**CSC1023: Literature Review**

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**Summary**

While researching for this literature review it became clear that digital civics is focused heavily on political usage to help people to communicate with governments and be empowered but Kirk has shown that it can be taken and used in the most humble of environments the family. Kirk and his colleagues have collaborated to bring families with absent individuals due to work commitments together in a unique study.

**Introduction**

I have chosen digital civics to review as it is utilising modern technology to address underling issues in connectivity in today’s society. Digital civics is defined as “a concept that refers to a set of digital tools that are designed for and centered around social interaction.” By Marco Bani and Stefano de Paoli (Bani, de Paoli, 2013).

The emphasis on the mundane activities becoming the most essential for social interaction and establishing a connection between individuals. Digital civics uses new innovations to improve day to day activities such as a countdown to a holiday or communication between a child and their mother.

**Methodology**

A variety of methodologies were used in the creating of this research for different purposes. One of the key ethnographic methods was interviews with the families but there were problems scheduling the meetings within the “mobile workers time commitments” (Kirk, Chatting, Bichard, Yurman, 2014). They describe this as being a “major issue for the project” as they had tried to perform detailed interviews with families but it was difficult to get the whole family together at the same time. They wanted these families to take part in the design lead research. Their main methodology was the use of culture probes which were placed in the homes of chosen families homes in which the members could interact with to gain “a glimpse into the relations family members have with material objects in the home” (Kirk, Chatting, Bichard, Yurman, 2014).They would then Tailor Bespoke technologies to reconnect the families.

**Discussion**

In his lecture titles open lab David Kirk described the research he had been performing at the culture lab at Newcastle University. The research covered a vast range of topics with and scale also from city wide innovations to those which are tailored to only a small number of individuals.

Firstly the presentation on the ‘Smart Cities’ as a future interest show that there is significant potential in this field to improve information flow by the introduction of sensors. These sensors could be used by government departments to monitor and develop efficiency of services. This idea of Smart Cities also allows feedback from citizens as there will be a shift “from transactional to relational services”(Kirk, 2016: Slide 5-6) which will empower local people by giving them better means to communicate with their local officials to bring about change. This is supported by the paper Electronic Government and Electronic Civics paper by the University Of Massachusetts Amherst Department Of Political Science which says that the future of digital civics “lies in the political uses to which communities and interest groups put the Internet and in a long series of behavioural and structural changes in government.” And “If it is the case that some types of communities are able to use information and communication technologies more powerfully than others, it may be that technically proficient communities gain political influence over those with less adroitness in cyberspace.” (Fountain, 2013). This shows that the communities will more skills in cyberspace gain more political power due to their ability to communicate with officials.

Kirk spoke about the Feed-Finder app in which breastfeeding mothers could vote on places in public where they felt comfortable to breastfeed their babies. Kirk said that Feed-Finder is “a civic platform for mothers” (Kirk, 2016: Slide 7). They used this idea and software to create App Movement which is mapping technology that allows people to nominate ideas, which members of the app vote on the ideas. When a quota of people vote on an idea the app automatically creates a new application for that idea. He described this technology as “a citizen commissioning platform” (Kirk, 2016: Slide 8).

There are many examples of the bespoke technologies during the Family Rituals 2.0 study, one of which was a bottle opener which connected via Bluetooth to a smartphone and sent a signal to the spouse to say that the husband away on business was having a drink. This signal would then pour a glass of wine for the wife. The purpose of this was so that they could share the activity of having a drink after work even when apart. Another of the technologies was an automated vacuum cleaner which was connected the car of a father working abroad in the UK when his family were back in Sweden. When he was on his way to work the vacuum would activate so the family knew what the father was doing. These may seem mundane or trivial but Kirk argues that these are some of the most important interactions in family life.

When considering the paper “Quotidian Ritual and Work-Life Balance: An Ethnography of Not Being There” by David Kirk of Newcastle University’s Culture Lab and colleagues, their research into Digital Civics “explores how these periods of separation are managed within wider considerations of work/life balance, and how digital technologies are aiding these periods of separation where the rituals of family life may jar with work schedules of the flexible mobile worker” (Kirk, Chatting, Bichard, Yurman, 2014).

**Conclusions**

At the time this paper was presented by Kirk and his colleagues stated that “this work is currently ongoing” and that “it would be somewhat premature to make conclusions” (Kirk, Chatting, Bichard, Yurman, 2014). But they do describe how digital civics and the probes are not the solutions to mobile workers missing family rituals but are ways gaining insight into the impact of periods away from the family. They also state how it was difficult to research families as a vast majority of family events are performed in private and that sensitivity is required to research effectively.

**References**

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