Privileging the "New" in New Media Literacy: The Future of Democracy, Economy, and Identity in 21st-Century Texts

Introduction

Of all of the thousands of websites online, Internet ranking website *Alexa* keeps track of which ones are deemed most popular according to an average of number of page views and number of users who visit the site over a period of time. According to results in the United States, of the top 100 websites in December 2008, the social networking website *Facebook* ranked 5th most popular, the community and commercial website *Craigslist* ranked 11th most popular, and the website for *The New York Times* ranked 24th ("United States – Alexa"). These three websites are some of the most popular in their respective genres; *MySpace* is barely more popular than *Facebook* in social networks, *CNN* is just ahead of *The New York Times* for online news, and there are no rivals to *Craigslist* (although it is interesting to note that this popular, and free, website ranks ahead of other commercial websites like *eBay* and *Amazon.*) Beside being some of the most popular websites in the United States, though, these websites also share a similar design strategy: although they cater to different kinds of users, content, and functionality, all three are designed according to the importance of time. Specifically, each website contains a layout that displays information in reverse chronological order, so that the newest information greets users at the top of the page, and older information is pushed to the bottom, or onto secondary (often archived) pages.

This paper will analyze these popular websites as possible locations of formative literacy practices for young users, where a literacy practice is not only physical and cognitive engagement with text, but also the attitudes one brings to interactions with text. I consider each website a "text," where the content on each contains pieces of information, usefully defined by Hollingshead, Fulk, and Monge as, "[raw facts that] include context—the people, technology,

and other organizational aspects to which the [facts] relate" (335). As some of the first websites that young users begin frequenting on the web, these texts are all contingent on this information context that relies on information being displayed according to temporal principles, where the "new" is valued—and prominently displayed—over information that may be more relevant, interesting, or important to a user. As a result, these texts are contingent upon their information's context—their temporal design—that may impact how users engage with the site. This engagement may become a socialized norm of how to read and write within the texts, which may transfer into engaging with other texts, thus becoming a literacy practice both online and off.

To analyze these websites I will propose a methodology of "versioning," an analytical frame that focuses on temporal website design where new information supercedes potentially relevant or interesting information. While newness is often favored and displayed in many everyday interactions (e.g. print newspapers, produce stands), versioning takes into account that online digital texts not only privilege newness as a default design principle, but also rely on user-produced newness in order to maintain popularity. I will define versioning in more detail in the next section, specifically as it relates to consumption and production of online texts. This paper is primarily concerned with the *consumption* of text(s) on these popular websites, but acknowledges that *production* is inherently necessary for user- and community-driven websites where the lines between reading and writing are blurred by interactive options.

The three websites I have chosen for this study—like all websites on the Internet—are open to all audiences, young and old. The websites are representative of the types of websites that young users may first encounter on the web. The three are "popular" in that the number of hits they have received in 2008 means users are visiting them often. However, they also represent markers in "popular culture" online where "popular culture can be understood as a

'text' that is received by people and acted on, or as a 'lived experience' that is created by people" (Dolby 259). Accordingly I have chosen these websites not only because they are widely visited, but because of their potential to inform this "lived experience," which I believe is analogous to a later literacy practice beyond the texts studied here. As a way of approximating a starting point for this practice, I define "youth," "young users," or "student-users" as those Internet users between the ages of 14 and 21, when users are transitioning to more personal freedoms and consumer choices in high school and college years. At this time, users are likely to be realizing their place in the world around them, earning income and consuming of their free will, and maintaining an outward persona, an online identity. This "age-based definition of youth" closely follows Elizabeth's Moje's view of adolescents (209), as well as aligns with her definition of youth literacy that are "practices and texts that young people engage in or with of their own volition" (207). These three websites represent the potential first encounters that young users will have with the same types of texts they will continue to encounter throughout adulthood.

This paper addresses websites as popular communication vehicles within new media studies, where young users may view little difference between digital and print texts for the goal of conveying information. Because of this abundance of text in multiple mediums, Deborah Brandt, and others, have noted that literacy practices in the 21st century are operating within an "information economy" (25), where information on a website is seen as both content and resource to be consumed by interested users. I am interested in how the focus on newness of online text operates within this economy, and how popular websites are designed in a way to highlight and value this newness over other factors. Since websites remain popular by drawing users back for repeat visits, it is in the sites' best interest to maintain new, and constantly updated, information to operate within this economy. However, as Colin Lankshear and Michele

Knobel note, there is a shift in popular media to not only provide more information, but to sustain users' interest, and—in effect—hold their attentions. This "attention economy" is potentially butting heads against the information economy because any successful economic model is one based on scarcity, and with growing caches of information on the Internet, "[a]ttention, unlike information, is inherently scarce" ("Do We" 20). As a result, literacy researchers need a way to analyze digital texts and their effects on young users that takes into account how attentions are sought and maintained by the potential overvaluing of new information. To do this, I propose "versioning" as an analytical framework.

Versioning as Methodology

Versioning is an approach to digital texts that addresses how a piece of information— such as a news story, good for sale, or portion of a user profile—gets updated and displayed on popular websites. This approach focuses on how the new is valued in digital texts as a result of website design and text layout. Gunther Kress, who believes "layout…does change the deeper meanings of the text" (16), presents the idea of a "reading path" to analyze how format, ordering, and display of text can impact a user's reception. According to Kress, "[t]he reading path provides more than just a kind of handy rope or guide-rail along a difficult path; it marks the line along which a text is to be read 'properly'" (50). In most of the United States, the "proper" reading path for digital or print texts is from top to bottom, and from left to right. Readers are positioned "along the lines of writing, from top to bottom, from left to right, as well as in its simple sequential unfolding. It is clear and given; if I wish to go against it, I have to work hard to do so" (Kress 152). As a result, young readers are taught to value the upper-left portions of any text as they proceed down to information that follows. Websites that place new information at the top of their websites, then, inherently value newness as the entry point for their respective

texts, and invite users to return to the sites over time to see what new entry point awaits them with each subsequent visit. Versioning contributes to Kress' reading path by considering how the persistent privileging of newness may affect information further down a page as somehow irrelevant or unimportant.

Versioning defines literacy in the 21st century as a "valuable—and volatile—property" (Brandt 2), and as "an economic resource, as an object of development, investment, and exploitation around which both value and competition intensify" (Brandt 183). In other words, literacy is growing more entwined with commercial economies where information within texts not only occupies the same spaces as advertisements on the web, but where information itself is seen as a good that can be produced and consumed for economic advantage. Within this information economy, the more content a website can produce, the more potential capital it can claim from its consumer users. However, as noted, this structure is being challenged by an economic model that requires repeat consumption, an attention economy, that will be discussed in further detail later in this section. By defining literacy in economic terms, versioning analyzes the importance that newness plays in a text maintaining its popularity as a means of economic viability and existence.

Digital texts—often referred to as new media texts—often demand literacy practices that differ from "traditional" print texts in subtly different ways. In this regard, versioning operates within the evolving frame of New Literacy Studies, defined by "the social practices and conceptions of reading and writing" (Street 1), where the social practices are enacted by how users interact with texts by consuming them in a particular way, contributing to them through interactive production, and revisiting them often. However, Street's definition of new literacies makes no explicit demand that texts are digital, or that social practices occur online. Instead,

some contemporary literacy scholars are appropriating the term "new literacies" as analogous to "new media," with the same focus on situated practice Street envisioned, only occurring exclusively in digital spaces. For example, Lankshear and Knobel define new literacies as having mutually inclusive "technical" and "ethos" components ("Sampling" 7), where they define "ethos" as "new literacies [that] are more 'participatory,' 'collaborative,' and 'distributed' in nature than conventional literacies" ("Sampling" 9). Further, they argue, "we can begin to relate the 'newness' of new literacies to a distinctive kind of 'ethos stuff' that is reaching a scale hitherto unprecedented, and turning the consumption of popular culture into active *production*: the production of consumption" ("Sampling" 13, original emphasis). While their newness maintains Street's emphasis on social practice, these scholars also address the convergence of popular culture (e.g. websites) into an active consumption of text contingent on seemingly economic-driven production. Versioning assumes these uses of "new," and places them firmly in a changing economy of text that considers website design as integral to how text is consumed and addressed in consequent interactions.

Above all, versioning is concerned with time, much in the way that Kathleen Blake Yancey's use of the term "*deixis*…refers to words like *now* and *then*" (318) when she discusses new technology in the 21st century. Yancey quotes "[D. J. Leu, C. K. Kinzer, J. Coiro, and D. Cammack to] say, '[deixis] is a defining quality of the new literacies of the Internet'" (318). But as this stress on temporality operates within an information economy, its incarnation as a design principle on the Internet rises in prominence and carries more consequence for capital gain and literacy practices. This is where versioning shifts away from *deixis*'s focus on mere temporal considerations, to how temporal considerations value certain aspects of text to give added value to the operating economy. In this case, new information is valued so that users' attentions can be

captured and maintained quickly, and through repeat visits to websites. While most information on the Internet is saved and archived, and there are millions of new texts uploaded every day, only the newest holds our attentions when it is given a privileged space on popular websites' layouts. This, again, asks us to consider the role of scarcity in successful economic models. For any material good, items that are fewer in number are often more desirable (e.g. luxury, hard to find items).

Digital goods'—in this case, digital information's—desirability can be measured by their placement on popular websites, and how long they maintain this privileged position. These pieces of information command our attention, and ask us to return again and again to a website until the information is no longer desirable. At that time, the text is moved to the bottom of the page, and new information is given the attention-grabbing space. Since what is "new" is always changing, constantly updated texts on websites operate within this scarcity model and confirm Michael Goldhaber's belief that "information is in oversaturated supply [which] is fatal to the coherence of the idea of an information economy," so that "the basis of the coming new economy will be attention and *not* information" (qtd. in Lankshear and Knobel, "Do We" 20, original emphasis). As a result, texts attract our attention with new information, and we materialize these attentions by visiting and interacting with websites, thereby making them popular. Since something that is new cannot be static for very long, websites continually update their top information with newer information, which invites users to repeatedly visit and again attach their attentions to this new information. I believe that by analyzing popular website design and tracking a singular piece of information as it fades in a text's attention economy, versioning can be a tool to pinpoint and discuss how new media literacies value newness, and encourage practices for young users that they may carry into other areas of their lives.

As I will show in the final section of this paper, this valuing of newness complicates researchers' ideas of how popular culture texts operate within educational and personal contexts. While researchers such as Nadine Dolby believe "the importance of popular culture and its connection to education lies in the role it plays as a site for engaging in the process of democratic process" (258), and Deborah Brandt encourage us to address literacy "in a civil rights context" (206), new media literacy's valuing of the new within an attention economy may become a major constraint on what it means to have a voice in the 21st century. Users may like to believe that their ability to consume and produce freely on the Internet affords them the ability to join conversations and stake a claim in the information economy frontier. However, as the following three analyses demonstrate, simply having access and the ability to participate may no longer be enough. As websites privilege new information through carefully updated designs, users are bound to more and more temporal considerations of 21st century literacy practices.

New Media Text Analysis Using Versioning

An analysis of three popular websites' privileging of newness in visual design and user functionality illustrates how these sites—and other like them—may facilitate literacy practices that not only allow users to navigate the sites in question, but also other texts both online and off. The three following analyses "adopt a socially critical stance toward communication and information technologies, taking careful account of their educational applications and implications" (Lankshear, Snyder, and Green 35) by focusing on their possible implications within three categories. The first category is that of democratic participation within the comments section of a story within *The New York Times*' website. This analysis utilizes versioning to highlight the consumption of news-related information and the potential disempowering of individual access to a voice online when other, newer, voices are privileged

with the top spot. The second category, literacy on the commercial website *Craigslist*, likewise considers consumption, in this case through the explicit lens of economy. Here, the analysis follows a piece of information that loses economic potential as users' attentions are less likely to follow it down a page and onto subsequent secondary pages.

Only the third category, versioning as it relates to identity formation and maintenance on a social network site, considers both consumption and a more explicit address of production. In this brief analysis, a user's update to her profile slips down *Facebook's* News Feed where it loses prominence with each other member within a network adding new information. This analysis suggests that newness may affect young users' literacy practices of production in terms of feeling a need to produce new information to gain prominence and popularity. This final analysis, while somewhat of a departure from the first two, nonetheless heralds implications for researchers and educators that the value of using versioning as an analytical tool may confirm Wilder and Dressman's belief in:

> the breakdown of traditional distinctions between modes of consumption and production as well as the dissolution of class-, gender-, and race-based modes of differentiation within the "virtual" (in all that terms' possible meanings) world of the Internet—a highly democratized world in which one's identity and one's capacity to become whatever one wishes to be are limited only by the conditions of one's access and one's own productive capacity, and not, it seems, by one's social, cultural, economic, political, or education history (Gee, 2004; Lankshear & Knobel, 2002; Luke 2000). (qtd. in Wilder and Dressman 206)

The following three analyses, then, provide an alternative framework for this breakdown as a study in learning from the design principles that have always existed in "real life," but are now prominently displayed—and more potentially influential—in online spaces.

For each of the following analyses, I tracked one piece of information as it changed position within the web text during an eight-hour day. Each piece was at one point the top, privileged piece of information within each online text when the observation period started. *The New York Times* comment was the newest comment among several entered previously, the *Craigslist* apartment posting was the most recent uploaded to the section under consideration, and the user update on *Facebook* was at the top of the site's News Feed (an individualized, real-time tracker of user interactions and updates displayed each time a user logs onto the site.) In the following analyses I follow these pieces of information as they fall down the sites' implicit reading paths. I offer brief examples of how analyzing these movements through the methodology of versioning may afford researchers and educators a more nuanced understanding of new media texts' effects on literacy practices when viewed through the lens of temporality.

The New York Times: Analysis of a News Website

The website for the *New York Times* is the online extension of the popular print newspaper. Although not necessarily a "youth" text, it is a pop culture website that has the same design principle as many other news- and information-based websites, as well as blogs: information displayed in reverse chronological order, with the newest information always at the top. The digital design does not stray far from the print design in this respect. However, the online text offers readers (herein referred to as users) affordances that the print version cannot. Primarily, the website is updated regularly throughout a day so that the main page displays an ever-changing front page, refreshed in real-time as stories are added, revised, or relegated to

secondary pages. As a result, even though a top story on the front page of the print *NYT*

maintains that privileged spot for one day, that same story may be bumped to the figurative

second page in a matter of minutes when digitized and presented online.

The other main affordance that the digital text offers users is the ability to talk back to a

news story through a "Comments" section following each story. For the purposes of this brief

analysis, I will only consider a user who reads the comments of others. However, the

implications of time that versioning addresses are just as salient in regards to access to

democratic participation through writing as they are through reading. To demonstrate, Figure 1

displays "Comment #22," which was posted roughly half an hour after the corresponding news

story was posted to *NYT* online.

Four hours later, Comment #22 was

three-quarters of the way down the

third page of comments, behind 67

comments added since 11:24 am.

By the end of the observation

period, after 7 pm, the same

comment was near the bottom of

Figure 1

the fourth page of comments, and one of 110 total comments posted.
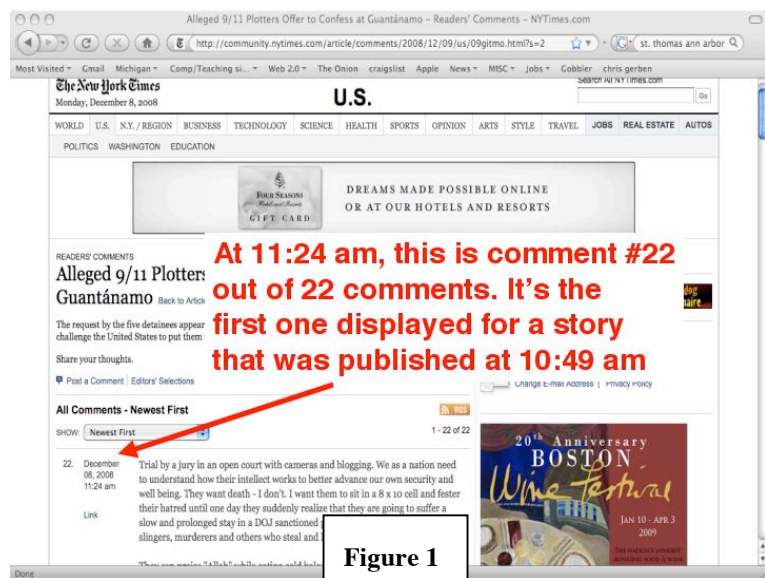
By applying versioning to the analysis of such a page, we are able to see that access to a

democracy does not necessarily guarantee equal participation in the conversation. Although each

comment is archived, analysis through versioning suggests that the most recent posts are more

relevant to the current discussion by being placed directly under the news story, and first in the

long list of comments. As a result, older comments become less relevant, and users encountering
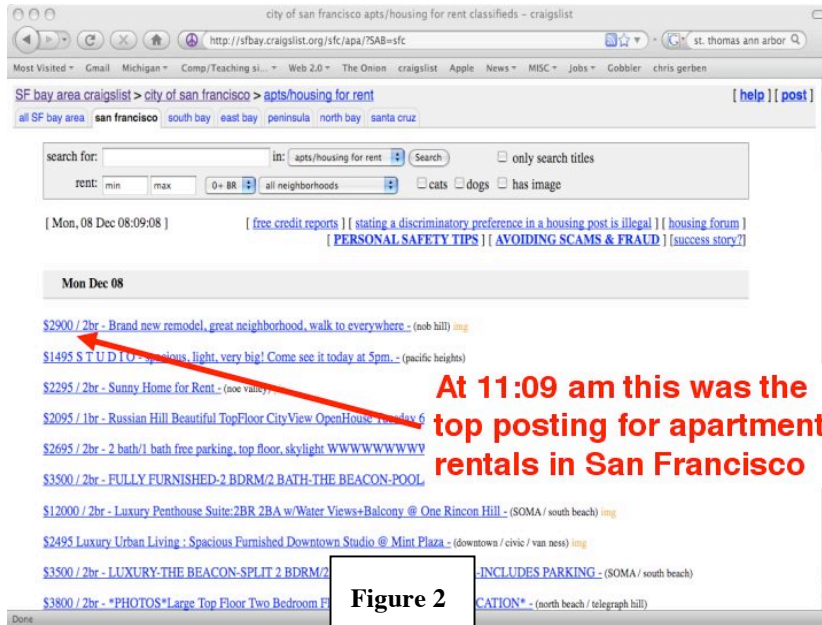
the comments section are less likely to read through the entire list of posts. This has some pragmatic basis, as the news story to which the comments responded was updated at least twice during the observation period, so not only are newer posts privileged in design on the web text, they are also potentially commenting on information that was not available at the beginning of the eight-hour period.

Interestingly, the *NYT* website allows users to organize their comments in chronological and reverse chronological ordering, as well as by recommendations (meaning users can vote on what comments they deem most interesting, relevant, etc.) Even so, applying versioning to this section reveals that the default setting for the section is arranged by time—and not relevance—and also that users have to manually scroll down and click to other pages in order to find older information, thus providing evidence for how important temporal considerations can be. Viewing this site through this analytical frame demonstrates how even localized, contextualized, and digitized texts that provide access to democratic participation may privilege newness at the expense of other factors. As a result, merely having access to this sort of democracy may not ensure meaningful democratic participation at all.

Craigslist: **Analysis of a Community-Based Commercial Website**

Like the previous website, *Craigslist* is designed in reverse chronological order, so when new items are posted, previous posts are pushed towards the bottom of the page and/or onto secondary pages. This commercial website likewise operates in a democratic fashion: users are allowed to read and upload posts for free (with a few exceptions), and are privileged only by how recently they accessed the site (for example, newer posts are always at the top, with no user potential to rank the posts or change their ordering in anything but newest to oldest.) It is within this setup that I began following an apartment listing within the San Francisco rentals section.

This can be seen in Figure 2. Notice how postings are displayed in lists, in uniform font and formula, and in descending order. In most cases—especially in rentals sections of big cities—the lists appear near infinite. There is no option for clicking to the last posting, instead a user can only scroll to the bottom of any page and click to see the "Next 100" posts. The one exception here, though, is that at the top of the page users can search for specific pieces of information within the text. So, for example, a user could search for one-bedroom apartments in the Lower Haight to eliminate displaying posts that are not relevant to that particular search. However, the results to even this specific search are then once again given to a user

Figure 2

in reverse chronological order, from newest to oldest.

Because of the commercial nature of this website, applying versioning to this text displays more than many others the move from an information economy to an attention economy and the result that has on a user's literacy practices. Free and democratic (at least in a "newest as first" model), *Craigslist* is constantly adding new information. By the end of the eight-hour period, this selected posting was near the bottom of the sixth page, meaning that users would have to scroll down and select "Next 100" six times before combing through nearly 700 other posts to find this one. At nearly 100 new pieces of information per hour, postings on this site command attention for incredibly short periods of times as older posts are not only more work to
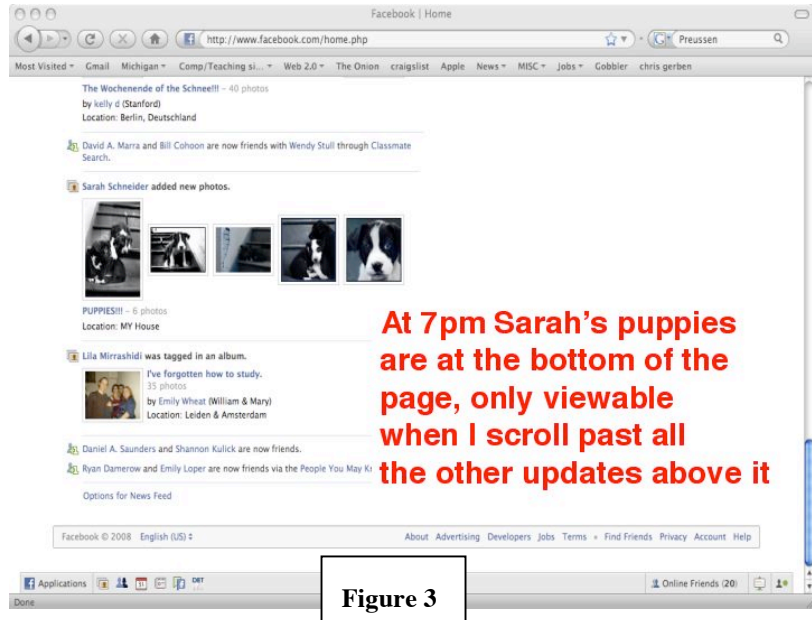
unearth, but also grow increasingly irrelevant as goods may be sold and/or taken off the market. As a result, users of the site often check back multiple times an hour or day to have access to the newest information. Versioning reveals this consumption of information based on temporal design. Researchers and educators only need compare this drive to return to a text multiple times a day with young students who may only view a (school) text once to appreciate how important this design principle can be.

Facebook: Analysis of a Social Network Website

The popular social network, *Facebook* welcomes registered users to their main pages with a "News Feed," automatically updated information about their friends' actions, displayed in reverse chronological order. As users do new things (e.g. become friends with others, post new photos, attend events) older interactions are pushed to the bottom of the News Feed until they eventually disappear. *Facebook*'s privileging of newness through this feature differs from the previous two examples in very important ways that can be revealed through versioning analysis. First, unlike the previous sites, there is no archiving option for users: once new information is pushed off the News Feed by newer information, it is gone forever, and not archived. The second difference—which is the focus of this brief section—is how this address of newness may have tangible effects on a user's production of new information on the site. In terms of production, whereas a user on *Craigslist* may be tempted to post the same information repeatedly to regain the top spot, users of *Facebook* face the temptation to alter information on their profiles, thus changing their representations of their online identity. Versioning reveals this shift in literacy practice from not only operating within information and attention economies, but to a valuing of newness that affects how the individual user is portrayed. In other words, whereas the previous two sites largely create new information to contribute to economic and social production,

Facebook may facilitate a literacy practice that creates new information to produce personal and moral production.

Figure 3 displays a user's addition to her profile as portrayed on my News Feed. At approximately 11 am this was at the top of my page, which prompted me to go see the rest of her user profile. Over the course of the eight-hour day, this news story not only slid down the page, but eventually was completely absent from the News Feed altogether. This means that had I logged in at this late hour, I would have not seen that this user had added anything new, nor would I have been particularly inclined to visit her profile page. Versioning

At 7pm Sarah's puppies are at the bottom of the page, only viewable when I scroll past all the other updates above it

Figure 3

demonstrates how the only way this user can again gain privileged status in this attention economy, and claim the top spot once again in my News Feed, is to add something new to her profile. Here, then, is a link between a person's identity only being prominent and popular through the individual privileging of newness. No matter how true or personally relevant this user's profile may be, unless she adds new information about herself—thereby adding new information about her identity—she will not garner my attention, and I will be less prone to visit her profile or acknowledge her online existence at all.

Here I find James Gee's definition of a "projective identity" particularly helpful in attempting to understanding how the design of new media text and user's resulting literacy

practice can be affected by temporal considerations. In his study of video games and learning, Gee differentiates between "virtual" and "real-world identities" (49) to explain the separation between character in a virtual world and the human player. However, Gee asserts that there is a "projective identity" where a player "project[s] one's values and desires onto the virtual character…[and sees] the virtual character as one's own project in the making, a creature whom [one] imbue[s] with a certain trajectory through time defined by [one's] aspirations for what [one] want[s] the character to be and become" (50). Applied to a social network like *Facebook*, a user may begin by projecting her ideal identity within the virtual space, creating a kind of "virtual identity." However, as that real-world user craves more attention, or more friends, or more interactions, she may feel the need to add more information to her profile, thus creating a projective identity that is both real and virtual, but also imbued with a desire to become something more than she is in "real life."

This may be where versioning can help researchers track this online practice to offline literacy practices that affect both engagement with text as well as engagement with social situations, and others. In an opinion piece on exactly this kind of bridge through online connections on *Facebook* written for *The New Atlantis*, editor Christine Rosen quotes "[n]etwork theorist Albert-Laszlo Barabasi [as saying] that online connection follows the rules of 'preferential attachment'—that is, 'when choosing between two pages, one with twice as many links as the other, about twice as many people link to the more connected page.' As a result, 'while our individual choices are highly unpredictable, as a group we follow strict patterns'" (qtd. in Rosen n.p.). These strict patterns on social network sites are to gravitate towards profiles and pages that have more and newer information. By applying versioning to these pages' visual

designs, researchers can potentially begin tracing how everything from attention spans with texts or people may be traced back to how users interact with digital texts arranged according to time.

Implications for Researchers and Educators

Analysis of any text through a specific frame privileges certain factors over others. This proposed methodology is no different. While versioning offers a view of social and textual practice through a temporal lens, it does so at the expense of temporarily overlooking others. As noted before, *The New York Times* offers users the opportunity or organize the visual design of the Comments section according to time or popular interest. Likewise, *Alexa's* most popular website of December 2008, the search behemoth *Google*, operates upon an algorithm that privileges number of links to any given text. I offer versioning not to discount these other design principles, but to begin to explore how nuanced our future analyses of digital texts will need to be as we transfer some analytical tools useful in print realms to this online space, and to situate this transfer as occurring within an increasing information economy vying for user attention. Attention economy and business scholars Davenport and Beck note *Google's* role in this situation by saying, "[a]s search technologies are refined, it's important that they not be made perfect. When any sort of search or information requirement is fulfilled too predictably, less attention may be devoted to the result" (84). If nothing else, I hope that my emphasis on newness demonstrates the conscious decisions that web designers make in privileging any piece of information, and how this choice may potentially affect how users come to value information within digital texts, as well as within print texts and personal identities beyond the new media realm.

As a result, I believe the preceding analysis of democratic, economic, and identity-based texts offers researchers opportunities to explore how literacy practices transfer from online to

offline spaces. Following Gloria Jacobs' findings on the study of youth instant messaging practices, "[b]y documenting the intersection of online and offline activities, it may be possible to see whether and how participants create and cross boundaries and carry online literacy practices into their offline worlds and vice versa," (399) I believe that future research on where young users *begin* these literacy practices will gain in importance. As "Haas (1996) [found] that…students began writing sooner and spent less time planning with [a] word-processor because making changes was easier with the word-processor," (qtd. in Hartley 294) a focus on time reveals how initial engagement and ease may affect literacy practices that are transferred to other practices. The aforementioned analysis of *Craigslist* and *Google* demonstrates how users are confronted with information that changes in position within the text as well as requires users to scroll down and click away from entry points on main pages. The ease of certain technologies may be offset by the relative "difficulty" of engaging in this scrolling and clicking. This certainly warrants a closer look at how temporal privileging operates on these websites and affects user practice.

Likewise, researchers and educators are confirming Leander's assertion that "technologies are essentially social, and thus serve to constitute particular values, ideologies, preferred practices, power relations, social relations, and modes of learning" (26) in differentiating between engagement with digital and print texts. Future studies using a versioning framework should pay particular attention to this connection between social and literacy practice, and learning. One way to begin addressing this connection is by taking note of how long student-users are engaging with any particular information within a text, in light of the information's position within the overall design. Here, versioning's attention economy approach can provide this comparison between design and engagement as it relates to literacy practice. However,

future researchers and educators alike may extend this study of time to a focus on how ideas—

and information—circulate within and across spaces. Lewis' focus on circulation in new

literacies suggests, "teachers receive training in curricular uses of technology, but they do not

learn about new mindsets, identities, and practices that come with new technologies, forms of

communication, and economic flows" (230). In other words, a versioning methodology is best

situated not only in social and textual practice, but also in the attitudes and approaches that

student-users bring to any text or practice. Online and in the classroom, these attitudes may

reveal how 21st century learners negotiate a seeming increase in information vying for individual

attention.

Finally, a focus on the literacy practices of young student-users will aide researchers and

educators alike in their address of identity formation and maintenance in extracurricular and

classroom realms. As the brief *Facebook* analysis suggests, young student-users may be

influenced by the privileging of newness within the online attention economy by equating ideals

of "more" and "new" to their personal identities as expressed in online profile pages. These

outward expressions seem to concurrently confirm Gee's three-fold address of identity, resulting

in "the *capacity*, at some level, to take on the virtual identity as a real-world identity," (63) as

well as addressing how these varying views of identity can be conflated into what researchers

McCarthey and Moje have deemed "hybrid identities." Specifically, Moje suggests, "[t]eaching

literacy, then, could be considered acts of supporting and challenging learners' identities and

providing spaces for learners to explore how their identities are hybrid, and how hybridity can be

stabilizing" (qtd. in McCarthey and Moje 233). This literacy teaching, of course, is occurring

both in and out of classrooms, where both spaces are operating within an attention economy that

privileges newness through design and access, which may ultimately result in student-user

attitudes towards texts and social practices. My goal is using versioning to address texts based in democracy, economy, and identity has been to show that regardless of focus, a privileging of any factor may result in important analyses appropriate to the 21st century text and user.

A focus on time, among many other factors, is not necessarily a new analytical approach for pop culture texts. However, new media texts afford researchers and educators alike the visual artifacts and real-time archiving of information that was not as easily attainable a generation ago. Likewise, online literacy practices are more easily traceable as users' consumption, production, and interaction with digital texts can be tracked and measured in increasingly sophisticated ways. These literacy practices in turn can be measured against "real world" and classroom practices to gauge the inevitable blurring of online and offline engagement with texts, identity, and attitudes of young users in the 21st century. Future research that carefully considers how temporality is a defining factor in reception and engagement with inherently social literacy practices will be more equipped to address the implications of new generations of student-users who are potentially considering newness as the norm.

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