The Consumption Experience of Digital Environments: Screencast Videography

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If a picture speaks a thousand words, imagine what kind of story a video could tell…

The need for videography in Consumer Research has been recognised and endorsed by Belk and Kozinets' initiative of the ACR Film Festival, which has been growing for more than a decade. Belk and Kozinets (2012) argue *"As industry increasingly embraces videographic techniques for representing consumer realities and portraying their marketing research findings, it is useful for our field to follow suit and, in many ways, lead the charge towards finding new, rich forms for understanding the consumer"*. Indeed the ACR film festival has showcased incredible research that highlights the importance of videography, the rich data it provides and the captivating presentation and storytelling of consumer research (e.g. Hietanen, Schouten, & Vaniala, 2013; Kawaf, 2014; Rokka, Rousi, & Hämäläinen, 2014; Seregina, Campbell, Figueiredo, & Uotila, 2013; Veer, 2014)

This research takes videography to a new level in consumer research, an unavoidable move toward studying the ever-growing arena of digital consumption. Therefore, this abstract presents screencast videography as a method of studying consumer experiences and shopping and browsing behaviours in an online context.

Rationale

With the rapid evolving nature of technology, various experiences have moved completely or partially to the digital world. New experiences and opportunities arise everyday for the average individual as well as for businesses of all sizes. With this evolving shift also come tremendous opportunities for researchers in marketing and consumer behaviour. Indeed, consumer researchers have invented and adapted existing research methodologies to allow an understanding of these new emerging phenomena. This is apparent in the rapid growth of 'netnography' as a method for studying 'the field behind the screen' by Kozinets (2002). This method has allowed an infinite number of possibilities for studying online communities in digital ethnographic fashion, and it has proved more effective than the traditional ethnographic approach in this context.

Similarly, this paper introduces a novel advancement to studying online experiences and behaviours by choosing an alternative approach to videography and videographic ethnography. This approach is screencast videography, a method of capturing interactions, behaviours, and emotions using records of screencasts of online shopping experiences. If visual ethnographies and videography research such as Burning Man (Kozinets, 2002a; Kozinets et al., 2004; Penaloza, 1998) allowed such rich understanding of observable experiences, so far the same has not been possible in the context of online experiences. The experience of browsing, shopping or interacting with websites occurs within the personal and private space of the individual; and so there is currently no method in the literature that allows for such work to be done in studying online experiences and behavioural decision making processes.

Therefore, my proposition in this abstract is to introduce screencast videography as a form of videographic interpretive approach to studying the consumption experience of digital spaces.

Videography vs. screencast

The production of videos is becoming extremely easy. High quality, user-friendly camcorders, mobile phones, smartphones, and tablets' cameras made the production of videos an enjoyable fun activity and thanks to the online revolution that made 'sharing' as easy as a click. It is no wonder therefore that video is increasingly appearing as a medium of data collection in research (Belk, 2006; Belk & Kozinets, 2005). Emerging modes of video-based data collection methods are (a) video-tape individual or group interviews, (b) record naturalistic observations, (c) autovideographical techniques where the participant is given a camcorder to film their observations (unobtrusive observations) and (d) a combination of self-ethnography and semi unobtrusive techniques. Knoblauch, Schnettler, Raab, and Soeffner (2006) comment on the advantages of video as an observational technique, video recordings appear more detailed, more complete and more accurate compared to observations made by the naked human eye. Moreover, videos capture 'interactions' and produce 'natural data'. "Natural data refers to data collected when the people studied act, behave and go about their business as they would if there were no social scientists observing or taping them" (Knoblauch, et al., 2006, p. 11). However, on using videos, Belk and Kozinets (2005, p. 129) comment "the camera can prove an unwelcome hindrance to the formation of interviewer-interviewee rapport. Shoving a camera in a person's face is both unnatural and obtrusive" which is something important to take into account when employing videographic research. Additionally, Vom Lehn, Heath, and Hindmarsh (2002) argue that visitors unavoidably react to the camera and merely play act when being filmed at an exhibition.

Contrary to this approach, screencast videography does not have to deal with the influence of the camera unless the researcher made a conscious decision to include camera recording with the screencast. Screencasting is defined, in Information Technology research, as *"a method of presenting digitally recorded playback of computer screen output which often contains audio narration"* (Brown, Luterbach, & Sugar, 2009, p.1748). The use of screencasts is most popular in education and particularly in virtual learning environments. Brown et al. (2009, p.1748) argue, *"Because screencasting captures desktop activity along with audio commentary, it can be a particularly effective method of explaining computer-based procedures."* Although screecasting has been widely used by academics for educational purposes, there is no evidence on the use of such method for research purposes particularly in the area of consumer research. Using screencasts is ideal as it offers the advantages of rich natural data of otherwise unobservable online behaviours; in the same time is more user-friendly and less obtrusive than camcorder based videography. This is because in screencast the participant can see no difference on the screen while shopping therefore the effect of a camera is not present.

I work on employing this method in understanding the consumption experience in online context; the empirical use of this method has been presented at the ACR film festival[1] (Kawaf, 2014). As in videography, this approach allows for the production of natural data (Knoblauch, Schnettler, Raab, & Soeffner, 2006) and is indeed less obtrusive since the hindering camera effect argued by Belk and Kozinets (2005) is not present in this approach.

[1] Trailer Available At https://vimeo.com/105890658

An example of using this method

Alike to videography research, in screencast the researcher must make various decisions before and throughout the process of data collection in accordance with the aims and objectives of the research and in a way that answers the proposed research question.

For data collection purposes, I have used Camtasia Tech Smith software package. The participants were asked to go online on a shopping experience journey the way they usually do. They had the freedom to choose the website(s) they want to shop on and whether they would like to open their emails/Facebook/Twitter accounts or any other website they usually use when shopping online. They were also asked to comment, using a headset, on what they are seeing and why they are choosing or discarding items or websites.

Ten screencast videos were captured and used in this study, they varied in length from 5 minutes to over half an hour. Like most screencasts, the videos contain screen capture of all the activities (movements and clicks) on the screen as well as audio track of the participants' comments as well as system sounds such as clicks, background music, etc. As aforementioned, cameras were not used to capture the participants' facial expressions in order to allow the participants to immerse in the task without the constant influence of the camera.

ANALYSIS

For the purpose of studying the consumption experience of the digital space, I employed critical incident analysis in order to represent the main critical aspects of the experience and the relevant web atmospherics that are deemed relevant. As Flanagan (1954, p.327) explains, *"By an incident is meant any observable human activity that is sufficiently complete in itself to permit inferences and predictions to be made about the person performing the act. To be critical, an incident must occur in a situation where the purpose or intent of the act seems fairly clear to the observer and where its consequences are sufficiently definite to leave little doubt concerning its effects."* Thus to determine the criticality of an incident, it is evaluated within the context of the overall experience. When an incident is evaluated as critical or not, it is looked at within the experience and its situational context. In other words, a critical incident in the video is one that seems to have clear approach or avoidance consequences within the experience journey.

FINDINGS

The results of this naturalistic approach to studying consumption of digital spaces highlight two distinctive approaches to the experience, purposeless and purposeful i.e. whether or not an experience is framed by a set goal to find a specific item.
Educational and social atmosphere maintains crucial relevance in purposeless browsing, whereas, visual product presentations maintain its core importance in allowing purpose led navigation.
Other findings that were possible by this approach include a systematic conceptualization of all critical atmospherics that are likely to be flagged as critical incidents within the journey of online fashion shopping.
Remarkably, the use of this method is not bound to online fashion shopping. The method can be used in any digital consumer behaviour or experience related study.

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