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Are social media networks reinventing museum education tools? The case of the Suzon Facebook page at the Caen Memorial Museum

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Résumé : cet article traite des usages des réseaux sociaux numériques (RSN) dans les musées français. Nous souhaitons ici explorer et comprendre les transformations que le numérique occasionne sur la relation entretenue entre le jeune public, les outils pédagogiques et le musée.

Mots-clés : réseaux sociaux numériques, musées, expérience muséo-pédagogique hypermédia, Facebook, enquête qualitative

Are social media networks reinventing museum education tools? The case of the Suzon Facebook page at the Caen Memorial Museum

Abstract: The focus of this study is the use of digital social networks in French museums. In this paper we wish to explore and understand the transformations brought about by digital social networks regarding the relation between the young public, digital educational tools and the museum.

Keywords: social media networks, museums, hypermedia-based museum learning experience, Facebook and qualitative survey

Introduction

In recent years museums have been actively engaging in digital social networks and social media platforms. To put this in context and establish a retrospective and prospective view, this research is based on the work carried out by C. Baujard (2012, 2009), F. Andréacola (2014, 2015), Vidal (2012), Paul F. Marty, Boyd W. Rayward & Michael B. Twidale (2003) and P. Pataud-Celériér (1994, 1999, 2000). It is also based on the work done by the GREM (a group carrying out research into museums and education) and in particular on the research carried out by M. Allard Michel, S. Boucher & L. Forest (1993) and A. Meunier (2011). Given this vast theoretical field, our objective is in fact quite modest. In this study we wish to explore

and understand the transformations brought about by digital social networks to the relation between the museum, digital educational tools and the young public. Before proceeding, it is necessary to establish what is meant by “museum educational tools”: *“Educational tools are specifically created for a target public. They may be included in the exhibition or be used on a regular basis during workshops, lent to visitors on a free-access basis, used by a mediator, or not only used inside the museum but also elsewhere (educational pack, for example). An educational tool represents an instrument which favours a strategy or a manner of proceeding with the specific objective of helping visitors to assimilate their learning experience of the museum or exhibition.”* (Meunier, 2011, p.1)

Hence we will address the following problem in this article: How does the production and sharing of digital content via digital social networks give rise to new museum educational practices? The main hypothesis is that the use of digital tools creates a new form of museum educational hypermedia experience which is accompanied, supervised, sociable and motivating. We have chosen a single subject for study: the Suzon Facebook page created by the Caen Memorial museum.¹ Our qualitative study combines three data collection techniques: the indirect observation of a teaching workshop at Caen Memorial museum and a primary school class and their teacher during a teaching session; non-directive ‘centred’ individual interviews with a mediator from the educational and cultural service, the illustrator, the community manager, an educational workshop leader from Caen Memorial museum and the primary school teacher; and collective non-directive interviews of pupils from the class of 8–11 year olds. (CE2 / CM1 / CM2).

1. Presentation of the Suzon Facebook page and those involved

For 10 years the 'Suzon project' was used and experimented during educational workshops at the Memorial by the educational and cultural service. During these workshops, a workshop leader played the role of Suzon for one hour and talked about her daily life during the Second World War with the words and voice of a child. For one hour her narrative was illustrated with slides via an interactive whiteboard and with certain objects. Following these educational workshops the Memorial decided to give her a new lease of life on the internet. This virtual character is called Suzanne Thomas, otherwise known as Suzon. She is a fictional character based on several real characters. The Memorial have chosen a drawing² to represent Suzon. The educational and cultural service elaborated and managed the educational scenario, the Facebook page and the online diary/newspaper for Suzon for a six-month period (January 2015-July 2015). The educational and cultural service work regularly with historians and the archives manager and especially with the Caen Memorial community manager. She works closely with the communication service.

1 The Caen Memorial situated in Normandy, France, is a museum dedicated to the history of the 20th century. Its main theme is oriented towards peace.

2 Alice Dufay is the illustrator for this Facebook page.

The community manager trains this service in the language specific to the digital social networks, regularly advises them and carries out digital observation. A team from this service is responsible for publishing three or four written posts on a weekly basis. A weekly meeting takes place with the community manager to determine the content of these posts.

Here we will describe the Suzon facebook page, beginning with its title, 'Suzon's diary'. This Caen Memorial community page has five tabs: 'a diary' comprised of posts, 'about' (Suzon's profile), 'photos', 'likes' and 'videos'. On the right-hand side Suzon's posts can be found along with the comments and 'likes' of her friends. This character talks about her daily life in each post. These posts (in Helvetica font) are very short texts (on average 7-10 lines) and are accompanied by visuals, comments or 'likes'. They are dated (2 September 1930) and written in a simple style. Suzon writes directly to her diary 'Dear diary, if you knew (...)' Each of Suzon's posts is read by approximately 2500 people. This page is supplemented by an online diary / newspaper³, an educational tool created to illustrate, complete and expand on Suzon's discourse.

The study focuses on a class of CE2 / CM1 / CM2 (6 pupils from CE2, 6 from CM1 and 12 from CM2) from a school of 70 pupils located in a village in Normandy. This class is supervised by a primary school teacher and at least once a week they use this Facebook page. The Facebook account is in the name of the school. This page conforms to the objectives of the national education programme, which are as follows:

'Skill 1⁴: To perfect the command of the French language (to express oneself orally or in a written text using a specific vocabulary, to exchange or debate). Skill 4: Development of information and communication skills, finding information, researching. Skill 5: Humanist culture: learning and memorizing specific events and characters associated with them in a chronological order.'

Outside the classroom environment, three or four pupils follow Suzon *via* Facebook with their parents. The others prefer to do it class with their classmates. They comment on Suzon's posts, ask her questions, give her advice and have several Facebook friends (parents of pupils or former pupils), and a specific Facebook friend, Jacqueline, 91 years old. They participate in competitions organised by the Memorial, sending pictures, photos of their class and models which are exhibited in the museum hall or via the Facebook page. To thank them, these pupils receive presents

³ We will not be studying this tool as this class did not use it.

⁴ *Le socle commun des connaissances et des compétences*, Décret du 11 juillet 2006, URL : <http://cache.media.education.gouv.fr/file/51/3/3513.pdf>

and are invited to the Memorial on the 3rd July to witness firsthand the culmination of Suzon's adventure.

This diagram explains this museum educational experience and the various protagonists:

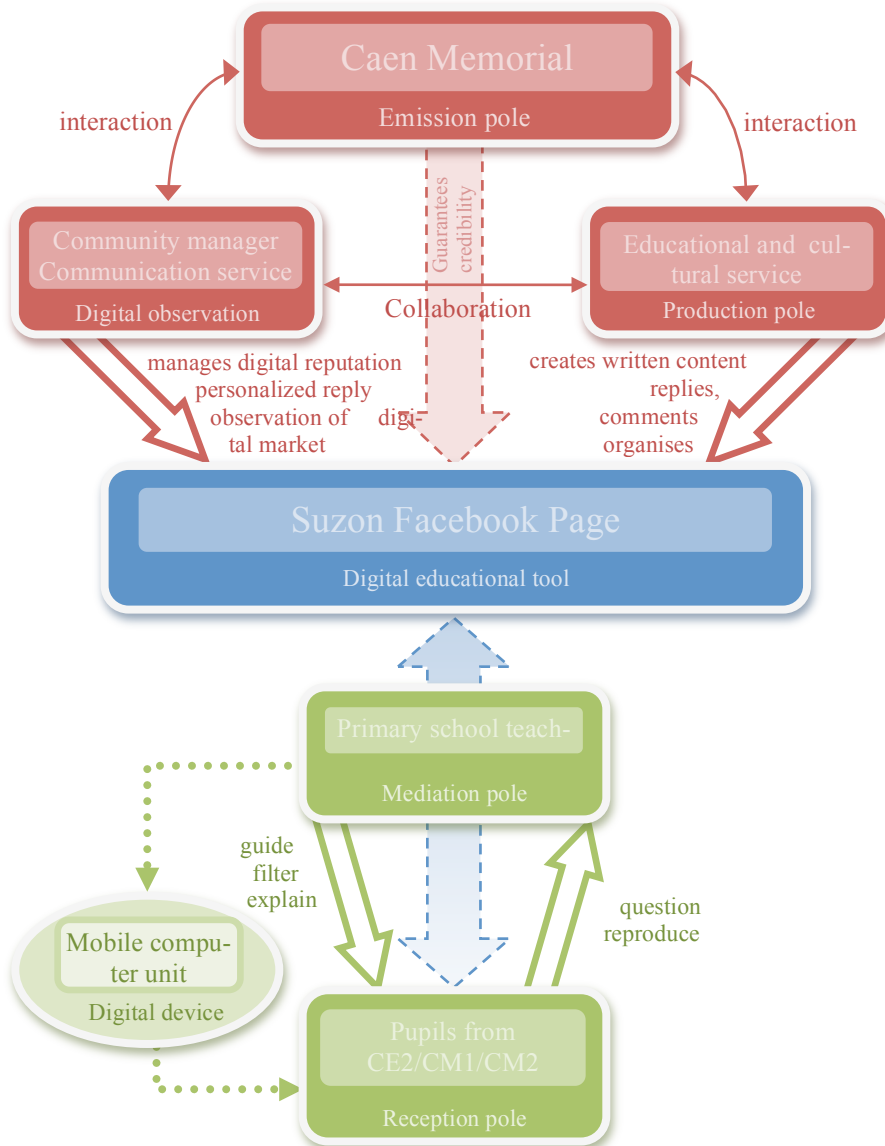


Figure 1. How the Suzon Facebook page at Caen Memorial functions

2. Analysis results

In this section the results will be presented according to the objectives of the research and the initial questioning. Four themes corresponding to our initial hypotheses emerge from the analysis of the interviews. This analysis is based on the the totality of what the respondents actually said and has been transcribed word for word. Four major points concerning this museum content and educational use come out of the study of this data, which is presented here in the form of a table. Looking at table 1, our study reveals a strong hypermediation of museum data via this Facebook page:

Table 1. Dimension: Hypermedia in museum education

| <i>Verbatim</i> | Categories |
|---|--|
| “Following the workshops we adapt the texts to the Facebook format” (CM) “Our job is to provide a discourse which is adapted to the Facebook format and to reply to the comments of Suzon’s fans” (CM) “With Facebook, you can take school and the museum home with you” (Mediator) | Shared digital museum content Text in the form of posts New educational measures Networking |
| “For Facebook the language used has to be attractive” (CM) “You can add sound, pictures ...” (a teacher) “The interactivity favours proximity and empathy” (a teacher) | Attractiveness of visual and written digital content Hypermedia access to collections (text + sound + static or animated image) |
| “It is a little girl who tells her story on Facebook in her head” (a pupil) “It is nice to follow a little 9-year-old girl on Facebook” (a pupil) “I know that it isn’t real: Suzon doesn’t exist!” (a pupil) “She talks about her life during the war. It isn’t a video game” (a pupil) | Virtual character close to her target public Shared on-line personal story Interactivity New space for sharing hypermedia content |

The second finding concerns the ‘hybrid accompanying’ on the part of the Memorial museum staff which takes the form of a physical and digital presence. Young people’s access to the information is carried out in constant collaboration with the Memorial’s educational and cultural service: educational workshops (physical pres-

ence), posts / short articles (digital), emails (digital), visiting schools (physical) and trips to the Memorial (physical). This accompanying is monitored by the teacher in the classroom: a third party, acting as a filter, is put in place between Suzon's Facebook page and the children.

Table 2. Dimension: Physical and digital presence

| <i>Verbatim</i> | Categories |
|--|--|
| "We went to the school in Fresne" (Mediator) "On the 3 rd July two classes came for Suzon's last posts" (Mediator) "They saw Suzon's last two posts as they were written live on the screen" (teacher) "Alice draws her! (...) Tomorrow I am going to Caen (Book Fair) to meet her and ask her to sign a photo of Suzon" (a pupil) "They send us pictures in response to our 'A vos crayons' (take up your pencils) drawing competitions" (Mediator) | Physical and digital presence and monitoring Physical and/or digital presence in the communication process The museum staff become discussion leaders and representatives The museum creates digital and physical media events which maintain the link |
| "I reply to the emails" (CM) "We posted comments and questions that the ladies at the Memorial replied to" (a pupil) | Scientific activity / mediation and managerial activities Continual dialogue with socionauts |
| "I ensure that posts which aren't adapted to Suzon don't get published. I leave the more critical messages about her on-line" (CM) "However you mustn't go there alone. You must go there with your parents!" (Workshop leader) "It is important to remain quite factual and monitor how we use it in order to protect the children, their right of publicity and information about them" (teacher) "There is a lot of debate about social networks. To have a Facebook account, you have to be 13 (...) It is our responsibility to accompany them" (Mediator) | Monitored and supervised transmission of knowledge Qualified, proper guides Observation of the digital market Management of digital identity Presence of a third party (museum / school) Respect of rights Protection of children Filter / Contact with Suzon's other |

| | |
|--|--|
| “It is an accompanying tool which is managed by a referent adult” (teacher) “We are extremely careful about Suzon’s digital identity” (Mediator) “I don’t allow them to be in direct contact with Suzon’s friends” (teacher) | friends (physical third party = teacher) Supervised community |
|--|--|

The third finding reveals a strong social aspect. Digital bonds of friendship are created between the educational and cultural service and the children, Suzon and the children, the fans and the children.

Table 3. Dimension: Digital sociability

| <i>Verbatim</i> | Categories |
|---|--|
| “There is a sort of proximity between this character and those who follow her” (mediator) “There is a strong bond between them and the virtual character” (mediator) “Our target is a community of teachers. And I am surprised to see adults following Suzon” (mediator) “179 people who talk about it and 5600 visitors to Suzon’s last post. We capture the children’s attention and that of teachers who have become attached to Suzon” (CM) “We exchange with other pupils, it’s better. You can share your ideas with others”. (a pupil) “The internavts correct each other” (CM) “We have friends and above all a Facebook friend” (teacher) | Museum educational community Sociability Strong digital bonds |
| “We observe a very strong emotional attachment to Suzon” (CM) “It is a happy ending as they identify themselves a lot with Suzon” (mediator) “The empathy created by Suzon’s character has enabled the children to make the most of the events” (teacher) “She tells her story about her life dur- | Strong emotion Sharing Interaction Identification with the fictive character Close emotional attachment to the digi- |

| | |
|---|---------------|
| ing the war period. She is 9 years old, it could be us!" (a pupil) "We feel it when she is afraid. It could be us" (a pupil) "I will be sad when it when be over in June" (a CM1 pupil) | tal character |
|---|---------------|

The fourth finding shows that putting museum educational content on-line via Facebook reinforces the pleasure of learning together and increases pupil's motivation in the classroom.

Table 4. Dimension: Renewed motivation and learning pleasure

| <i>Verbatim</i> | Categories |
|--|--|
| "We receive pictures, montages and models made by the primary schools" (mediator) "During the workshops we quickly notice which children follow Suzon" (CM) "The children participate actively in discovering the activities proposed by this Facebook page" (teacher) "They have learned the important dates concerning the Second World War, the main protagonists and their roles" (teacher) | Creation of competitions Ease of learning Pleasure of learning together Better understanding of this historical period Better understanding of what people really felt at that time Complementarity |
| "They can anticipate and build hypotheses using their knowledge of the subject" (teacher) "It is a new way of approaching and assimilating history" (CM) | New learning space New way of assimilating history |
| "I prefer Suzon to the factsheets, she explains things without the violence of war. I prefer to do it in class" (a pupil) "We learn things. It could be us" (a pupil) "It is like a cartoon, it is a different way of learning about history" (a pupil) | Digital tool New cultural transmitter Transmitting emotion |

A legitimate museum education hypermedia tool

Our communicational research aims to bring a general understanding of this digitization via the digital social networks and its various stakes within French museums. The Memorial educational and cultural service transforms the specialised theme into online content which is accessible to the visitor. Its principal mission is to produce digital content while conforming to the rules associated with digital social networks. Hence, via this Facebook page, pupils can explore and discover an impressive quantity of easily accessible information under the supervision of a mentor (Meunier, 2011). The organisation linked to the multi mediatisation of the data gives rise to new ways of accessing the information, collections, archives and knowledge (Bowen 2000, Pignier 2015, Baujard 2013).

Consequently, socionauts may follow Suzon's thoughts and daily life. Our findings are corroborated by those of C.Baujard (2013). Therefore the teacher may do collective presentations on a specific theme to the class with the help of posts. These posts function in addition to other articles, (maps, videos, sound, text, online dictionary...) relating to the same subject (Pague, 2015). It is a technological convergence with an educational objective (Baujard, 2013). From an educational perspective, this Facebook page facilitates the variation of activities during the same class session and the elaboration of new methods of working in a community environment within a framework provided by the Memorial. This digital museum education tool enhances, encourages and maintains team work (Tisseron, 2012). Suzon's discourse is enriched via interactions with socionauts.

Physical and digital supervision and accompanying

This study shows how the use of digital social networks in class requires the presence of an adult acting as a third party or a filter between the digital social network and the pupils. This situation calls for the pupil to be accompanied, guided and managed (boyd, 2007). The accompanying is two-fold with the involvement of the educational and cultural service and a teacher. This service presents the educational tool it has developed during workshops, visits to schools in the local area close to the Memorial, and via traditional media communication and leaflets. The teacher acts as a mediator and learning facilitator. As a type of mentor, the teacher guarantees National Education standards and values of living together. Faced with the computer screens the children need 'cultural transmitters' (Lardellier, 2005) to be able to form a considered opinion (boyd, 2007).

Digital sociability

Our study also brings to light the existence of communities with members who create, share, debate and collaborate for a single common interest or common culture (Suzon and the Second World War). Far from reducing sociability, digital social networks give rise to the formation of new links (Casilli, 2011). These virtual spaces are completely autonomous or are put in place with physical social links (the educational and cultural service, the pupils' parents, the illustrator, meeting another class ...) A mediator and the community manager highlight the positive nature of this Facebook page. With digital social networks the Memorial staff are in the process of

modifying their relationship with a wider public and continuing to promote heritage. At the same time they need to structure and order their data. Our results may be corroborated by those of Casilli (2011).

A form of proximity is created between the fictional character and the socionauts (in this case, the pupils). These feelings favour the creation of emotional bonds with an elderly person and a better understanding of this historical period. These findings support the work by Mlaki (2011). She suggests that Facebook's social and relational dimension explains the role played by feelings. Indeed, this relational dimension creates a type of attachment to the tool and emotions may be associated to its use (sadness, joy, worry, empathy ...). This may encourage the user to want to continue this link via Facebook. Our results show the role played by feelings of emotional attachment to Suzon, to habits, (consulting the page weekly, replies to the "A vos crayons" competitions), and to the overabundance of information in the continuity of use of digital social networks (Mlaiki, 2011, Falk & Dierking, 2013).

A renewed motivation and learning pleasure

Our results demonstrate a strong motivation and personal involvement on the part of the pupils, as reported by the teacher and the educational and cultural service. This tallies with findings in scientific literature such as the work of Livingstone (2009) for example. Digital tools give them access to a wealth of knowledge in a different way, increasing their motivation and their pleasure of the learning experience (Livingstone, 2009). Here, Suzon's Facebook page favours the renewal and diversification of educational methods which become more and more attractive, interactive, and better tailored to each pupil's individual needs. It also facilitates collaboration and links between schools and the extracurricular environment, notably with the Caen Memorial. Facebook increases the motivational factor. Its innovative quality, (interactivity ...) develops the pupils' curiosity in class and helps to better capture their attention, increase their participation (particularly to participate and exchange). It facilitates the whole learning process thanks to a better visibility and complementarity of documents (text, audio, video). According to our study, legitimate, well-monitored digital content can give rise to an active, participative and differentiated learning experience. Several studies have demonstrated the additional value of the use of ICT in education (Depover et al., 2010, Vidal, 2012). They offer a new type of educational experience which goes beyond the traditional methods and are at the heart of mediation. Our findings, corroborated by diverse research, confirm the implementation of a rationale of hybridization and museum educational experimentation via digital social networks (Baujard, 2003).

Conclusion

The purpose of our study was to bring a general understanding of this digitization via the digital social networks and of the various stakes within French museums. Thus, the Caen Memorial uses Suzon's Facebook page to comment, broadcast,

relay information, publish and share its content and mediations. These schemes of digital mediation via Facebook facilitate the consolidation of the educational ambitions of the museum and the promotion of cultural heritage to a young public. Our findings also showed the crucial role played by the Caen Memorial educational and cultural service via their support and implication. Their measures are supported and strengthened by the presence of a teacher (tutor, mentor, filter). It goes without saying that this does not mean that opening, maintaining and managing a Facebook account is the only necessary condition for a museum's educational content to be effective. A precise conception of the educational mission of the museum in the digital social network field remains to be clearly defined. In spite of the importance of digital social networks on an educational and socio-professional level, their educational use within a school context remains a huge challenge. Of course, our conclusions are by no means representative of the question of digital social networks in French museums in its entirety. However they are pertinent to the specific case described in this paper.

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