

Subjective Realities of Neoliberalized Social Media Natives: Trading Affect for Effect

Authors : Rory Austin Clark

Abstract : This primary research represents an ongoing two year inductive mixed-methods project endeavouring to unravel the subjective reality of hyperconnected young adults in Western societies who have come of age with social media and smartphones. It is to be presented as well as analyzed and contextualized through a written master's thesis as well as a documentary/mockumentary meshed with a Web 2.0 app providing the capacity for prosumer, 'audience 2.0' functionality. The media component seeks to explore not only thematic issues via real-life research interviews and fictional narrative but technical issues within the format relating to the quest for intimate, authentic connection as well as compelling dissemination of scholarly knowledge in an age of ubiquitous personalized daily digital media creation and consumption. The overarching hypothesis is that the aforementioned individuals process and make sense of their world, find shared meaning, and formulate notions-of-self in ways drastically different than pre-2007 via hyper-mediation-of-self and surroundings. In this pursuit, research questions have progressed from examining how young adult digital natives understand their use of social media to notions relating to the potential functionality of Web 2.0 for prosocial and altruistic engagement, on and offline, through the eyes of these individuals no longer understood as simply digital natives, but social media natives, and at the conclusion of that phase of research, as 'neoliberalized social media natives' (NSMN). This represents the two most potent macro factors in the paradigmatic shift in NSMN's worldview, that they are not just children of social media, but of the palpable shift to neoliberal ways of thinking and being in the western socio-cultures since the 1980s, two phenomena that have a reflexive æffective relationship on their perception of figure and ground. This phase also resulted in the working hypothesis of 'social media comparison anxiety' and a nascent understanding of NSMN's habitus and habitation in a subjective reality of fully converged online/offline worlds, where any phenomena originating in one realm in some way are, or at the very least can be, re-presented or have effect in the other—creating hyperreal reception. This might also be understood through a 'society as symbolic cyborg model', in which individuals have a 'digital essence'-- the entirety of online content that references a single person, as an auric living, breathing cathedral, museum, gallery, and archive of self of infinite permutations and rhizomatic entry and exit points.

Keywords : affect, hyperreal, neoliberalism, postmodernism, social media native, subjective reality, Web 2.0

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