

Tracing Digital Traces of Phatic Communion in #Mooc

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Abstract : This paper meddles with the notion of phatic communion introduced 90 years ago by Malinowski, who was a Polish-born British anthropologist. It explores the phatic in Twitter within the contents of tweets related to moocs (massive online open courses) as a topic or trend. It is not about moocs though. It is about practices that could easily be hidden or neglected if we let big or massive topics take the lead or if we simply follow the computational or secret codes behind Twitter itself and third party software analytics. It draws from media and cultural studies. Though at first it appears data-driven as I submitted data collection and analytics into the hands of a third party software, Twitonomy, the aim is to follow how phatic communion might be practised in a social media site, such as Twitter. Lurking becomes its research method to analyse mooc-related tweets. A total of 3,000 tweets were collected on 11 October 2013 (UK timezone). The emphasis of lurking is to engage with Twitter as a system of connectivity. One interesting finding is that a click is in fact a phatic practice. A click breaks the silence. A click in one of the mooc website is actually a tweet. A tweet was posted on behalf of a user who simply chose to click without formulating the text and perhaps without knowing that it contains #mooc. Surely, this mechanism is not about reciprocity. To break the silence, users did not use words. They just clicked the 'tweet button' on a mooc website. A click performs and maintains connectivity - and Twitter as the medium in attendance in our everyday, available when needed to be of service. In conclusion, the phatic culture of breaking silence in Twitter does not have to submit to the power of code and analytics. It is a matter of human code.

Keywords : click, Twitter, phatic communion, social media data, mooc

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