Future Media – watch and be watched

by Christopher Peterka

With respect to the ever-rising number of experts attending all sorts of smart gatherings globally, the first thought that springs to my mind when being asked about "the future of media" is: simply more "new media". Is this plain stupid and naïve? Probably not, as aside from the growing volume of content being published through the cloud consumed at an ever increasing speed, distributed via an ever more atomised app-armada of viewers, readers and messengers, the bottom line over the last number of decades always has been, and will continue to be, more media.

Potentially game-changing development

Yet, the rather recently proven feasibility of collecting individual data to feed into algorithms that help users to take on a new perspective in their daily activities (i.e. to learn more about their individual sleep, dietary or exercise patterns) hints at an entirely new development vector: the "programmable human". It isn´t per se a "media development" but has the power to potentially change the game.

Wearable self-tracking technology (WSTT) such as passive pulse meters, GPS sensors or gyrometers in combination with active feedback mechanisms as provided by apps in the style of "reporter", "day one" or even Facebook, i.e. deliver real-time data-gathering for instantaneous feedback and guidance. Why should this end at exercise or dietary recommendations when it can make the dream of 1:1 targeting finally come true in a far more sophisticated way than professionals could have mostly hoped for? WSTT creates an entirely new situation when it comes to the connection between man-machine and media. For the first time ever in humankind´s history, all three systems become genuinely connected: through data.

New territory: data-infused real-time content scenography

Say hello to "quantified self-movement", marry it with "the internet of things" spice it up with some a truly smart content database and add a high-performance distribution channel: voilá. Once you know where a person is at a given moment, how they feel, what´s scheduled and on the To Do list, combined with the local context with regard to technical equipment, traffic and weather, the next step is to select, patch together and play out the one singular content that matches – presumably exactly – that one singular target situation. Forget prefabricated "award winning" creative content. Put creativity where it belongs tomorrow: into the new territory of data-infused real-time content scenography.

New technologies giving deeper insights into specific consumer behaviour

Alphabet patented a technology as far back as the year 2014 that can detect when an ad is being watched and make predictions about the individual's emotional response to that ad. See the premium on that contact price? Yes, exactly: that´s why we´re going to see these technologies become applied en masse. Samsung's Galaxy S IV uses eye-scrolling to detect when the reader has reached the bottom of the screen in order to reveal more text. This is in addition to its eye-pausing technology that stops video playback whenever the viewer looks away, and restarting it once they look back: this saves precious battery charge, keeps the user focused and certainly builds a far better database about specific consumer patterns.

Customised active content

These innovative technologies make content active. The machine analyses its audience and actively uses that real-time feedback to change what's served up. The content is no longer passively waiting for an audience to act upon it. Rather, it now acts upon itself based on the inputs fed to it by active audience monitoring. In the future, no two single playouts will be the same - as long as you´re not serving up to identical twins.

But what about privacy? Concerns of big brother watching not only every step but our very gaze upon the world? Let´s take a look at some interesting numbers.

Privacy by 2020

By 2020, the number of internet users will reach almost 5 billion – equal to the entire world's population in 1987. This compares with 1.7 billion users in 2010 and just 360 million in 2000. Every aspect of net-behaviour that we´ve so far experienced, such as social or peer-to-peer sharing, will dramatically increase with these numbers. Probably a far more important, although by no means new, insight remains alien to most industry decision-makers: most of these 5 billion people will live by the paradigm of on demand-instant-mobile access to everything at almost no cost for the trade of their private data. They won´t even consider anything ever having been different to this accessibility and nature of data trade – and they will thereby not hold back.

Eventually, and for good ethical reasons, the public – aka the government – may try to raise "digital literacy" to new levels of understanding this trade-off. However, technological advancement is going to outspeed this ambition in the first run.

For decades, the growth of supercomputer power has followed a remarkably smooth and predictable trend. If this exponential trend continues, it is likely that complete simulations of the human brain and all of its neurons will be possible by 2025. Let´s at this stage not yet open Pandora´s box and discuss the question of technological singularity. Yet, one thing is for sure: supercomputing will be cheap – so will predictive analysis based on hundreds of millions of simultaneous individual content playout decisions. So, cost for this level of sophistication won´t be a valid reason not to do it.

Privacy by 2030

By 2030, a micro-SD card will contain the storage capacity of 20,000 human brains. Add 5G+ network bandwidth capacities and any physical carrier other than what we today consider a smartphone will have become totally obsolete. Exceptions are made for our dear vinyl connoisseurs – as usual. Even 8k video content will be available on the spot. Basically the entire world of the internet of everything is going to turn into one giant content interface, including your favourite bench at the park suddenly serving you a very tailor-made piece of content about, let´s say, the latest findings about mindfulness practice in the valley.

Christopher Patrick Peterka (37) is a futurist and entrepreneur. As managing partner of the gannaca global think tank group, he coaches organisations on questions relating to the topics of innovation culture. His particular interest is dedicated to new ethics within the economy and society of the Digital Modern era. Christopher Peterka inspires, surprises and challenges. A father to two infants, he reveals the tectonic shifts between the 'old and new world', raising new perspectives on phenomena that have recently become part of our lives.

Have you ever wondered about the emotionality of your smartphone? Peterka scratches at the limits of the imaginable and feasible, without losing touch with daily life. Because at the end of the day, what he really wants is to remind his audience of life´s designability.

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