Subject of SNS Design
: The semiotic concept of self as developed by Peirce and Bakhtin/Volosinov

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Abstract

SNS such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, etc. have surged in popularity, permeating major aspects of our everyday lives with their power as tools of mass communication. My interest with SNS lies not only in its interconnectedness, but also in its interface design mechanism. Based on the semiotic theories developed by C.S. Peirce and Bakhtin/Volosinov, the main argument in this paper is that interface designs of SNS are created not by the designers alone, but through a designer-user community.

Facebook page design, has been changed dramatically several times, invoking widespread complaints. Design production in this kind of interconnected social system arises through the course of the interlocutions between the users and the designers. Peirce’s illumination of ‘self’ and ‘man-sign’ as well as Volosinov’s explanation of ‘verbal interaction’ and ‘inner speech’ could be relevant for this situation. I propose that these two semioticians offer us plausible explanations regarding the intersubjectivity of SNS design mechanisms and how collective intelligence is formed and works in our era of the online social network.

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I. Introduction

The question of exactly who is responsible for the continual redesign of the immensely popular social networking service (SNS) Facebook is an intriguing one.1) This question becomes more complex when we consider the continual design iterations occurring in parallel on mobile devices including smartphones and tablet PCs. In this paper, I address major features in the ongoing discussions regarding the intricate concepts involved in Facebook’s web design. My contention is that designers alone are not wholly responsible for the Facebook interface design, rather, it has been a collective effort between users and designers facilitated by mutually responsive and productive interactions.

As Facebook’s subscription base increases in volume and diversity, the website itself is continually compelled to adapt, to better serve and therefore retain its dynamic user base. One principal reason for Facebook’s overwhelming success in the midst of numerous competitors is its ability to rapidly adjust its interface design to meet new demands. In order to understand the core concepts behind Facebook’s interactive design, it is first helpful to elaborate upon ‘design semiotics’. Simply put, the word ‘design’ shares a historical association with the meaning of ‘sign’, which is to convey the meaning of a tangible object or intangible idea. Krippendorff contended that “design is making sense of things.”2)

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1) Andreas Kaplan and Michael Haenlein 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.” According to them, we can consider social media as any applications for user-created content on the web, although I am focusing on SNS media like Facebook. (Kaplan and Haenlein “Users of the world unite! The challenges and opportunities of Social Media.” Business Horizons 53:1, The Kelley School of Business, Indiana University, 2010, pp.61-62)

2) Krippendorff, “On the Essential Contexts of Artifacts or on the Proposition That