Mind the Traffic!
Social Media and Games Art and Design
Creative Production: An Exploration of Student Perspectives
Sharon Tolaini-Sage (s.sage@nua.ac.uk)
Games Art and Design
Norwich University of the Arts
Johann Lagessen, 3D Digital Environment, NUA, 2017
Dennis Wong, Digital painting: ‘Guardsman’ NUA, 2017
Jack Lennon, 3D Digital Environment, NUA, 2017
William Karenga, Digital ‘Matte’ Painting, NUA 2017
Context and Rationale

- Acknowledging and challenging my assumptions and bias about students’ interaction with social media, by:
  - investigating students’ own views of their behaviour in relation to social media; their own feelings about how it might affect their ability to focus positively and productively on their digital art and design process.
Contemporary HE Learning & Teaching Environment

• Technology Enhanced Learning (TEL) is now part of university teaching and learning best practice (Pickering, 2014)

• Students have ‘grown up digital’ (Prensky, 2012)

• They prefer online interaction with peers and tutors in order to ‘curate’ the content and inhabit the digitally connective space ‘Alone Together’ (Turkle, 2011)
A Critical View

- Pedagogical literature on digital technologies frames it as a neutral or benign presence in higher education (Selwyn, 2016)

- Does this overlook the complexities of the learning environment and what students themselves bring to it?
Student Practices

• Games Art and Design Students use social media for a variety of purposes during their studying day:

• Facebook, What’s App, Instagram, Skype, Twitter, ArtStation, LinkedIn, YouTube, Discord, Steam, Reddit, Snapchat, Pinterest, Tumblr.

• They work on producing digital creative work while social media is on, on screen, and on the phone next to them.
Aims of the Research

• To bring new knowledge of how students themselves view their creative engagement

• To contribute to curriculum design in creating a regular seminar based on these research methods

• To build mutual understanding and a debating culture around social media use and practice-led learning

• To contribute to life long learning habits based on critical thinking in relation to social media
Methodology

- Students recorded a social media use diary relating to a 3 hour study session over two consecutive days - one with social media on, one with it off.
- The diary provided detailed data for responses to a subsequent online survey.
- Students had a degree of agency in the research process.
Analysis

• A ‘narrative’ analytical approach

• Exploring lived realities - students ‘subjective landscapes’ analysing ‘storied text’ through ‘emergent key themes’

• By ‘telling a story’ a narrative account breaks with the strictures of coding and makes voices audible through direct quotation (Cohen et al, 2011)
Reflection on Methodology

- The online survey was a relatively blunt instrument
- Sometimes flawed
- Nevertheless it gave some interesting insights
- Further iteration of the survey’s content would produce increased focus
Did engaging with social media have an impact on your feelings towards your studio work? If you answer yes, please specify how.

Answered: 16   Skipped: 0

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Comments (14)
• ‘I could never get into the flow of things…I felt like I was hardly making any progress’ (CG)

• ‘I felt sidetracked’ [by] ‘wasting my time’ (JE)

• ‘It generally lowered my self-esteem’ [and] ‘brought a lot of doubt and stagnant work pace from distractions’… ‘it noticeably lowers mood’ (TR)

• ‘When work is going slowly, I’ll have a quick look through my Facebook feed…knowing full well I’m probably wasting my time’ (HS)

• ‘[I develop] lingering thoughts…about friends, relationships, errands, personal projects, hobbies etc’ (NC)

• [Seeing exceptional work online] ‘unmotivated me to work to try hard because I’m not as capable as the talents I witnessed on social media’ (NC)
• ‘To go and look on a social media website is often intentional so I can give myself a short break, not only physically but mentally as I found that taking regular breaks would keep my brain focused… although I’d find it hard to regain the creative energy I had prior to visiting a social media website’ (JR)
When did you feel you were able to achieve most focus on your studio work?

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Total 16
Highly Reflective and Nuanced Answers...

• ‘I’d see work that somebody had posted/shared which I found was often quite harmful to my workflow as I would see it and be instantly demoralised/demotivated after seeing the level of work that was out there to then go back to working on whatever I was doing was not always easy!’

• ‘However, my reaction depended heavily on my mood and confidence in my own ability, as other times I would see work and using [sic] it as a learning curve almost, studying it and seeing how I could raise my own work to that level’ (JR)
Was the experience of doing your studio work more enjoyable with your social media:

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Comments (14)
Will you change your social media habits when engaging with your studio work as a result of this research?

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Total 16

Comments (14)
Resulting Insights

• Students’ own views showed the complexity of their engagement with social media.

• Despite feeling more focused and/or productive without social media, students enjoyed their creative work more with it on, felt less isolated, and were consequently not planning to change their behaviour, or were unsure whether to do so.

• Depending on mood, engaging with social media had the potential to produce significant positive and negative effects on feelings of self-esteem around creative production.
(Some) Conclusions

• There is a definite need for a debating culture around the relationship between social media use and creative practice.

• Using the social media diary and the survey as the basis for further curriculum design will be a relevant, valuable strategy in harnessing a ‘reflective cycle’ of teaching and learning (Kuh, 2009)

• Introducing planned seminars, adjusted for different levels, using this research as a model for their content, would encourage a culture of critical thinking, reflection, and positive student engagement with their course.


• Kuh, G. (2009) *What Student Affairs Professionals Need to Know about Student Engagement.* Journal of College Student Development. 50 (6), pp. 683 - 706.

• Pickering, J. (2014) *How to Start Using Technology in Your Teaching* HEA Available at: https://www.heacademy.ac.uk


• Turkle, S. (2011) *Alone Together: Why we expect more from technology and less from each other* NY: Basic Books.