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PTC 629: Social Media – Theory and Practice
April 11, 2011

To: Dr. Andrew Klobucar

From: Linda Lichtenstein

Re: Social Media Project – Participatory Culture Applied to an Animal Anatomy & Physiology eLearning Application

Background

The theme of my project is Participatory Culture as it relates to an animal anatomy and physiology eLearning application I began designing last semester for PTC610 – Research Methods for Information Design.

My animal anatomy and physiology application is currently in the initial concept-preliminary design phase. Its content is geared toward the high school student or undergraduate who wants to work with animals in some capacity such as veterinarian, veterinary technician or technologist, or veterinary researcher. The application includes the usual anatomy and physiology academic information in the form of text, photography, and multimedia. In addition, it includes other interactive functionality like the ability to zoom in and out of body structures, and the ability to color and label anatomical structures.

For the purpose of this project, I considered various ways I could incorporate social media into my application and came up with three possible scenarios:

1. The addition of blogs and forums to enhance the *At the Clinic* section which consists of practical clinical information and experiences. Users would participate by adding their experiences and advice, or whatever other relevant information they would like.
2. Inclusion of an application-level, sharable bulletin-board to serve as a study aid. Users could include snippets of information such as topic discussions, animated diagrams, self-colored and labeled diagrams, videos, and other information (from within the application and perhaps from the web in general) into a work space. Users could add notes to the snippets as well. And, they would have the option of forming 'study groups' where they could share the content of their bulletin boards amongst themselves.
3. The addition of an interactive, 'Second Life' type of educational game to allow users to create avatars representing pathogens such as microbes and parasites. The system would represent the body. Although users could construct avatars to be a creative representation of the pathogen; the system would enforce rules such that the avatar possessed defining characteristics of the pathogen in real life. For example, if the pathogen of choice is streptococcus, the system would only allow the avatar to have a spherical body. The object of the game is for the avatar to inflict maximum damage on

the body as the pathogen attacks the body in real life, and the body to defend itself as it would in real life.

Of the three scenarios, Scenario 3 appeals to me the most; it is the scenario on which I will focus my project. As such, it will take the “new social media application technology designed for a particular community with a particular communal information need” format.

Aims and Objectives

My project will aim to create a defined community of content producers in the veterinary or medical fields. They fall into two major groups: educational designers and learners. The objective will be to encourage these groups to comment on and participate in the creation of pathogen avatars – to learn about pathogens or apply what they already know about them, from the physical form they take to the behavior they display.

A second objective will be to prompt learners to discuss elements within the educational game environment. For example, I would encourage them to talk about how they would go about inflicting maximum damage on the body (the system), what would make the game fun so they would want to come back and play again and again, how they would envision interacting with other avatars, and what the reward system would look like. I would encourage educational designers to take notice and join in the discussion as well, particularly in relation to enhancing the game’s educational value.

In addition, my project will be a dynamic media publication. Content producers will be able to not only comment verbally, but to upload drawings of their avatars as well as photographs and videos.

Methodology

A WordPress website will be developed. Static pages with relevant pathogen avatar and educational gaming information will be developed. These pages will provide the capability for content producers to leave comments. In addition, an *About Me* page will also be developed. Content will be tagged, categorized, and generally Search Engine Optimized so content producers will be able to find and use the site. In addition, a WordPress gallery will be implemented and populated with my Flickr gallery on Participatory Culture. Over the remainder of the semester, appropriate media will be added to the gallery as well as links to relevant blogs and websites by me, and hopefully by content producers.

Plug-ins and widgets will be incorporated, as appropriate, to expand the capability of the website. Extended functionality may consist of forums, information boards, and a ‘Second Life’ environment. In addition, content producers will be encouraged to add their avatars and other media such as videos and photographs to the site. Links to social media sites like Twitter and Delicious may be established.

The theme of the website, initially set to a default theme, will be upgraded to enhance its overall canine anatomy-physiology-pathogen content.

Purpose and Goal of Social Media

My Flickr gallery presented a collection of photographs that, to me, represented Participatory Culture and could be applicable to my animal anatomy and physiology eLearning application. I chose photographs that exhibited literacy through sharing and learning. These photographs are consistent with the goal of my project, specifically education through social media in the form of peer-to-peer learning.

My WordPress website is mainly about educational gaming. I included dana boyd, a social media researcher, in my Flickr gallery because of her interest in the social dynamics of gaming. Specifically, the psychology of players to “optimize or improve their ‘numbers’ within the system” (Lim, “How social media succeeds by being serious fun”) or “how social media succeeds by being invisibly serious fun”. A goal of my website is to engage the content providers to provide commentary concerning how to make the game fun, what features would keep players coming back, and how players would like to be rewarded.

My WordPress website will be targeted to a specific audience, that is, veterinary and medical professionals. A large part of the website content will be produced by them. These individuals form a social network; according to Marin and Wellman, “By studying behavior as embedded in social networks, social scientists are able to explain macro-level patterns not simply as a large number of people acting similarly because they are similar, but as a large number of people acting *on one another* to shape one another’s actions in ways that create particular outcomes. This perspective is important; accordingly, the activity on my website should grow as members of the social network add content and influence others to do the same. This perspective is validated by Brian Soulis’ definition of social media success: Relevance + Resonance = Significance. Significance drives Sharing.

Prioritized List of Social Media Initiatives

Once the basic WordPress website is functional, more advanced functionality will be added. In order of priority that functionality is first, a ‘Second Life’ environment; and second, a forum for discussion.

In the future, subprojects to be considered will be based upon their ability to reach more content producers. A subproject to increase Search Engine Optimization would be a priority. Another priority subproject would be to create a presence on social media sites which are frequented by members of the veterinary or medical profession. Research would need to be done to identify candidate sites.

My long term goal is to continue the development of my animal anatomy and physiology eLearning application into a viable commercial product. An important part of the application will be its social media components as described above; an *At the Clinic* forum, a study group bulletin board, and a ‘Pathogens Against the Body’ educational game.

Implementation Plan

Task	Resource Required	Timeframe
<i>Initial WordPress site setup</i>		
Get familiar with WordPress	WordPress tutorials	April 6 – April 15
Configure my account and general settings	WordPress login	April 12 – April 15
<i>Customize WordPress site setup</i>		
Write static pages and <i>About Me</i> content	Proposed subject matter	April 11 – April 15
Set up static and About Me pages, comment capability	WordPress account	April 15 – April 18
SEO Optimization, Tags, and Categories	WordPress site	April 15 – April 18
Create a Gallery with Flickr gallery	WordPress site Flickr gallery	April 15 – April 18
Choose WordPress theme and apply to site	WordPress site	April 15 – April 18
<i>Manage Comments</i>		
Moderate comments	WordPress site	April 15 – May 8
<i>Advanced Customization of WordPress site</i>		
Create links to relevant blogs and websites	WordPress site Blogs and web sites	April 15 – May 8
Add media to my Flickr gallery and sets	Flickr account Media	April 15 – May 8
Add widgets to integrate Twitter, and Delicious	Widgets Twitter account Delicious account	April 19 – April 25
Add widgets and plug-ins to set up a 'Second Life' type of environment, and forums.	Widgets, Plug-ins	April 19 – May 8
Define my own theme in HTML, and CSS	WordPress site	Future