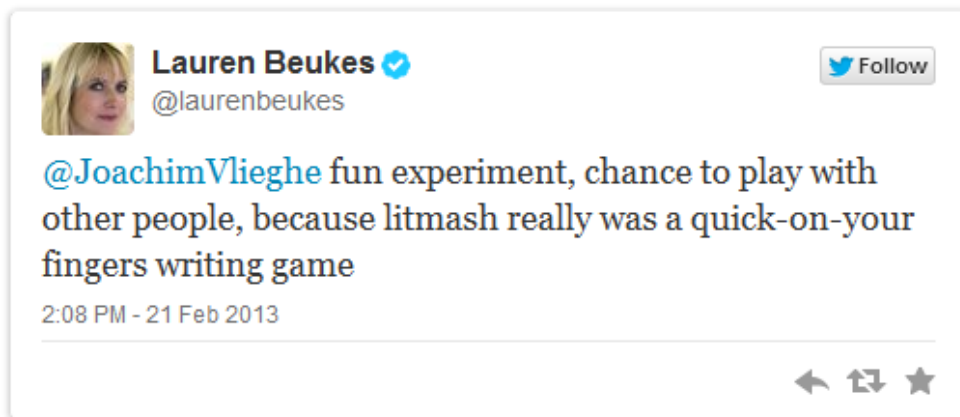


Figure 38: Tweet retrieved from <<https://twitter.com/laurenbeukes/statuses/304578294672683008>>

"Hoping to pick up a few more followers, but mostly chance to test myself to come up with as many stories as poss"

(Lauren Beukes)

"My TFF was a sort-of game (or group story) that any literature lover could contribute to. I called it "Stone Soup Dinner Party"."

"My stress was that I needed other people to contribute. Otherwise it would fall flat."

(Dana Sachs)

Discussion

Summary

This chapter examined how the literary producers experience and contribute to the changes of literary communication practices in social media environments. This involved documenting the participants' contributions to the *2012 Twitter Fiction Festival*, resulting in a detailed description of the types of literary communication practices that emerge in social media environments. In addition, this chapter also included a close examination of reflections of the participants regarding their literary communication practices. Based on thematic analysis of these reflections, I added extra detail to the description by outlining how producers of literary work interpret their engagement in these practices through language and discourse. The description consists of five main findings. Firstly, the labels "author" and "writer" were problematized and tentatively replaced by alternative labels such as "artist" and "player". Secondly, tweeting was presented as a challenging but pleasant revival of fragmented writing. Thirdly, the limitations and affordances of *Twitter's* design have been discussed in relation to the decreasing opportunities to curate narratives. Fourthly, the participants' experiences in the *Twitter* environment have contributed to a transformation in their perception of storytelling, changing it from writing for a distant and imagined audience, to performing for a live and responsive group of recipients. Fifthly, the *Twitter Fiction Festival* has inspired curiosity and playful experiments with content, form and interaction.

Conclusions

The findings of this chapter show how producers of literary works negotiate their social role by experimenting with different communicative practices and engaging in discussions about literature and fiction writing. The producers problematized the limitations and constraints of traditional approaches and perceptions of literary production. They do so by presenting strong contrasting metaphors of traditional writing and social media practices. These metaphors stress the idea of page-bound writing as a solitary practice. Furthermore, the participants explain how their literary communication practices reproduce and simultaneously transform literary traditions by using the unique opportunities and affordances of social media. This transformation involves highlighting the social aspect of literary production by presenting fiction writing as an interactive performance.

The descriptions of literary producers also reveal a strong, almost inescapable passion for storytelling. This passion motivates the participants to engage in literary events like the *2012 Twitter Fiction Festival*. The participants explicitly celebrate social media environments for providing spaces to share their passion with fellow enthusiasts. Participating in these spaces offers producers an outlet for their creativity and their desire to communicate. The constraints and opportunities offered by the design of

social media are often incorporated in the creative practices of the participants. This results in a wide variety of literary experiments which often include a playful collaborative set up. These playful experiments are mostly conceived as interactive performances that are limited in time. They rely heavily on active contributions from other users and improvisation by the literary producer. This requires the literary producers to continuously engage others user through invitations and encouraging responses. In contrast to these unscripted performances, various experiments rely on meticulous planning to create a carefully crafted narrative experience. Here, interaction is often limited to constructive feedback. From a producer's perspective, literary communication is then no longer understood as a set of solitary practices, but as a series of collaborative processes that are firmly situated in a rich and diverse social context.

Feedback and examples offered by peers also appear to be an important aspect of literary production. It is another important reason for the participants to contribute to the *2012 Twitter Fiction Festival*, but also to share their thoughts and experiences during the *#TFFDiscuss* focus groups. As spaces to communicate their passion for literature in general, and fiction writing in particular, social media environments also serve as interesting learning environments. The study in this chapter has shown how participation in these environments and events allows literary producers to learn through personal experience of success and failure, as well as feedback from recipients. In addition, social media also provide an opportunity to explore and discover inspiring experiments of other literary producers. Within social media environments, it is easy to interact with these producers. As such, literary producers become peers in a shared learning process. In light of this, social media environments thus also appear to function as affinity spaces for producers of literary work.

CHAPTER 4: LITERARY MEDIATION IN SOCIAL MEDIA ENVIRONMENTS⁶

⁶ This chapter is based on:

Vlieghe, J., Vandermeersche, G., & Soetaert, R. (2014) Social media in literacy education: Exploring social reading with pre-service teachers. *New Media & Society*. doi: 10.1177/1461444814547683

Vlieghe, J., Rutten, K., & Soetaert, R. (2014). *Cultural participation & professional development in social media culture* (D2.2.3). Brussels, Belgium: EMSOC reports.

Abstract

This chapter focuses on mediators of literary work – i.e. teachers – and their engagement in the social media environment *Goodreads*. In this chapter I present the results of the thematic analysis of an elaborate auto-ethnographic document. The document was compiled during a six-month period by 79 students enrolled in the teacher training program at Ghent University. Based on the thematic analysis, I discuss how literary mediators weigh social media's affordances for users who are passionate about reading against its downsides for novice or occasional readers. I also show how discussions about the infrastructures and practices of social media inspire the mediators to reflect on the importance and characteristics of engagement, trust, and value assessment. Finally, I indicate how mediators relate their observations and reflections to their understanding and perception of education and the role of the teacher. As such, the chapter offers an overview of how mediators describe, experience and negotiate literary communication practices and their own role(s) within social media environments.

Introduction

The previous chapters have provided rich descriptions of how the interactive and social nature of many digital media has inspired questions about the prevailing image of traditional reading as a quiet and solitary practice. In particular, they show how the opportunities to engage with content and people through social media are often perceived to be in stark contrast with what print media have to offer. Indeed, social media allow users to fashion their own identities, to evoke instant public discussions, to publish their own adaptations, or to collaborate with content creators. As social media are becoming increasingly ubiquitous, many people will become accustomed to this kind of media engagement. This also means that new expectations are formed about what it means to be a writer, a reader, a critic, or even a literature teacher.

In fact, as argued in the introduction, education is one of the cultural domains where the impact of “new” media is the most far-reaching (Snyder, 2003). The introduction of printed books, for instance, had a big impact because it allowed larger groups within the population to gain access to literary works. Literacy and reading research (Graff, 2007; Hagood, 2003; Price, 2004) points out that the rise of mass literacy has inspired debates about how educational curricula should be reformed and how we should define the activity of “literary reading”. More recently, digital media changed the understanding of reading from an exclusively print-based act to an engagement with hybrid forms of text, image, and sound (Collins, 2010). For some scholars, these changes are a prelude to the death of traditional reading (Birkets, 1996, 2013). This is often related to material changes, that is, to the transition from print books to digital carriers and to the transformation of reading strategies (Hillesund, 2010; Liu, 2009). Other scholars explore the opportunities that digital and multimedia advances create to change the way we read fiction in education, for example, on digital reading platforms (Baron, 2013).

While there has been quite a lot of research on the recent transformation and multiplication of reading practices, there have been few studies on how this affects the distribution of roles within literary culture (Schmidt, 1997). Readers and cultural participants can now more easily alternate between being pleasure readers, cultural mediators and curators, critics, literary contributors, and, in some specialized cases, literature teachers (Hawisher, Selfe, Moraski, & Pearson, 2004). This diversity of roles in reading culture offers a striking contrast to how educational policy has come to define and restrict the roles teachers can play in standards-based reforms (van de Ven & Doecke, 2011). Understanding how to navigate and balance these different roles may help us to redefine the agency of teachers within educational and social change (Gee, 2005). This chapter focuses on these changes exclusively from an educational perspective by exploring how pre-service teachers describe their own role(s) and opportunities to engage literary communication practices within social media environments.

Digital media and literacy practices

New media inspire new practices which alter understandings of literacy. The traditional concept of literacy was based on the mastering of reading and writing of print-based media. The rise of a variety of new media contributed to the development of alternative practices for expression and communication. Considering these developments, scholars redefined literacy as “a set of instructions on how to act and talk so as to take on a particular role that others will recognize” (Gee, 1991, p. 1) within a specific media environment. These instructions cover a wide range of activities and conversations, like reading media texts and critically appraising works of art.

In reading research, the notion of literacy is often approached through either a psychological/cognitive analysis of reading or through readers’ self-interpretation of their own reading practices. The latter kind of research entails the activity of “explicating explications” of readers’ own understanding of what they are doing (Lang, 2010, p. 119) as can be found in marginalia, diaries, and discussions. It is attentive to contextually and historically determined attitudes and discourses surrounding reading, and the agency and roles of participants in these discourses.

As Terry Eagleton (1985) explains, the ideology that long pervaded in pedagogy and popular imagination was modeled on the image of “the solitary reading subject in its existential encounter with the isolated text” (p. 102). Elizabeth Long (1993) points out that this focus on the solitary reader has obscured the entire infrastructure that supports reading: “the social and institutional determinants of what’s available to read, what is ‘worth reading’, and how to read it” (p. 194). In light of this, Jim Collins (2010) suggests that the introduction of digital media has transformed our understanding of reading from “a thoroughly private experience ... [to] an exuberantly social activity, whether it be in the form of actual book clubs, television book clubs, Internet chat rooms” (p. 4). This includes changes of the spaces for reading, the systems of provision and knowledge transmission, and the expectations and reception of books (Collins, 2013). Tom Standage (2013) offers further support for the claim that digital media and social aspects of reading go hand in hand. He argues that people’s engagement with new technologies “build upon habits and conventions that date back centuries” (p. 5) like the sharing of letters and pamphlets. He suggests that while mass media (newspaper, television, radio) made public discourse seem one-directional, “the social nature of media has dramatically reasserted itself” (p. 4) due to the rise of various digital tools and social media.

Social media, conduction and communication

From a theoretical perspective, literary critic Wayne Booth argues for an understanding of reading as a social practice. Booth (1988) suggests that evaluating literature, as an essential part of reading, “must imply a communal enterprise rather than a private, ‘personal calculation’” (p. 72). He coined the term

coduction to denote the process. He asserts that even in solitary contemplation we arrive at the value of our reading through comparing the work at hand with previous experiences. By moving toward a more “public” criticism, initial intuitions can become explicit, compared to shared experiences (in the form of cultural norms and values) or related to standards of literary and cultural history. A reader’s coductions about a certain literary work are then always preliminary, as “the validity of our coductions must always be corrected in conversations about the coductions of others whom we trust” (p.73). Booth’s concept of coduction thus reveals how we rely on a community of other readers, whether implicitly in a history of interpretations of the text or explicitly in conversations with other readers.

Booth’s concept of coduction directs attention to practices where social interaction is part of reading, such as reading groups (Allington & Swann, 2009; Scharber, 2009). Research indicates that many of these practices are emphasized in social media environments focused on literature and literary reading, such as *Goodreads* or *Copia* (Kiili et al., 2012). Developers of these digital environments or platforms claim to offer tools that support and even improve these practices. They insist this will result in an enhanced form of reading, often described as “social reading” (see Cordón-García et al., 2013). In most cases, the social interaction is described by the developers as digital communication between “Friends.”⁷ In the context of social media, the concept of “Friends” is generally used to refer to several different types of relationships among participants. As danah boyd (2006) argues, the process of identifying other participants as “Friends” enables the creation of an imagined community built around the individual. This allows participants to digitally “express who they are and locate themselves culturally” (para. 4). In social media environments, participants express their taste in culture (movies, books, etc.) as well as people. In other words, they situate themselves in a network of “others whom we trust” (Booth, 1988).

Passion, conflict and literacy education

On social media platforms, trust often relies on exhibited taste and experience, rather than institutional affiliation and acknowledgement. As sociolinguist and media scholar James Paul Gee (2005) points out, most digitally mediated social networks develop and evolve around a shared passion and support interest-driven learning activities. According to Gee, social media platforms thus create environments that can be described as affinity spaces. These are spaces where affiliation between people is based primarily on common interests and endeavors; where segregation between newcomers and masters is absent; where mentorship is flexible; where new content can be generated; where different forms of knowledge, both individual and distributed, are encouraged; where tacit knowledge is acknowledged;

⁷ I follow Ellison and boyd (2013) in distinguishing between “Friends” (with capital F) to refer to online connections, and “friends” (lower case) to denote the more general understanding of friendship.

and where forms and routes to participation and status can vary greatly (Gee, 2005, pp. 225–228). As the description of affinity spaces shows, this kind of environment thrives on diversity and flexibility. Hence, such social spaces are also very susceptible to controversy and disagreement.

Sadly, current policy and context of education leaves little room for fruitful disagreements (Graff, 2003). A broad study of language education in various national contexts indicates that standards-based reforms make it difficult for teachers to question the rigid definitions of cultural and critical literacy included in educational policy, and to reflect on the significance of literacy education (van de Ven & Doecke, 2011). In relation to literature, this tendency toward standardization is reflected in the preference for national literary canons and fixed guidelines for evaluating literary texts. Similarly, classroom discussions are mostly used as a means to “fact-check” and rarely aim to promote discussion and interaction (Beach, Appleman, Hynds, & Wilhelm, 2006, p. 186). Teachers may feel that policy measures limit them both in dealing with the variety of literacy practices that exist in contemporary society, as well as in contributing to educational change.

Based on her work in comparative literature, Mary Louise Pratt (1991) argues that spaces for controversy and disagreement offer a number of interesting pedagogical opportunities (also Graff, 2003). Pratt (1991) suggests that conflicts allow educators and learners to exercise self-expression (i.e. creating an auto-ethnographic text); to identify with the ideas, interest, histories, and attitudes of others; to understand the process and impact of cultural mediation; and to establish “ground rules for communication ... that go beyond politeness but maintain mutual respect” (p. 40). As social spaces where a wide variety of people from across the world can communicate freely, social media environments can be considered pedagogical instruments. They create a set of conditions for the evaluation and transformation of how we create meaning and assess the value of books and other people’s opinions.

Based on these theoretical suggestions regarding the social aspects of reading and literacy education, this chapters explores literary communication practices within social media environments. The exploration focuses primarily on how teachers describe and experience these practices and their own role(s) in the social media environments, as well as how they perceive their own opportunities to act within it.

Method

Identifying the field

For this study I have selected the social media environment *Goodreads*. This environment was created in 2007 and is considered to be the largest platform for “social reading” with approximately 7,500,000 accounts and 270,000,000 books in its databases (Goodreads, 2012). Reports on website traffic indicate that *Goodreads* was visited more than 21 million times by close to 13.5 million unique users during the month prior to the beginning of the research project (Quantcast Corporation, 2013). As Lisa Nakamura (2013) argues, *Goodreads* is thus an exemplary place to analyze the kind of social interaction found in contemporary literary culture by focusing on reading “in the wild” (p. 241; also Heath and Street, 2008).

Users of *Goodreads* can engage in a number of different activities within this social media environment. According to the creators of *Goodreads*, the primary goal of the platform is to help people who are “deciding what to read next?” (Goodreads, 2012). In order to receive personalized recommendations, each user must add book titles to a *Virtual Bookshelf* (that constitutes a reader’s own reading history), indicate genre-based reading preferences (for books a user wants to read), and create a network of Friends. Based on the user’s preferences and reading history, the recommendation engine of *Goodreads* proposes book titles that might interest the user. This process of automated recommendations is very similar to the longtail on shopping websites like *Amazon*. Another form of recommendations is related to the activities performed by Friends within the *Goodreads* environment. These activities are represented in a news feed that resembles the activity streams found in other social media environments such as *Facebook* and *Twitter*. Besides updates of the activities of Friends, the news feed also includes a tab “discussions.” This tab allows users to join discussion groups and to add, rate, and review books. Other elements in the *Goodreads* environment include opportunities to search for books, people, discussion groups, and literary events; curate lists; record literary quotes; set up reading challenges; create and take trivia quizzes; enter contests; read author interviews; and share creative writing projects.

Selecting the participants

A study was set up with students enrolled in the teacher training program at Ghent University. In total, 79 Flemish students participated in the study. The group consisted of 54 female and 25 male students within an age range of 23–46 years. An academic prerequisite for enrollment in the teacher training program at Ghent University is the completion of a master’s program at a European University or Technical Institute. Each of the participants thus holds a master’s degree in one of the following domains: Arts and Philosophy, Political and Social Sciences, Psychology and Educational Sciences, and

so on. After completing their training at Ghent University, they will be teaching literacy skills that go beyond reading and writing, including higher level skills associated with cultural and digital literacy.

Collecting the data

The study was designed to explore literary communication practices from a perspective of teachers-as-ethnographers (see also Heath, 1983; Green & Bloome; 2004). This exploration comprises three activities: (1) participation in the *Goodreads* environment, (2) observation of their own and other participants' activities in that environment, and (3) reflection through writing and discussing with peers. In order to complete these activities, the students were invited to participate in the activities of a social media environment from March until August 2012. Participation required the students to create a personal account and request access to the semi-public discussion group created for this study: <https://www.goodreads.com/group/show/66394-ugent---cultuur-media-educatie2012>. During the discussions, students were free to reflect on and discuss any topic that struck them as interesting, odd, exciting, and so on. Together, the students composed an auto-ethnographic document relating their observations and experiences to social reading practices. The document consists of 120 messages and contains a total of 49,516 words.

Analyzing the data

The content of the document was analyzed through a process of open coding using *NVivo10*. Themes were extracted from the participants' writings at sentence and paragraph level. The process resulted in an extensive coding scheme (+300 themes and subthemes). In this article, only the most prominent themes are discussed based on their coverage and frequency. The themes have been divided into two major clusters: a cluster relating to literary communication practices and a cluster relating to literacy education and the implementation of social media in education. During the discussion of the results, data extracts are used as representative examples. These data extracts have been translated from Dutch, but otherwise remain unaltered in order to accurately represent the voice of the participants. In accordance with the informed consent signed by the participants, pseudonyms are used to ensure their privacy.

Findings

Literary communication

Four dominant themes emerge from the analysis of the participants' descriptions and reflections on literary communication practices in social media environments. (1) The first theme focuses on the use of *Goodreads' Virtual Bookshelf* as a personal archive and organizer. (2) The second theme centers on the production and quality of content on *Goodreads*. (3) The third theme elaborates on the public sharing of personal information as a means for identity construction and value assessment. (4) Finally, the fourth theme addresses the issue of trust in digital social networks.

Constructing a virtual bookshelf

Many participants consider the *Virtual Bookshelf* to be one of the biggest attributes of *Goodreads* and other social reading environments with a similar feature (e.g. *LibraryThing*, or *BookIdo*). The participants believe this type of function is particularly appealing for people who are passionate about literature and reading because it enables those readers to create archives. These features help them to keep track of their personal reading history, as well as their preferences and the books that they would like to read. This corresponds with Jim Collins' observation that "given the seemingly endless number of titles ... title selection has become one of the most pressing concerns within the popular literary culture" (2010, p. 80):

If you like to read, it is a handy site to keep an overview of your own preferences and to make lists. This, to me, seems to be the strength of Goodreads, the individual aspect.

(Adam)

A few participants note that the *Virtual Bookshelf* function is especially interesting for readers who often borrow books from libraries or friends and thus do not have a physical copy on their bookshelf:

Because I am a frequent library visitor, I have a lot of material merely on loan. It is sometimes difficult to keep track of what I have already read and what I still hope to accomplish. A virtual inventory in such a case comes in handy.

(Marsha)

Marsha and other participants do, however, express doubts and discomfort about functions such as reading challenges and updates on reading progress that highlight personal achievements. These functions are viewed as only marginally related and thus distracting to the activity of reading. The participants also voice similar concerns about functions that enable the exploration of books and

active discussions (e.g. the discussion feed, the group forums, the Goodreads database, and its book-info pages). According to them, the amount of available information complicates exploration and inhibits active participation in ongoing discussions:

The selection is, like in a library, too extensive to read a short summary and some reviews of each of the books. Goodreads' recommendations are a good start, but as a way to broaden your horizons, it quickly turns into a long and arduous search.

(Leonie)

If there are ... a lot of active discussions, you have to invest a lot of time in keeping up with all the changes and then I'm only talking about one group. My impression is that this slows down the discussions.

(Adam)

Other participants counter these concerns by arguing that participating in literary communication practice on *Goodreads* has had a positive effect on their reading behavior. They explain that by participating in this social media environment, they have become more attentive while reading, rediscovered forgotten books, or reattempted books that were set aside:

The books I have read since becoming a member of this website, I have read much more attentively, because I wanted to give an accurate rating.

(Nadine)

*Besides, it is also a way to rediscover a previously read book ... because of the positive reading experience of a friend, I can revisit a book I once started, but gave up on midway the reading, like Franz Kafka's *The Trial*.*

(Melvin)

Evaluating content and comments

Generally, the users of social media environments are responsible for most, if not all, of the content produced within these environments (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). As demonstrated in chapter 1, developers pride themselves on creating open and egalitarian spaces, where users are empowered to freely share content with limited top-down. Social media environments can be considered as open but empty containers. In this study, quite a few participants regard the content of the container (i.e. reviews, ratings, background information, etc.) as incomplete, superficial, questionable, irrelevant, or unstructured. They suggest that the lack of focus and control reduces the overall quality of the information on *Goodreads*. This in turn affects the credibility of user ratings and reviews and their

power to convince people to read a particular book. So in contrast to developers' intentions, participants experience the input of users in a different manner:

I wouldn't consider Goodreads a complete source of information. I see Goodreads more as an empty box which avid readers can fill with information they can subsequently share with each other. Goodreads is as rich as the input of its members. The personnel of Goodreads act more as moderators and barely add anything.

(Lizzy)

The online recommendations or reactions, which I found on the site, are fairly superficial and sometimes even "questionable." I am thus not convinced that I will avoid the "bad reads" with Goodreads.

(Beth)

The comments and discussion groups in my opinion also lack a clear overview, an evident structure is missing, and some form of control. They often also deviate from the original topic: books and literature. Because of this, the site loses credibility, as a result a lot of visitors (including myself) will quickly drop out.

(Linda)

Participants fear that due to its easy accessibility, *Goodreads* admits users who lack knowledge and experience in the field of literature. They point out that this leads to overly subjective ratings and reviews. Many participants also feel that the inexperience of readers affects their contributions and reputation, and thereby lowers the status of *Goodreads* as a quality platform for sharing a passion for literature. In contrast to Gee's (2005) theory of affinity spaces, participants are often skeptical about contributions of other less experienced readers:

I think that this reduction of barriers which allows everyone to put their opinion online, without effort, about every book he ever read too often leads to superficial and deficient perspectives. People will often participate in the debate based on what they heard about the work without having read it themselves.

(Quentin)

Somewhat paradoxically, the participants praise the ideal of encouraging and acknowledging input from non-professional readers while at the same time expressing distrust of inexperienced contributors. Many participants appreciate the open nature of social media environments. They feel that this non-restrictive quality allows for greater diversity, thus increasing the democratic potential of these environments. The idea of social reading is said to counteract an elitist approach to literary culture by allowing competing opinions, whether they are grounded in expert knowledge or not:

This [Goodreads' rating system, authors' clarification] creates an original mix between what the "experts" put forth as "the classics," and the necessary democratic adjustments of the differing voting behavior of the common reader.

(Pete)

It is remarkable ... that most of the comments display strong opinions and contrarian judgments. Members of Goodreads will want to respond more quickly if they find that their favorite was done an injustice.

(Andreas)

Sharing and contributing

Within this new configuration of literary communication, it has become common practice to share your reading and thoughts as a "visible demonstration of [your own] personal taste, at that moment" (Collins, 2010, p. 80). Participants in this study point out that sharing is often associated with the practice of comparing oneself with others, competing or seeking confirmation. They wonder,

Why do we have to "compare" everything these days?

(Beth)

Some participants point out that publicly sharing one's personal reading history and preferences helps users of social media to construct and exhibit identity:

Reading is viewed as an isolated, lonely activity ... Thanks to Goodreads, reading becomes more tangible and defined, it gets a shape. You are reading book x or y, got stuck on a certain page, give the book an interim evaluation. ... Reading is an utterance of identity, and a means to construct an identity. You are what you read, and you do want to show who you are, right?

(Marsha)

While some participants remain suspicious of public sharing, others argue that displaying identity through previous reading experiences and preferences is actually helpful in trying to assess the value of others' opinions. Thus, value assessment also involves questions of identity and identification. Indeed, rhetorical theory argues that besides convincing arguments (logos) and passionate delivery (pathos), a speaker also needs to persuade his audience through personal authority and honesty (ethos) (Herrick, 2012).

Goodreads supports us in the possibility to compare the taste of Friends with our own: the books that we both read and the ratings that we gave appear side by side. In this way, we can gauge how high a 5-star rating of this person should be assessed.

(Melvin)

Much like other social media environments, *Goodreads* offers its users opportunities for self-fashioning. Users can use pseudonyms, create multiple accounts, and selectively share information to create a desired persona (see also Donath, 1999). While users can thus express themselves freely, a few participants in this study caution for the persistence of mechanisms such as stereotypes and peer pressure:

The goal of reading books shouldn't be to display your cultural capital. I understand that the books that you read ... can be seen as an external marker for your identity and that you can profile yourself to the outside world by the books that you read. However, bragging about a certain classic or the number of books you have read exacerbates the elitist culture that books are associated with. I was confronted with a number of stereotypes regarding certain genres of books and its readers and I caught myself that I actively selected which books I shared with others and which I kept "secret" to avoid such prejudices.

(Nadine)

Building networks (of friends)

Similar to constructing a *Virtual Bookshelf*, *Goodreads* allows users to construct "a publicly visible, personally curated list of contacts" (Ellison & boyd, 2013, p. 155; see also Donath & boyd, 2004). As Nicole Ellison and danah boyd (2013) have suggested, such networks are composed of both friends encountered elsewhere (e.g. offline) and new acquaintances with shared interests. Many participants in the current study clearly state that they prefer to confide in friends rather than new contacts on *Goodreads* because the former's opinions and suggestions are easier to judge and compare to one's own. This concurs with findings from previous research (boyd & Ellison, 2007; Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2011). Indeed, some participants indicate that the presence of familiar contacts stimulates the further participation and engagement in social media environments.

Indeed, you just have no clue who places these comments online. Personally, that is why I still attach more importance to a literary reviewer's or a friend's opinion than to 500 visitors of Goodreads.

(Linda)

I invited a lot of my friends—including my grandma—to create a profile. My choice of books heavily depends on friends' recommendations, more so than on the reviews of strangers. The fact that you are familiar with their personality ensures that you already have more confidence in the book.

(Nadine)

While issues with familiarity and trust influence user engagement, not all participants consider the presence of “strangers” as unhelpful or problematic. They suggest that the expansion of existing peer networks can offer inspiration and support. Related to their background as pre-service teachers, some participants, however, expressed uncertainty about how to create a specific interest group that shares books and recommendations for literacy education:

I feel that discussion groups for Dutch, German or French teachers are missing. I looked for such groups, but found nothing interesting. The dominance of English on Goodreads to me signals a shortcoming. I could have, of course, started such a group myself, but then I don't know how I could reach other teachers in my discipline.

(Margo)

Literacy education

Following the discussion of how they view general aspects of literary communication practices in the environment of *Goodreads*, participants also addressed themes focused on literacy education and the implementation of social media. These themes largely align with three pillars of pedagogical practice in literacy education related to literary culture: (1) selecting books for students, (2) participating in the cultural conversation, and (3) acting as mediators for and even protectors of adolescent students in this conversation.

Selecting books

In their overview of Flemish and Dutch state-mandated curricula and educational goals, Nicolaas and Vanhooren (2008) have noted that the introduction of pupils to the field of literature by guiding and familiarizing them with different genres, styles, and authors is a key component of the teacher's task. The participants in the current study recognize that such initiation also involves encouraging, engaging, and helping disinterested students to find pleasure in reading (also see Scharber, 2009, p. 433). In light of this, some participants feel that *Goodreads* creates interesting opportunities because of the way it approaches "book recommendations":

Through its "Recommendations" a website such as Goodreads creates some order in a multitude of books, which can overwhelm a beginning reader. I view the website from a teacher's perspective. ... I see the role of the teacher as a cultural intermediary, who must introduce students to the complex world of culture, must guide and help them take their first steps in the enormous storehouse of culture which nowadays dominates the market.

(Charles)

Participants see advantages in using social media as a way to motivate pupils to read more often and to explore different genres. Indeed, Smith and Wilhelm (2002) have noted that increased choice and ownership of the selected texts increases students' motivation. Other participants found that *Goodreads* seemed better at affirming than at changing reading behavior: the amount of freedom and personalization might inhibit pupils' desire to engage with other forms and genres of literature. In this respect, the participants describe these social media environments as practical tools rather than rivals to the literacy teacher, who has to counteract pupils' facile or habituated reading preferences:

Students can use this site to find out which books suit their "taste." I find that this statement jumps to conclusions. Students must "taste" different genres, authors, and art forms.

(Britt)

If you start from the assumption that youngsters need to get more insight into the literary canon of our European literary history ... Goodreads will not prove to be the ideal means. The teachers will still need to actively contribute.

(Quentin)

Participating in cultural conversations via social media

Edelsky, Smith and Wolf (2002) have recommended modeling the practices in the literature classroom to those of a literary book club: students are then socialized and invited to participate in a highly engaged conversation about literature. Much of this talk about books currently takes place online, especially through social media. If literacy educators want to continue to prepare young people for successful participation in social and cultural life, the participants advocate the embrace of social media:

I notice some doubts in a number of comments in relation to the implementation of social network sites in class. I am still a proponent of the direct contact with students and class discussions. But because social networks have become a part of our lives—and this is definitely the case for our students—it seems better to me to embrace and include it in our classes than to reject it.

(Gwynne)

A number of participants point out that social media have an extra affordance of promoting and creating cultural access for young people. Social media allow pupils to participate in a socially meaningful context beyond the walls of the school. The participants suggest that this can increase pupils' sense of ownership. Indeed, other research has suggested that online discussions offer students an authentic audience for their writings, which heightens its social purpose and the pupils' motivation (Beach et al., 2006, p. 204):

A big advantage is that literature classes and the possible assignments or reading reports the students make take place in a social context, in a real discussion. As such, the feeling that students just have to fulfill assignments to get marks disappears, and the students' products can really contribute to a discussion. It is even possible to talk to some of the authors themselves. ... The students' contributions become meaningful when they can direct their questions or remarks to the author him/herself.

(Charles)

Protecting students against bad influences

Using online discussions may help self-conscious students to overcome discomfort experienced in face-to-face discussions and participate in conversation on literature (Beach et al., 2006). However, many participants in this study feel that participation in social media environments warrants caution. When social media become part of classroom practice, participants argue that it is the task of the

teacher to take control in order to protect pupils from negative experiences and feelings, such as the difficulty of use, confusion, demotivation, and so on:

However, I also think that it will be necessary to support students in this task. Goodreads is not that easy to work with. I would only use it in the highest grades of secondary education.

(Marianne)

There's a risk that our students get lost in the labyrinth of literature. Unless we ourselves draw up a guide in the shape of a reading list, this [Goodreads] can seem confusing to many.

(Gwynne)

Similarly to using closed questions that increase the control of teachers on students' input (Beach et al., 2006; Showalter, 2009), many participants advocate the use of semi-public or closed discussion groups as the best way to assume control and protect the pupils. By creating a closed space within the social reading environment, teachers can closely monitor and guide the activity of their pupils. As such, participants believe teachers can ensure that pupils only come into contact with content that meets the proper quality standards. Pratt (1991) has acknowledged that this impulse for teacher control is understandable, even more so given the tendency toward standardization within educational policy, but it is rather untenable in our heterogeneous society:

Because of the subjectivity of the comments, I think that it is dangerous to use this in an educational context. You could maybe scare away youngsters from reading certain books? If you want to use it, you might want to create a closed and controlled group within which you work with students, just as we did. ... Maybe I am just too old-fashioned.

(Tony)

I share the concerns of many fellow-students about the reviews' quality and their impact on pupils. On the internet, everyone's opinion is worth as much as anyone else's, no matter how superficial. That is why I think that, in an educational context, it is safer to create a separate group where there can be a discussion about a specific topic, with the input of students and under the supervision and editorship of the teacher.

(Marsha)

Discussion

Summary

In general, this chapter has explored how literary communication and its infrastructure are changing toward social interaction in social media environments. In addition, it examined how this might affect the common understanding of literacy and education. Based on the participants' collective auto-ethnographic text, it seems that dedicated environments like *Goodreads* mostly attract people with a passion for literature and reading. The affordances of *Goodreads* for passionate readers, such as increased motivation and attention, are weighed against the downsides for novice or occasional readers, like the excess of reading material and the lack of content quality control. This chapter also showed how discussions about the infrastructure of *Goodreads* and the practices of its users inspired the pre-service teachers in my study to reflect on issues such as engagement, trust, and value assessment. This includes reflections about the importance of encouraging and acknowledging, on the one hand, the practice of exhibiting reading experiences, and on the other hand, the expression of taste and value by "common" readers. Finally, the study presented in this chapter indicates how the participants relate these observations and reflections to their understanding and perception of education and the role of the teacher. According to the participants, it is the teacher's task to introduce pupils to literary culture and to facilitate their access to this conversation about literature. This task involves motivating pupils to read and to discuss books, but also to counteract and broaden their reading preferences and knowledge of books. In addition, the participants feel that a certain level of control and expertise by the teacher is required to reach these educational goals.

Conclusions

This exploratory study has provided a detailed description of how teachers handle the changing practices and roles associated with the introduction of new technologies, such as social media. Two major insights can be derived from this *thick description*. First, while dominant discourses and ideologies tend to obscure the public and social features of literary communication in general, and reading practices in particular, participants in my research point out that social media like *Goodreads* make it possible to display literary experiences. As such, reading practices become an integral part of a reader's identity as a literate individual. Moreover, the study indicates that a social conception of reading is supported by the identity created through a *Virtual Bookshelf* and the trust that is built within a network of Friends. Second, in relation to social media and education, a clear paradox arises from the students' comments. The participants recognized that one of the roles of the teacher is to facilitate pupils' access to socially and culturally meaningful contexts. Platform such as *Goodreads* can be characterized by their openness to conversation, diversity, and conflict, as well as their lack of top-

down control. Closely resembling affinity spaces, these environments are said to create interesting opportunities for developing literacy driven by interest and passion. However, the participants also feel that a strong case can be made for a planned and structured approach to literacy development involving a careful selection of books and quality assessment of reviews and comments. It is clear from the participants' reflections that a tension exists between the lack of explicit learning goals within environments like *Goodreads*, and the clear and planned educational objectives of formal education.

CONCLUSION

"No previous technology for literacy has been adopted by so many, in so many different places, in such a short period, and with such profound consequences. No previous technology for literacy permits the immediate dissemination of even newer technologies of literacy to every person on the Internet by connecting to a single link on a screen. Finally, no previous technology for literacy has provided access to so much information that is so useful, to so many people, in the history of the world. The speed and scale of this change has been breathtaking."

Coiro et al., *Handbook of Research on New Literacies*, pp. 2-3

New technologies disrupt, but they aren't the singularly disruptive force some would have us believe. Many of their purported disruptions result from their entering into contexts where language shifts are already under way, causing friction. Social media didn't alter the meanings of "status," "privacy," or what have you. The meanings were already transforming. Social media just helped make the changes more visible, and maybe accelerated them. That is why Williams called words "elements of ... problems."

Ted Striphas, *The Internet of Words*, para. 31

Introduction

From literature and monoliteracy

The epistemological history of the term “literacy” reveals a gradual shift from oral to written culture and a strong connection to literature. For several centuries the terms “literature” and “literate” were used interchangeably to refer to a form of learning based on the use of written texts. When printing technology made books available to a wider audience, the term “literature” became a label to denote texts of high quality – i.e. the canon. The term “literacy” was introduced as a derivative of the term “literate” to refer to the ability to read and write and the status of being well-read (Williams, 1983, p. 184). The introduction of this term signifies how oral performances were replaced by written texts as the dominant mode of meaning-making and socialization (Ong, 1982). This shift also represents a change in our perception and understanding of the world. Writing was perceived as a way “to separate and distance the knower and the known and thus to establish objectivity ... reducing interference from the human life world and making possible the exquisitely abstract world of scholasticism and science” (Ong, 2013, p. 111). Literacy as the ability to read and write page-bound texts became an essential characteristic of highly developed cultures and a label to distinguish them from less developed or primitive cultures (Gee, 1986). The introduction of new media made us aware that other modes of meaning-making can be equally powerful. This also sensitized us for the fact that literacy is a socio-cultural construction.

Towards multiliteracies and participatory culture

The contrast between print and audiovisual media inspired scholars to contest the dominant understanding of literacy as a monolithic, uniform and univocal set of practices (see e.g. Street, 1988). Literacy was redefined as complex, situated and multifaceted and a *Pedagogy of Multiliteracies* was proposed as a new approach to education (The New London Group 1996). This new pedagogical approach recognizes that all “modes of meaning are dynamic representation resources, constantly being remade by their users as they work to achieve their various cultural purpose” (p. 64). It aims to empower people to design their own social roles by helping them to master different modes of meaning-making. Modern education often continues to focus predominantly on print literacy. The *affinity spaces* surrounding digital media present powerful alternatives for learning (see Gee, 2007; Hayes & Gee, 2010) and introduce people into a *participatory culture* (see Jenkins, 2009). As a consequence, literacy is practiced and understood differently (see Snyder, 2003). Social media appear to be the epitome of participatory culture, combining the digitization of traditional media forms with a strong focus on communication and participation through user-generated content.

Studying new literacy practices in social media & literature

In this dissertation, I have presented a systematic analysis of new practices and understandings of literacy that emerge in social media and participatory culture. I documented these practices and perceptions in relation to literary communication. In each case study I focused on a specific social role, namely: developers, recipients, producers or mediators. This enabled me to investigate how new literacies affect perceptions of media and cultural institutions, of identity and participation, and of power and hierarchy.

Because the field of social media covers such a vast array of platforms and practices, I have directed my attention to literacy events and practices focused on literary communication based on two observations. First, as I have argued above, there is a strong historical connection between literacy and literature. Even today, print literacy and literature remain very important in formal education. The increasing competition with new media forms often leads to a discourse of crisis and fierce debates about the importance of older media such as literature. This brings me to the second observation. Literacy is a social practice and its features are largely defined through the discourses surrounding various modes of meaning-making.

Innovative methodology

New Literacies Studies scholars generally agree that the speed and scale of the changes introduced by digital media is astonishing (Coiro et al., 2014). As a consequence, many researchers aim to document this rapid evolution of practices and perceptions. This will allow research, but also policy makers and educators, to acquire a meta perspective on the transformations which media and literacies are constantly undergoing. In this dissertation I have presented and applied a methodological framework that supports this endeavor. The framework consists of two complementary approaches.

An ethnographic approach

The first approach builds on the ethnographic tradition of the New Literacies Studies (see Heath & Street, 2008). Literacy practices are documented through careful and lengthy observations of literacy events. In addition, informants are selected for further inquiry about their practices and perceptions. This allows researchers to compare literacy practices and understandings of literacy in various social and cultural contexts. This also enables researchers to analyze how literacies perpetuate and change perceptions of power and hierarchy related to the processes of meaning-making.

A system-oriented approach

The analysis is supported by a system-oriented approach which builds on the theory of art and media as social systems (see Luhmann, 1995, 2000; Schmidt, 1997). This theory suggests that mediated communication gives rise to a particular organization of social roles. Each media system represents a set of "standards which people invent for specific purposes in specific socio-cultural situations, especially for the purpose of drawing distinctions in their experiential reality" (Schmidt, 1997, p. 122). The shape of this system can be mapped by examining the documented practices and discourses and identifying labels that are used to refer to particular action dimensions and social roles. One dimension that is crucial, but often disregarded, is the process and role of media development and design as an intentional action. Media can be used to initiate and guide change and to introduce new ways of thinking. Therefore the systematic analysis of any medium should always begin with a detailed assessment of its design and the developers' discourse that surrounds it. After identifying the contours of the system, other dimensions or roles can be analyzed individually to see how dominant practices and perceptions are perpetuated or contested and how power and hierarchies surrounding a particular medium are reshaped. By comparing these individual analyses, a set of key terms can be extracted that expresses the shared understanding of cultural institutions and what counts as literacy.

Summary of the findings

Chapter 1: developers as initiators of change

Where the collective thoughts and ideas of the community live on every page, bringing new meaning and insights to every word. ... Copia brings this idea to life in a digital world, so we can all read better together. This is the future of e-reading.

(COPIA Interactive LLC, 2012)

In Chapter 1, I have established a framework for my research by assessing the discourse of social media developers. The study comprises a rhetorical analysis of the developers' discourse represented in 27 unique platforms. This analysis allowed me to consider the ideology behind the design. The analysis has shown how social media are characterized as social spaces that welcome and stimulate diversity and confrontation. Users are invited to participate regardless of their age, gender, nationality, religious or political beliefs, educational background or professional occupation. Participation entails the creation of content and the exploration and maintenance of networks of taste and experience. The developers only provide vague suggestions about how and for what purpose these networks can be used. They do, however, heavily stress the importance of personal experience and the strength of shared skills and knowledge. The design of social media provides support and encouragement for users to share resources. This gives users the opportunity to develop their expertise by applying it in relevant situations and by learning from the expertise shared by others. As such, social media environments are presented as places where users can express and explore a shared and passionate interest in a particular topic or activity according to their own needs and wishes. At the same time, the term "community" is used to denote a wide variety of resources shared by friends and strangers. Furthermore, the discourse of developers blurs boundaries between different social roles and reframes cultural participation in terms of continuous post-processing. Here, the interpretation, adaptation and creation of meaning and value becomes a shared responsibility. Social media are presented as democratic learning environments or *affinity spaces* that recognize and reflect the multiplicity, complexity and flexibility of participating in culture and society.

Chapter 2: new modes of reading

Unfortunately, we live in a society that frequently spews negative comments. That contributed to my fear to share something in the group. Eventually I did just try it. Everyone responded positively. They even said things like: 'I might read it myself', 'I'm going to keep this in mind', 'I'm going to have a look at it', 'I'm going try it to see if it suits me'. I thought that was all very positive and so I started to contribute more and more.'

(Tom)

In chapter 2, I have focused on the recipients of literary works – i.e. readers – and their engagement in two social media environments of the Flemish initiative *Iedereenleest.be*. Based on a content analysis, I identified five main types of practices in which recipients regularly engage: formulating opinions, sharing advice, sharing information, displaying reading activities, and discussing general topics. By comparing practice patterns, I was able to illustrate that media design facilitates particular kinds of literacy practices while inhibiting others. In addition, thematic analysis indicated how people perceive and try to take advantage of these opportunities to act. The recipients argue that social media environments stimulate people to meet with other enthusiasts, to share experiences, to create identities through networks of taste and experience, and to acknowledge and encourage participation. They recognize the potential of social media to establish democratic environments where people can participate equally and take up various social roles, but also point out that opportunities for participation and the presence of an intrinsic passion are not enough to involve people into a participatory culture. According to the recipients, it is necessary that active participants lead others by example, acknowledge and encourage them, and take collective action in case unproductive conflicts or abuse arise. In light of this, the recipients also explain that social media developers help to support this by acknowledging diversity and by interfering as little as possible. The image presented by recipients confirms the characterization of social media as *affinity spaces* and stresses the crucial importance of acknowledging, supporting and encouraging people's passions and of allowing them to engage in different practices.

Chapter 3: new modes of writing

'Being a writer' is my job. But also my life. Can't disengage my brain from making up stories - ever! [In social media environments] I'm active, engaged, interested, happy to find new ideas/books/article/people & chat about books & reading.

(Lucy Coats)

In chapter 3, I have focused on the producers of literary works – i.e. writers – and their engagement in the *2012 Twitter Fiction Festival*. Thematic analysis of producers' practices and reflections indicated how social media inspire people to re-imagine labels, practices and social relations. The analysis also showed that producers are intrigued and motivated to question and challenge existing labels when they are explicitly invited to experiment with different practices of meaning-making. At the same time, the producers recognize the importance of labels for discussion and making sense of people's actions. Inspired by the description of their own practices, the producers try to create alternative labels that are less restrictive and highlight the unique aspects of production dimension in social media environments. These aspects include multimodality, playful experimentation, and the tension between scripted and responsive performance. Furthermore, the producers consider how the design of social media can support or obstruct creative cultural production. Regardless of individual differences, all producers in the study describe social media as spaces for sharing and cultivating their passion with other enthusiasts. Participating in these spaces provides an outlet as well as an opportunity to learn through personal practice and the experiences shared by others. According to the informants, the freedom to follow their passion, to experiment and to make mistakes are all crucial for their development as producers. Again, the image of social media as *affinity spaces* emerges.

Chapter 4: new modes of mediation

Goodreads supports us in the possibility to compare the taste of friends with our own: the books that we both read and the ratings that we gave appear side by side. In this way, we can gauge how high a 5-star rating of this person should be assessed.

(Melvin)

In chapter 4, I have focused on the mediators of literary works – i.e. teachers – and their engagement in the social media environment *Goodreads*. Thematic analysis of mediator's auto-ethnographic observations and reflections has shown how the opportunities for participation in social media environments create a need for protection and guidance. The mediators characterize social media as environments open to conversation, diversity and conflict. They argue that this creates interesting opportunities for supporting and stimulating passionate users to participate in relevant social contexts. Furthermore, the design of social media and the practice of their users inspire the mediators to consider how people learn to interpret and evaluate the value assessments of others. They stress the importance of encouraging and acknowledging people's efforts to construct an identity and to exhibit expertise by creating networks of taste and experience. These affordances for cultivating and developing a passion are weighed against the downsides for novice users. In light of problems such as an excess of content and the lack of quality control, the mediators feel that a strong case can be made for planning and structuring in order to socialize new users. They also consider the necessity of counteracting and broadening the preferences and knowledge of users. The mediators believe that some form of guidance and control is necessary to scaffold information, broaden interests, stimulate critical reflection and coach the discussion. Here too, social media are celebrated as *affinity spaces*, though skepticism is expressed towards the idea of self-directed learning.

General conclusions

In this section, I discuss the general conclusions of the research and consider the affordances and the limits of the new practices, discourses and understandings that emerge in social media or participatory culture. I argue that the findings support many of the positive claims about *affinity spaces* and *participatory culture*. I also stress the tensions that emerge by pointing out that the findings reinforce some of the skepticism and counterarguments presented by other scholars.

The discussion is divided in two subsections. The first subsection addresses the discourses of developers, recipients, producers and mediators and extracts a number of key terms, namely: "passion", "sharing" and "conflict". These key terms express a shared understanding of what counts as literacy in social media environments. I also consider how these terms reflect a new understanding of literacy, identity and authority. In the second subsection, I focus on the notion of cultural expertise as it is defined within participatory culture. I consider how the new understanding of expertise empowers and challenges "regular" users, but also "professional" users who are affiliated to traditional cultural institutions.

New keywords in culture and education

Passion

A comparison of the discourses studied in this dissertation indicates that social media are primarily characterized as places where people with a shared "passion" meet with other enthusiasts to engage in discussion and collaborative projects. The concept of passion is used to refer to users' interest and their enthusiasm to explore and develop that interest further. In social media environments, passion is expressed through the creation of a network of tastes and experiences. These networks consist of status updates (e.g. what you are currently reading), preference list (e.g. a list of your favorite books), opinions (e.g. book review), social connections (e.g. a list of followers), personal works of creativity (e.g. a short story) or inspiring works of others (e.g. a sonnet written by a fellow poet).

The concept "passion" is also used by the participants to stress the image of social media as open environments that welcome diversity, experimentation and confrontation. Social media are mostly perceived as democratic social spaces that offer opportunities for equal participation and support the cultivation of passions shared by its users. This is concurrent with the characterization of digital media as *affinity spaces* (see Gee, 2005; Hayes & Gee, 2010). As such, the discourses surrounding social media focus on interest-driven learning and move away from the 'skills and benchmarks' approach of literacy.

However, the concept of “passion” is also used by the participants to demarcate the difference between passionate and impassionate users. This dichotomy could be used to reinstate the opposition expressed in the terms literate and non-literate or civilized and primitive. Terms which have been criticized by the scholars from the New Literacies Studies (see Street, 1984, 1988; Gee, 1986). Impassionate could become a label to denote a large group of users who refuse to participate and thus fail to develop skills, knowledge, enthusiasm and emotions related to a particular topic of interest.

Sharing

“Sharing” is also a central concept within the discourse of social media and participatory culture. The concept is used to refer to broad ranges of activities like distributing creative content or displaying social connections. Each of these activities is associated with the expression and development of passion. Users can create a public identity so others can identify their tastes and experiences (see also Donath & boyd, 2004; Lui, Maes, & Davenport, 2006). This allows users to contextualize and evaluate each others value assessments.

Sharing is also recognized as an essential practice for expressing that trust and as such to acknowledge and encourage people’s participatory practices. The more users are acknowledged by others, the more status they acquire as an expert reader, writer, mediator, critic, etc. As such, they steadily become resources for others in the social media environment (see Gee, 2005).

Participatory culture does not just offer opportunities for sharing, but also makes sharing a necessity. People’s contributions are always assessed in the light of new situations. Their status as “expert” is therefore always under scrutiny. They are challenged to argue and exhibit expertise rather than to simply claim it. Thus, people are constantly encouraged to share. This creates an endless cycle of showing followed by acknowledging, questioning or disagreeing.

Conflict

Recipients, producers and mediators recognize that social media developers influence how to act and talk through the process of designing social media. At the same time, they suggest that interference through clear prescription and top-down control by developers is minimal, thereby allowing users to re-imagine the functions and purposes of different design elements. In fact, in various cases developers even stimulate users to customize the environment and to try out different modes of meaning-making. While this is considered essential for the success of social media as *affinity spaces*, the participants in my studies have also identified this as a potential weakness.

CONCLUSION

On the one hand, the discourses of the participants indicate that the lack of control and the strong focus on customization in social media environments support and stimulate diversity and discussion. On the other hand, the studied discourses also highlight that these features can very easily lead to information overload and aggressive self-affirmation. This tension between fruitful and unfavorable conflict inspires various suggestions for implementing some form of control, including social control through communities of practice and quality control by institutionally recognized experts (e.g. teachers, librarians, etc.). The participants stress the importance and tension of supporting conflict (see also Pratt, 1991; Mottart, Soetaert & Verdoodt, 2003), but also of sharing responsibility for establishing a set of general rules and criteria.

New forms of cultural expertise

"Different people lead in different areas or on different days and being a leader means in large part, resourcing, mentoring, and helping people, not bossing them around."

(Hayes & Gee, 2010, p. 188)

Situated expertise

The opportunities for equal participation empower and encourage people to challenge the contributions of others and to present alternative solutions. The quality of the exhibited practices is assessed in light of the given situation. This means that experts can no longer rely on age, training or profession to claim authority. Instead, all users need to construct an identity and show their expertise by practicing it in public (see also Hayes & Gee, 2010). Affiliation to powerful cultural institutions like libraries or publishing houses is only important if it contributes to a proper response in the given context. This model of situated expertise presents a unique challenge for cultural institutions and professional experts, such as schools and teachers. Professionals involved in these institutions need to help people to acquire this critical attitude (see Jenkins, 2009), which inevitably means that they themselves will be questioned and challenged.

Experts as learners

Situated expertise forces everyone who participates to continuously update and revise their skills, knowledge, attitudes and beliefs; often on an ad hoc basis. Learning needs are identified as people discuss what is needed in a given situation. At the same time, this discussion also immediately creates an opportunity for learning because people share their insights and experiences to support their claims and arguments. In fact, users often share information about their own learning process in order

to ask and answer questions. Interestingly, accounts of failure are often considered equally valuable to successful solutions. Expertise is thus expressed by presenting oneself as an experienced learner, but a learner nonetheless. This practice is not new (see e.g. Heath, 1983), but often still undeveloped in traditional institutional settings like formal education (see Jenkins, 2009; Gee & Hayes, 2010).

Balanced deep and wide knowledge

The openness of social media environments empowers users to explore their interests in various ways (see also Gee, 2005). They can choose to explore a particular topic, which allows them to gain “intensive” knowledge, but at the same time creates a tunnel vision. They also have the opportunity to explore and converge different topics (see also Jenkins, 2006a). This allows them to acquire “extensive” but potentially shallow cultural knowledge. Being an expert means finding a balance between both by acquiring deep insights while maintaining a broad overview. This can be very challenging in institutionalized settings in general, and education in particular, where expertise is often segregated into different domains (see Gee, 2004).

Limitations and opportunities: studying a field in motion

Of course, all research is necessarily limited in time and scope. In addition, the field of literacies studies is in constant motion, changing rapidly under the influence of new media. This makes studying these changes a challenging task. It requires continuous attention to keep up with the transformations and new literacies that are emerging. In this final section, I discuss how I have tried to address these inevitable limitations. I explain how I have tried to create opportunities for ensuring and facilitating continuity in research, for developing a deep understanding of the changes in media and literacies, and for maintaining a broad perspective on this evolution.

Ensuring and facilitating continuity

In this dissertation, I have analyzed and documented how literacies are currently practiced and understood in a social media culture. The analysis considered literacy events and practices from four different perspectives, thus providing a broad overview, which stresses the complexity of the changes. In addition, I have taken great care to provide clear links between my findings and findings from previous studies. As such, I have tried to stress the tensions and bridge some of the gaps in the academic literature on literacy and social media. Nonetheless, these practices and understandings presented in this dissertation will inevitably change over time and therefore demand additional research. I have tried to facilitate this future research by carefully describing the methodological techniques developed and used in my research.

Developing a deep understanding

Additional in-depth studies of literacies and literary communication practices in social media environments can hopefully benefit from my research, which provides a detailed outline of the meaning-making practices and understandings from four different perspectives – i.e. developers, recipients, producers and mediators. Future studies can focus more closely on individual perspectives. This could, for instance, include a focus on the commercial aspects of social media development and literary production. It could also entail a quantitative analysis that focuses more intensely on the interaction patterns between different actors and the development of authority or on the relationship between design elements, communication opportunities and types of learning.

Maintaining a broad perspective

Future research can also focus on broadening the understanding of literacies in a social media culture by considering domains other than literature. The system-oriented approach can be easily applied to domains such as music or film. The findings from these studies can then be compared with the findings presented in this dissertation to detect similarities and variations across different domains. Such comparative research would help literacy scholars to develop a meta-perspective on the different literacies that are emerging in social media and participatory culture.

Studying the effects of media AND people

Finally, I hope that my research can convince scholars in the field of media and literacies research to focus equally on the effects that media have on people and the effects that people have on media. I concur with Ted Striphas (2014) that “changes in the language are as much a part of the story of technology as innovative new products. Keywords remind us of the degree to which the story of technology is a human one, grounded not only in the calculi of science and engineering but also in the welter of everyday talk” (para. 6-7). This is easy to forget when we refer to all participants with the generic term “users” while gathering “big data” in search of “universal patterns”.

NEDERLANDSE SAMENVATTING / SUMMARY IN DUTCH

Inleiding

In dit doctoraat onderzocht ik wat het betekent om geletterd te zijn in onze huidige samenleving waarin mensen steeds vaker deelnemen aan het sociale en culturele leven via sociale media. Geletterdheid heeft een sterke historische link met literatuur, daarom richtte ik de casestudies in mijn onderzoek vooral op de participatie in literaire cultuur en literaire communicatie in sociale media omgevingen zoals bijvoorbeeld *Goodreads* en *Iedereenleest.be*.

Literatuur en geletterdheid

De term "geletterdheid" is sterk verbonden met de termen "letteren" en "literatuur" en ontstond als gevolg van een geleidelijke verschuiving van orale naar schriftelijke cultuur. Doorheen de moderne tijd werden de "letteren" en de "literatuur" of het lezen ervan een steeds belangrijker vorm van kennis en leren. Dankzij de invoering van de drukpers konden boeken sneller en goedkoper geproduceerd worden waardoor meer mensen toegang kregen tot geschreven teksten. Naarmate ook het aantal teksten toename werd de term "literatuur" steeds vaker gebruikt om een onderscheid te maken tussen hoogstaande en minder kwaliteitsvolle teksten – m.a.w. de literaire canon. Naast lezen en kennis van de literaire canon werd ook het vermogen om te schrijven een criterium om te spreken van "geletterd zijn" (Williams, 1983).

Gesproken taal werd stelselmatig vervangen door geschreven teksten als de voornaamste manier om betekenis te creëren en over te dragen (Ong, 1982). Hierdoor veranderde ook onze kijk op de wereld. Geschreven teksten lieten immers toe om kennis over te dragen zonder daarbij afhankelijk te zijn van de onmiddellijke ervaring of het menselijke geheugen. Hierdoor konden wetenschappers een hoger niveau van objectiviteit en abstractie bereiken (Ong, 2000, p. 111). Het samengaan van schrift cultuur en wetenschappelijke ontwikkeling zorgde ervoor dat "ongeletterdheid" steeds meer gezien werd als eigenschap van minder ontwikkelde of "primitieve" culturen (Gee, 1986). Geletterdheid werd dus benaderd als een universele maatstaf voor ontwikkeling en onderwijskansen.

Nieuwe media en meervoudige geletterdheid

De term geletterdheid blijft echter een sociaal-culturele constructie. Het bewustzijn hiervan ontstond pas toen nieuwe media zoals radio en televisie hun intrede deden en ons confronteerden met andere vormen van betekenisgeving (Ong, 1982). Het contrast tussen gedrukte en audiovisuele media zette wetenschappers er toe aan om de enkelvoudige en mono-culturele benadering van geletterdheid in vraag te stellen (bv. Street, 1988). Op basis van etnografische en sociolinguïstisch onderzoek werd het begrip "geletterdheid" geherdefinieerd als complex, context-gebonden en meervoudig. Aansluitend

stelden wetenschappers voor om opvoedingsprojecten te hervormen in het licht van deze meervoudige benadering van geletterdheid. Dit voorstel omvatte de erkenning en ondersteuning van alle vormen van betekenisgeving "als dynamische middelen voor expressie die continue worden bijgestuurd door hun gebruikers terwijl ze trachten verschillende culturele doelstellingen te verwezenlijken" [noot: vertaald uit het engels] (The New London Group, 1996, p. 64). Het doel van deze pedagogische benadering is om mensen de mogelijkheid te bieden om zichzelf uit te drukken en zo hun eigen sociale rol vorm te geven.

Desondanks ligt de nadruk van vele opvoedingsprojecten binnen het formeel onderwijs nog steeds op het lezen en schrijven van gedrukte teksten. Daartegenover staan de *affinity spaces* die vorm krijgen in en rondom digitale media. Dit zijn omgevingen waarin mensen die elkaar vaak niet kennen op basis van hun gedeelde interesse en passie samen komen om kennis en ervaringen te delen of om samen te werken aan een project (Gee, 2005). In deze omgevingen maken mensen kennis met een heel andere, maar krachtige vorm van leren (zie Gee, 2007; Hayes & Gee, 2010). Bovendien leren ze ook omgaan met een culturele omgeving waarin gelijkwaardige participatie bijzonder belangrijk wordt (zie Jenkins, 2006b, 2009). Dit heeft onvermijdelijk gevolgen voor hoe geletterdheid wordt ingevuld en beoefend (Snyder, 2003).

De sociale media lijken het beste uitdrukking te geven aan de *participatieve cultuur* die ontstaat onder invloed van digitalisering. Ze zijn sterk gericht op communicatie en participatie op basis van door gebruikers aangedragen materialen (of ook: User-Generated Content). Bovendien wordt de nadruk op participatie gecombineerd met de digitalisering van traditionele mediavormen zoals muziek, film en literatuur. Zo is *Soundcloud* gericht op het digitaal delen van eigen muziekbewerkingen, *Youtube* op het delen van zelfgemaakte filmpjes en *Goodreads* op het delen van boekbesprekingen en leestips.

Voorstelling van het onderzoek

Onderzoeksvragen

In deze verhandeling heb ik bestudeerd hoe de ontwikkeling en het gebruik van sociale media nieuwe benaderingen en toepassingen van geletterdheid tot stand brengen. Bovendien onderzocht ik ook hoe dit bijdraagt tot de vernieuwing van culturele instituties. Bij het opzetten van mijn onderzoek, heb ik aansluiting gezocht bij de etnografische en sociolinguïstische traditie binnen het onderzoeksveld van de geletterdheidstudies. Bijgevolg omvat deze verhandeling een uitgebreide etnografische verkenning van gebeurtenissen, praktijken en gesprekken binnen sociale media omgevingen die uitdrukking geven aan geletterdheid en geletterdheids-ontwikkeling. De vragen die daarbij centraal staan zijn:

- (1) Wat betekent het om “geletterd” te zijn in een sociale media cultuur?
- (2) Hoe dragen deze nieuwe benaderingen van “geletterdheid” bij tot het beeld dat mensen hebben ten aanzien van hun eigen identiteit, hun sociale positie, hun mogelijkheden om deel te nemen aan cultuur en de verdeling van macht ten aanzien van culturele instituties?

Afbakening

Het veld van de sociale media beslaat een bijzonder uitgebreid gamma aan platformen en praktijken. Op basis van een grondige studie van de academische literatuur en mijn eerste observaties binnen sociale media omgevingen besloot ik echter om mijn aandacht toe te spitsen op literatuur en literaire communicatie. Deze keuze stoelt op twee belangrijke vaststellingen. Enerzijds is er het sterke historische verband tussen literatuur en geletterdheid, alsook het aanhoudende belang van literatuur en tekstuele geletterdheid binnen het formeel onderwijs. Anderzijds is er de aanwezigheid van een rijk aanbod van gesprekken en teksten met betrekking tot de rol en het belang van literatuur en literaire communicatie. Beide elementen lieten mij toe om te onderzoeken hoe sociale media bijdragen tot de verandering van traditionele benaderingen van geletterdheid, alsook van bestaande culturele instellingen.

Methodologie

Het onderzoek combineert etnografische dataverzameling en discursieve analyse met een systemische benadering van literaire communicatie en cultuur. Dit betekent eerst en vooral dat de data voor dit onderzoek werd verzameld in verscheidene fasen door middel van verschillende methoden zoals participerende observatie en semigestructureerd interviews. Naast aandacht voor de handelingen van

de participanten en de context waarin ze die stellen, wordt er bovendien aandacht geschonken aan de manier waarop de participanten over die handelingen spreken. Op deze manier houdt het onderzoek rekening met het feit dat veranderingen in onze cultuur en maatschappij ook discursief tot stand komen. Door literaire cultuur als een sociaal systeem te benaderen (zie Luhmann, 1995, 2000; Schmidt, 1989, 1997) wordt er tevens aandacht geschonken aan de verschillende perspectieven die mensen hanteren terwijl ze handelen en spreken. Die perspectieven zijn verbonden met bepaalde sociale rollen die een reeks handelingsmogelijkheden omvatten. Deze handelingsmogelijkheden worden door empirische literatuurwetenschappers traditioneel als volgt gedefinieerd: "productie", "bemiddeling", "receptie" en "nabewerking" (Schmidt, 1997).

De aandacht voor de verschillende perspectieven wordt weerspiegeld in de structuur en opzet van het onderzoek: elke deelstudie richt zich op één specifiek perspectief. Het perspectief van ontwikkelaars en ontwerpers van sociale media is moeilijk te plaatsen binnen deze structuur. Het is tevens vaak afwezig binnen het bestaande onderzoek met betrekking tot sociale media. Het is echter bijzonder belangrijk om het onderzoek naar de invloed van media-veranderingen op geletterdheid bij de ontwikkelaars en ontwerpers te starten. Via de vormgeving en promotie van de door hen ontworpen media dragen ze immers in belangrijke mate bij tot die veranderingen. Zoals Ted Striphas vaststelt: "nieuwe technologieën zorgen voor veranderingen, maar in tegenstelling tot wat sommigen ons willen laten geloven doen ze dat niet alleen. Veel van de veranderingen die aan deze nieuwe technologieën worden toegeschreven zijn veeleer het gevolg van hun bijdrage in een context waar veranderingen in de taal reeds op gang waren en voor wrijving zorgden" [noot: vertaald uit het engels] (2014, para. 31). Daarom startte ik het onderzoek bij de ontwikkelaars van sociale media platformen om zo te achterhalen bij welke veranderingen zij met het ontwerpen van deze platformen trachten aan te sluiten.

Bevindingen

Hoofdstuk 1: ontwikkelaars van sociale media

In hoofdstuk 1, onderzocht ik het vertoog van sociale media ontwikkelaars om zo te bepalen welke veranderingen zij op het oog hebben met betrekking tot cultuurparticipatie. Op basis van een retorische analyse van het vertoog en de vormgeving van 27 sociale media platformen gericht op literaire communicatie maakte ik een gedetailleerde beschrijving van de verschillende rollen en handelingsmogelijkheden die ontwikkelaars beschrijven en ondersteunen. Uit de analyse bleek dat sociale media worden omschreven en voorgesteld als democratische sociale ruimtes waarin mensen met een gedeelde interesse en passie voor literatuur elkaar kunnen ontmoeten, helpen en uitdagen. De ontwikkelaars beschrijven drie rollen of gebruikerstypes, namelijk: “lezers”, “schrijvers” en “bemiddelaars”. Vaak wordt er echter geen sterk onderscheid gemaakt tussen de verschillende handelingsmogelijkheden van elke rol. Integendeel, er wordt gesuggereerd dat iedereen kan deelnemen op een gelijkwaardige manier en dus elke mogelijke handeling kan stellen. Bovendien wordt het sociale aspect van de literaire cultuur benadrukt door een focus op literatuur als een communicatief proces waarbij betekenis tot stand komt via interactie tussen verschillende actoren – d.i. lezers, schrijver en bemiddelaars. Hierdoor is iedereen betrokken bij “nabewerking” en verdwijnt deze dimensie als individueel handelingspatroon in het vertoog van de ontwikkelaars. Ook bespreken de ontwikkelaars nagenoeg nooit hun eigen rol. Op basis van deze bevindingen werd in de volgende hoofdstukken gefocust op literaire receptie, productie en bemiddeling.

Hoofdstuk 2: lezers en literaire receptie in sociale media

Hoofdstuk 2 richtte zich op lezers en literaire receptie binnen de sociale media omgevingen van het Vlaamse leesbevorderingsinitiatief *Iedereenleest.be*. De studie omvatte observaties van 490 gebruikers die deelnamen aan de website en/of de Facebook-groep van *Iedereenleest.be*. Daarnaast werden semigestructureerde interviews afgenomen bij tien zeer actieve gebruikers, alsook bij de ontwikkelaar en beheerder van het initiatief. Op basis van de observaties werden vijf belangrijke vormen van literaire communicatie bij lezers vastgesteld. Door de frequenties van deze praktijken op de website en in de Facebook-groep te vergelijken, werd duidelijk hoe de vormgeving van een sociaal media platform handelingsmogelijkheden creëert of verhindert. Dit werd verder ondersteund door de thematische analyse van het interview materiaal. Daaruit bleek tevens dat de lezers literaire communicatie via sociale media op vier manieren beschrijven, namelijk als: het delen van leeservaringen, het ontmoeten van andere mensen met een passie voor literatuur en lezen, het creëren van een identiteit en het erkennen en aanmoedigen van participatie.

Hoofdstuk 3: schrijvers en literaire productie in sociale media

Hoofdstuk 3 richtte zich op schrijvers en literaire productie tijdens het *2012 Twitter Fiction Festival*. In het kader van deze casestudie werden gegevens verzameld bij veertien auteurs die deelnamen aan dit online evenement. De gegevens omvatten naast transcripties van twee focusgroep-gesprekken die plaats vonden via *Twitter* ook materiaal met betrekking tot de bijdragen van de participanten en documenten en observaties met betrekking tot hun overige activiteiten op sociale media. Op basis van een iteratieve thematische analyse bleken participanten zich belemmerd te voelen door traditionele labels zoals "auteur" of "schrijver". Deze labels zijn enkel gericht op de productie van geschreven teksten, wat vaak niet overeenstemt met de werkelijke praktijken van de "verhalenvertellers" en "artiesten" binnen sociale media. De participanten vergelijken en beschrijven hun praktijken uitvoerig en plaatsen deze vaak in contrast met traditionele benaderingen van schrijven als eenzame en gedisciplineerde bezigheid. De participanten definiëren hun praktijken als het schrijven van gefragmenteerd verhalen, het ontwikkelen van narratieve structuren, het creëren van interactieve leeservaringen en het experimenteren met regels verbonden aan mediavormen, literaire genres, schrijfstijlen en samenwerkingsverbanden.

Hoofdstuk 4: bemiddelaars en literaire bemiddeling in sociale media

Hoofdstuk 4 richtte zich op leraren en literaire bemiddeling binnen de populaire sociale media omgevingen *Goodreads*. De gegevens voor deze casestudie bestaan uit een auto-etnografisch document dat werd samengesteld door 79 studenten verbonden aan de specifieke lerarenopleiding van de Universiteit Gent. Op basis van een thematische analyse bleek dat de participanten vier belangrijke kenmerken van literaire communicatie via sociale media beschrijven. Ten eerste wordt er gesproken over de mogelijkheid om een archief van persoonlijke leeservaringen aan te leggen. Dit verbinden de participanten met een tweede mogelijkheid, namelijk om het waardenoordeel en de reacties van anderen te contextualiseren en te evalueren. Als derde kenmerk duiden de participanten op het belang van actieve participatie bestaande uit het delen van ervaringen, inzichten en meningen. Ten vierde wijzen de participanten op het belang van de genetwerkte structuur en de aanwezigheid van sociale contacten binnen sociale media omgevingen. Bij het bespreken van deze vier kenmerken overwegen de participanten ook wat de voor- en nadelen zijn voor het onderwijs. Op basis van deze reflectie stellen ze dat leerkrachten als bemiddelaars in literaire cultuur begeleiding moeten bieden door het selecteren van boeken, door het ondersteunen en opzetten van gesprekken over literatuur en door het beheersen en voorkomen van vruchteloze conflicten.

Algemeen besluit

Uit de bevindingen van deze studies blijkt dat sociale media omgevingen inderdaad vaak de vorm aannemen van *affinity spaces* waarbinnen vormen van leren voorkomen die vaak niet mogelijk zijn binnen het formeel onderwijs. De participanten bevestigen heel wat positieve claims met betrekking tot *participatieve cultuur* en *affinity spaces*, maar benadrukken ook aan aantal tekortkomingen en potentiële problemen. Door de perspectieven uit de verschillende deelstudies met elkaar te vergelijken werd duidelijk hoe binnen sociale media omgevingen vorm gegeven wordt aan een *participatieve cultuur* en wat dit betekent voor de invullingen het concept “geletterdheid”.

Nieuwe kernbegrippen ten aanzien van cultuurparticipatie

Met het oog op de eerste grote onderzoeksvraag identificeerde ik in deze verhandeling drie nieuwe kernbegrippen met betrekking tot cultuurparticipatie in sociale media omgevingen. Geletterdheid heeft binnen sociale media omgevingen te maken met het uitdrukken en uitbouwen van een passie voor een bepaald onderwerp, het delen van ervaringen, inzichten en meningen, en het stimuleren en beheersen van conflicten.

Passie

Het erkennen en ondersteunen van “passie” wordt gezien als één van de belangrijkste elementen voor het ontwikkelen van geletterdheid in sociale media omgevingen. De sterke interesse voor een bepaald onderwerp brengt mensen samen en werkt als een sterke interne motivatie om bijdragen te leveren en te leren. Binnen sociale media omgevingen staat diversiteit en gelijkwaardigheid echter centraal. Er zijn dus meestal geen richtlijnen of toelatingscriteria om deel te nemen aan de activiteiten in sociale media omgevingen. Het hebben van een “gedeelde interesse” of “passie” krijgt dus een brede invulling en kan voor elke gebruiker iets heel anders betekenen. Het passiegericht of interesse-gedreven leren wordt daardoor ook aanschouwd als een mogelijke zwakte omdat het kan leiden tot kortzichtigheid en agressieve vormen van zelfbevestiging.

Delen

Het “delen” wordt beschouwd als de centrale activiteit binnen sociale media omgevingen. Iedere gebruiker wordt aangemoedigd om ervaringen, inzichten en meningen te delen met anderen. Door het delen creëren gebruikers een uitgebreid netwerk van hun ervaringen en smaken. Op die manier

bieden de gebruikers een context aan op basis waarvan anderen iets kunnen bijdragen en waardeoordelen kunnen evalueren. Zo bouwen gebruikers een identiteit op die voornamelijk bestaat uit gesitueerde handelingen in plaats van uiterlijke en abstracte kenmerken zoals leeftijd, geslacht of academische en professionele titels. Door dit delen bieden de gebruikers ook ondersteuning aan elkaar, waarbij ze afwisselend de rol van expert en lerende op zich kunnen nemen. De “gemeenschap” wordt een gedeelde bron van kennis en vaardigheden die niet enkel bestaat uit succesverhalen, maar ook uit problemen en mislukkingen.

Conflict

Het stimuleren van “conflict” wordt gezien als een derde belangrijk element voor het ontwikkelen van geletterdheid in sociale media omgevingen. De aanwezige diversiteit en passie binnen sociale media leiden onvermijdelijk tot conflict. Dit wordt verder in de hand gewerkt door het ontbreken van input van de ontwikkelaars en ontwerpers van de sociale media. Iedereen krijgt daardoor gelijke mogelijkheden om een bepaalde sociale rol op zich te nemen, maar ook om de rol van anderen in vraag te stellen. Het in vraag stellen van de identiteit of sociale rol van een gebruiker gebeurt – net zoals het creëren ervan – op basis van de handelingen die deze gebruiker heeft gesteld. Door op deze manier met elkaar in conflict te gaan, dagen gebruikers elkaar uit om hun handelingen te onderbouwen met argumenten en hun zwaktes te erkennen, alsook om vragen te stellen en te bouwen op de ervaringen en inzichten van anderen. Net zoals passie vormt het gebrek aan controle en het stimuleren van conflict ook een mogelijke zwakte omdat het demotiverend kan werken en snel kan ontaarden in scheldtirades. Conflict vergt dus ook enig (zelf)vertrouwen en (zelf)discipline.

Nieuwe vormen van expertise

“Verschillende mensen leiden in verschillende domeinen of op verschillende dagen en een leider zijn betekent voornamelijk mensen ondersteunen, begeleiden en helpen, niet hen orders geven.” [noot: vertaald uit het engels]

(Hayes & Gee, 2010, p. 188)

Het antwoord op de tweede centrale vraag in deze verhandeling formuleerde ik aan de hand van de drie vormen van expertise die voorop staan in sociale media omgevingen, namelijk: gesitueerde expertise, het leeren expert en expertise als evenwichtige verhouding tussen diepe en brede kennis. Deze drie nieuwe vormen van expertise tonen aan hoe de machtsverhouding tussen “gewone” en “professionele” gebruikers – of ook: tussen individuen en culturele instituties – enorm worden verkleind.

Gesitueerde expertise

Op basis van de bespreking van de kernbegrippen blijkt dat expertise flexibel is en steeds bepaald wordt op basis van de situatie waarin de gebruikers zich bevinden. Iedereen kan expertise claimen door de juiste handelingen te stellen, maar deze claim kan ook door iedereen in vraag gesteld worden. Dit betekent dat de stem van "gewone" gebruikers even zwaar kan doorwegen als de stem van "professionele" gebruikers die verbonden zijn aan culturele instellingen. Vanuit pedagogisch oogpunt zou het de taak moeten zijn van deze culturele professionals om mensen hierbij te ondersteunen en te leren om kritische vragen te stellen (zie ook Jenkins, 2009). Dit betekent echter onvermijdelijk dat deze "professionele" gebruikers – net als de culturele instellingen die ze vertegenwoordigen – zelf in vraag gesteld kunnen en zullen worden.

De lerende expert

Naast het in vraag stellen van expertise is ook het erkennen van eigen tekortkomingen een belangrijk aspect van expertise-ontwikkeling binnen sociale media omgevingen. Een expert wordt onder meer geacht om haar of zijn passie voor een bepaald onderwerp uit te drukken in een bereidheid om te leren. Het in vraag stellen van expertise betekent immers dat gebruikers bereid moeten zijn om hun vaardigheden, kennis, attitudes en overtuigingen bij te stellen en dit meestal op een ad hoc basis. Bovendien wordt het delen van het eigen leerproces (bv. verkenningen of experimenten die nieuwe inzichten of vaardigheden opleverden) beschouwd als één van de belangrijkste manieren op expertise kenbaar en beschikbaar te maken voor anderen. Het idee van de expert als lerende is niet nieuw (zie bv. Heath, 1983), maar het wordt echter weinig toegepast binnen traditionele institutionele settings zoals het formeel onderwijssysteem (zie Jenkins, 2009; Hayes & Gee, 2010).

Evenwichtige verhouding tussen diepe en brede kennis

De openheid van sociale media omgevingen maakt dat gebruikers zelf kunnen kiezen welke interesse ze verder willen ontwikkelen en hoe ze dat willen doen (zie ook Gee, 2005). Enerzijds, kunnen gebruikers kiezen om een bepaald onderwerp uitgebreid te verkennen. Dit laat hen toe om "diepe" kennis op te bouwen, maar kan ook leiden tot enggeestig denken. Anderzijds, hebben gebruikers de mogelijkheid om meerdere onderwerpen te verkennen en te combineren (zie ook Jenkins, 2006a). Hierdoor kunnen ze "brede", maar mogelijk oppervlakkige, culturele kennis ontwikkelen. Te enge en te oppervlakkige kennis zijn beiden nefast voor het ontwikkelen en claimen van expertise binnen sociale media omgevingen. Experts worden vaak omschreven als personen die beschikken over diepe inzichten zonder daarbij een breed overzicht te verliezen. Dit kan ook bijzonder uitdagend zijn voor experts in traditionele culturele instellingen in het algemeen, en binnen het onderwijs in het bijzonder, omdat expertise er vaak wordt opgedeeld in gescheiden vakgebieden (zie Gee, 2004).

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ACADEMIC OUTPUT

Integrated chapters

Publications

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- Vlieghe, J., Vandermeersche, G., & Soetaert, R. (2014). Social media in literacy education: Exploring social reading with pre-service teachers. *New Media & Society*. doi: 10.1177/1461444814547683
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- Vlieghe, J., Bourgonjon, J., Rutten, K., & Soetaert, R. (2011). What happens off the field? Proposing a rhetorical approach of the affinity spaces surrounding games. In D. Gouscos & M. Meimaris (Eds.), *Proceedings of the 5th European conference on games-based learning* (pp. 626–631). Reading, UK: Academic Publishing Limited.

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- Vlieghe, J., Rutten, K., & Soetaert, R. (2014). *Cultural participation & professional development in social media culture* (D2.2.3). Brussels, Belgium: EMSOC reports.
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- Vlieghe, J., Rutten, K., & Soetaert, R. (2011). *State-of-the-Art report on studies of literacy and learning in and through social media* (D2.2.1). Brussels, Belgium: EMSOC reports.

Conferences

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- Vlieghe, J. & Page, K.L. (2013, October). "Twitter, the most brilliant tough love editor you'll ever have." *Literary Literacies, Social Reading and the Twitter Fiction Festival (#TFF)*. Paper presented at InfoSocial 2013: A Media, Technology, & Society Graduate Research Conference, Evanston, IL. Abstract retrieved from: <http://comm.soc.northwestern.edu/mts-conference/2013-program>

Related academic output

Publications

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Vlieghe, J. (2012). Cultuureducatie en sociale media: een opiniestuk van Joachim Vlieghe, Universiteit Gent. In S. Donders & E. Gillaerts (Eds.), *Dag van de cultuureducatie 2012: wie ben ik? Opstand & cultuur: inspiratieboekje* (pp. 6–7). Brussels: Vlaams ministerie van Cultuur, Jeugd, Sport en Media.

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Vlieghe, J. (2012, March 6). Een Oscar voor een e-book. *Apache News Lab*. Retrieved from <http://www.apache.be/2012/03/06/een-oscar-voor-een-e-book>

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Bourgonjon, J., Vandermeersche, G., Vlieghe, J., & Soetaert, R. (2013, August). *"How Video Games Can Change Your Life": Analyzing Stories of Change on Internet Fora*. Paper presented at Digital Games Research Association 2013 Conference, Atlanta, GA. Abstract retrieved from http://lmc.gatech.edu/~cpearce3/DiGRA13/papers/paper_92.doc

Bourgon, J., Vlieghe, J., & Vandermeersche, G. (2013, July). *How literature and video games affect people's lives. Exploring Stories about Learning Across Media*. Paper presented at International Study Association on Teachers and Teaching 2013 Conference, Ghent. Abstract retrieved from <http://www.isatt2013.ugent.be/files/ISATT%202013%20Abstract%20Book.pdf>

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- Vlieghe, J. (2013, May). *Dramatistic Analysis of Literacy Narratives in Social Media Environments*. Paper presented at Rhetoric as Equipment for Living; Kenneth Burke, Culture and Education, Gent. Abstract retrieved from <http://www.cultureeducation.ugent.be/activities.php?id=451>
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- Vlieghe, J. (2012, June). *Social Reading: Re-revealing the Social Layer of Books*. Paper presented at Revealing the Reader: A Symposium, Melbourne. Abstract retrieved from <http://www.cultureeducation.ugent.be/activities.php?id=77>
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- Vlieghe, J. (2012, February). *Media, literacy and the literary system: How social media are affecting literary professionals?* Paper presented at Literacy and Society, Culture, Media, & Education, Ghent. Abstract retrieved from <http://www.cultureeducation.ugent.be/activities.php?id=58>

(2011)

Vlieghe, J., Bourgonjon, J., Rutten, K., & Soetaert, R. (2011, October). *What happens off the field? Proposing a rhetorical approach of the affinity spaces surrounding games*. Paper presented at 5th European Conference on Games-Based Learning, Athens. Abstract retrieved from <http://academic-conferences.org/pdfs/ECGBL2011-Booklet.pdf>

Invited lectures

(2014)

Vlieghe, J. & Vandermeersche, G. (2014, February). *Lezen en Sociale Media*. Guest lecture in the Bachelor program in Pedagogical Sciences at Ghent University, Ghent.

(2013)

Vlieghe, J. & Vandermeersche, G. (2013, November). *Lezen en Sociale Media*. Guest lecture in the Specific Teacher Training Program at Ghent University, Ghent.

Vlieghe, J. & Vandermeersche, G. (2013, November). *Lezen en Sociale Media*. Lecture at the ICT-congres Sint-Jans College, Hoensbroek.

Vlieghe, J. (2013, May). *Literature teaching and social media*. Guest lecture in the Specific Teacher Training Program at Ghent University, Ghent.

(2012)

Vlieghe, J. (2012, April). *An introduction to cultural participation in social media environments*. Guest lecture in the Bachelor program in Multimedia and Communication technology at HOWest, Kortrijk.

Soetaert, R., & Vlieghe J. (2012, March). *Sociale Media als Cultuurbemiddelaar*. Lecture at #Internet(R)evolutie! Naar sociaal-cultureel(net)werken, Brussels.

Vlieghe, J. (2012, March). *An introduction to cultural participation in social media environments*. Guest lecture in the Specific Teacher Training Program at the department of educational studies at Ghent University, Ghent.

Vlieghe, J. (2012, January). *Hoe sociale media de rol van de cultuurbemiddelaar veranderen?* Lecture at Dag van de Cultuureducatie 2012, Antwerp.

