I have, 500 for intro, 2000-2500 for lit 1000 for method, 2500 for data, 1000 for discussion and 500 for conclusions.

**EBay and the Skilling and Deskilling of Practices**

**METHOD**

To understand eBay as a space where the skilling and deskilling of practices takes place, I would frame this at this stage as skill, remember deskilling comes for your empirical observations a phenomenological perspective was adopted for the in depth interviews with eBay users of different capacity. This meant lived experiences could be documented with a view to producing thick descriptions from which a deep understanding of these experiences could be gained (Creswell, 2007; Thompson et al., 1989). The definitive aim of applying this approach was to understand the phenomenon investigated from the point of view of our participants whilst retaining the cultural and social context within which it is situated (Denegri-Knott and Zwick, 2011). As with Denegri-Knott and Molesworth’s (2009) paper on eBay and the management of possessions as stock, it was deemed important for this research to generate ‘nuanced narratives of consumers’ experiences of eBay rather than theory that can be generalised’ is this a citation?. Try to give a nod to practice theory, by telling us what kind of questions you asked, that would get your respondents to tell you about their projects, goals, knowledges, skills, understanding of rules, level of commitment.

Data collection took the form of in depth interviews with 9 eBay members (see Table 1), both buyers and sellers of different levels of skill and varying forms of interacting with the site. As a phenomenological stance has been taken for this research, a smaller sample is sufficient due to an ability to relate in detail experiences of the phenomena under investigation qualifying them for participation (Denegri-Knott and Molesworth, 2009).

Due to the eBay practices of each participant being under scrutiny it was important that the interview situation was as consistent as possible to their typical eBay usage so their behaviour was as natural as possible; resultant of this, interviews were held at the location where the participant used eBay. Further to this, due to individual practices being researched, it was necessary for the interviewees to demonstrate their physical behaviour when using eBay as well as their existing knowledge of the site and technology; therefore so each interview was carried out whilst the respondent was logged into their eBay account and manoeuvred around the site.

On average, interviews lasted 45 minutes and were later transcribed and analysed by way of identifying the key themes within participant’s stories. From this, the themes which were most prevalent within the data were extracted and are discussed in detail below. When was the research carried out? In total how much data was generated?

**Table 1:**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Respondent** | **Age** | **Occupation** |
| Natalie | 22 | Sports Student |
| Gina | 42 | Sales Director |
| Dan | 24 | Bartender |
| Pete | 22 | Sports Student |
| Laura | 19 | Photography Student |
| Andy | 51 | Landscape Gardner |
| Hannah | 30 | Stage Manager |
| Rory | 22 | Insurance Broker |
| Eireann | 21 | Personal Assistant |

**FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS**

State this more like a key finding emerging from you study is that eBaying constitute not only an instance of skilling but also de-skilling. Until now, the term shouldn’t have been used. My intention is to focus on the skilling and deskilling of practices within the context of eBay. The term deskilling refers to the skill and knowledge that was previously in the domain of the human agent being delegated to a technological agent. While attention will be concentrated on the manifestation of deskilling and its impact upon eBay practices, acknowledgement of skilling, the acquisition of knowledge’s necessary for competent eBay use that leads to such deskilling, is necessary to understand the trajectory of these broader knowledge’s. Although participants did not expressly acknowledge their use of available technology as a form of deskilling, there were consistent themes found within the data which I organise under two key themes below.

Firstly, in becoming skilled in using eBay, there were reduced opportunities to learn the rules and know-how’s of the site itself which were initially believed to imbibe the eBayer with the skills for competent utilisation of the site. What about other knowledges required to use the site competently, such as how to assess/determine value and how to frame it? Through the stories, it was made clear how eBay usage evolves, and much of this original knowledge becomes less prevalent as it is superseded by technology. Many of the emotions attributed to the process of eBaying by Denegri-Knott and Molesworth (2009), the supposed ‘search for the desired item and associated thrill of the bidding process’, were absent from participants stories when recounting experiences of technological intervention. Through the stories, it became apparent that by attaining skills in technology, you lose the other knowledge’s previously acquired as a means of becoming a competent eBayer, what kind of knowledge?

Further to this notion that deskilling makes many of the original rules and knowledge’s of eBay obsolete, it emerged that the technology which enables deskilling within participants in certain manifestations has a secondary role to that for which it is explicitly intended this is not very clear, what do you mean?. EBay allows for the delegation of responsibility and commitment on to technology, meaning that many of the rules and knowledge’s initially learned through interaction with the site become defunct. Participant’s stories demonstrated this reduced commitment through deskilling, where less to no attachment was formed with goods and the responsibility of obtainment was in a sense, no longer that of the eBayer themselves. What about attachment to the activity itself?

**SKILL TOTALITY AND OBSELETE KNOWLEDGE (EDIT TITLE) Agree, this is not very clear as it stands.**

Participants’ stories demonstrated the development of eBay knowledge skills over time not very clear is this that skills and associated knowledges developed over time, did they become settled?. However it became apparent that as their eBay skill set increased, the need for implementation of such know-how’s was reduced. Can you include an example to help illustrate (from your data) This was also true of knowledge learned outside of eBay; many skills previously learned as a way of locating and obtaining items became redundant, once automated systems like (x) were used. Again I think you need a story/reference to your data to help support this. through the deskilling functions provided by eBay.. This mirrors the notion put forward by Hand and Shove (2007) that the implementation of technology in turn can diminish one’s creativity. When speaking to Hannah, a stage manager at a theatre, she depicted the negative connotations now attached to eBay through its reduction of user skill and knowledge required to utilise the site and locate certain goods.

There is a lot of people in the industry that feel that looking on eBay is a real kind of cop out. Um, and I know some designers really don’t like looking on eBay and suggesting things...we don’t always say the stuff has come from eBay we just kind of, show images, because some people do have a preconception. Um, but uh, before I guess, yeah the skills were very different, so you would be trawling through the Yellow Pages, um, getting contacts, phoning people and if they don’t have it, asking if they kind of, can give you any leads and you kind of have a web of um, kind of phone calls or visits to places because you kind of just get chatting to people. We still do that, um, it’s just that eBay is another tool for us to use.

The ease with which eBay allows participants to search and locate a wanted good was often attributed within the stories to the deskilling functions the site now provides. Prior knowledge was almost unnecessary as the eBay filters allowed specific items to come up in a search engine without their credentials having been specified in order to find them. Natalie, a 22 year old sports student, stated that her main eBay purchases were watches. When talking about her technique of locating certain items, it was clear that any previous research or consideration was unnecessary as eBay provided means of filtering her options on her behalf and bringing up items with which she had no previous knowledge of. What about the comment that they need to learn how to use eBay first in order to achieve specific goals that they have in mind?

I would literally type in yellow watch...I’d start with that and then underneath they have related searches, so here they’ve got yellow watch Casio and I’d maybe think oh yeah that’s what I want, or they’ve got yellow Ice watch, so initially I’d probably start it off quite simple and it’s only when I start seeing things...initially I’d say I’m looking at the watch um, and then say I like this Casio watch I’d think, hmm 3.89 I wonder if I can get that better. So then I’d go back up to the top because they’ve given me the idea of a Casio, so then I’d go yellow watch Casio. And then it’s not a case of looking at the watch it’s a case of looking at which I’d get the best value for...so you can sort it out by however you want, it automatically goes to best match, but if I wanted the lowest price first, either price and packaging or just price alone, I can do that.

However, the key words which eBay provide to attempt to reduce the skills needed to locate a certain good were felt by Hannah to hinder her search process., how? Explain Her wealth of knowledge about the goods she searched meant she was usually in a position to not require guidance from eBay and tailor her searches relatively scrupulously is this supported by your quote?, give specific examples of this then.. However, the limited knowledge of other eBayers’ common within their listings often made her search process more difficult, as eBay was presenting her with items which were not accurately represented.

I tend to use a variety of different key word searches. It’s amazing if you type in ‘vintage something something’ that will bring up different things to ‘retro duh duh duh’ because it just depends what people have listed their item under...People generally quite often don’t know what they’re selling, so they’ll guess at a period, or like, they say its art deco and it’s not. Or they say it’s 80s and its 70s...I quite often search around a period if I’m looking for a certain date as well...that’s where the vintage and retro thing comes in...sometimes people will put, will list like, a whole range of different periods and styles because they know people will do a search for say, art deco, because that’s quite a popular search and then, um, it means that their thing comes up even though it’s not, to get people looking at it...that can be quite frustrating if people list lots of different stuff if they don’t know.

Her description of people’s listing techniques as a method of attaining more item views demonstrates that through the functions eBay provides, the need for prior knowledge of a good is not as vital as knowledge of the eBay search process. Isn’t she demonstrating skill and knowledge here, she is better able to determine what the stuff is, despite its poor categorisation by fellow eBay users. Through know-how of how items come up in a search, a seller can achieve more views by omitting accurate knowledge, and it could in fact be detrimental if through its inclusion, their presence in a search were to be restricted.

This promotes the concept that once you know how to use the system, eBay no longer acts as a tool of discovery. Frustration at this development of the site was found within Rory’s narrative, as he expressed his distaste for the control the technological agent took over his search process and the personal value that this prevented being constructed.

What I don’t like is Daily Deals and crap like that. I don’t like people who advertise their stuff too much...When you find something yourself you feel better for it...I’d rather still scroll down and kind of make my own choices.

The issues raised within interviewees stories were frequently linked back to eBay ‘mak[ing] it easy for everyone to use, whether you’re a first time eBayer or you’ve been doing it for years’. As postulated by Denegri-Knott and Zwick (2011 p11), once knowledges are delegated to electronic agents, the ‘possibility of surprise and serendipity that characterised early experiences in the user-generated space gives way to routine’. The easier eBay makes the buying and selling processes through technological advance, the more they risk eliminating the thrill originally present and sought out via their auctions as eBayers become skilled in the acts of deskilling through electronic agents (Lehtonen, 2003).

**I wonder if upfront this could be more about how eBaying requires skilling of a particular nature (that is about how one is socialised into using the site effectively) about the acquisition of necessary knowledges and specific rules that enable users to find desired objects. This is about the mobilisation of embodied knowledges (Dant) in the eBayer which are technological in the sense that they know how to use search engines, to broader object related knowledges (what things are, how much are they worth) and embedded knowledges eBay itself. This so reading can then lead us to an argument that over time as knoweldges and levels of skills become settled, that this seems to produce tedium amongst the people you spoke to. So for instance they got about using auction sniper or learnt how to use specific words to search for bargains, etc.**

**DESKILLING AND REDUCED COMMITMENT**

The emotions which are supposedly prevalent on eBay are remarked upon within existing literature as both a driver and an outcome of interaction with eBay (Denegri-Knott and Molesworth, 2008; Denegri-Knott and Molesworth, 2009). However, participants in this study expressed that the deskilling made capable through technology in turn reduced the commitment felt by them to a particular item, and limited their attachment to it.

The Auction Sniper tool was raised amongst participants as one of the central deskilling technologies utilised, allowing them to have very little to do with the eBay process yet still, to them, be a successful eBayer. One of its key usage benefits as perceived by interviewees was the ability to not get drawn into a bidding war over an item. Stories highlighted that these bidding wars create an emotional attachment between eBayer and item, often leading participants to pay over what they had originally intended for the good. Support for this notion comes from Ariely and Simonson (2003) who note eBayers may be ‘particularly susceptible to escalation of commitment because participation in an online auction can often trigger an intense emotional response page number’. Participants expressed in their stories that they felt Auction Sniper helped them save money through its ability to take on the commitment role on their behalf so such emotions cannot be formed between eBayer and good. Pete, a 22 year old sports student, is an avid Auction Sniper user and acknowledged the benefits it offers by reducing his commitment through detachment from the item itself.

The main way that I get items so cheap is I use a tool called auction sniper...Whenever I bid on eBay, or almost whenever I bid on eBay I will always use this...I don’t have to keep checking up on the same item to see what price it’s going for, so basically it means I’m always looking for new items not the same ones, and it means I don’t get into bidding wars with other people for the same item. So, I found that jacket, and I set up the snipe for it, and then I knew that I didn’t have to worry about when the item was ending or how high it was going, I could just ignore it and I literally just get an email from them when it’s ended saying you either won it or you didn’t…I feel like I get better deals using [Auction Sniper] – I definitely feel like I pay less, because yeah as I said, I don’t get stuck in bidding wars, I’m not, like, it sounds weird to say you can get emotionally attached to an item but you kind of can. If you get in a war you want to win it, but with this is removes that emotional attachment. I literally just set this up with my maximum bid which I’m happy with, and then I leave it.

Denegri-Knott and Molesworth (2010) postulate this as an outcome of deskilling; the reduction in effort needed to acquire an item undermines the desire eBay could originally facilitate within buyers. While Denegri-Knott and Zwick (2011) claim that the cycle of desire (Campbell, 1987) also exists in the digital world, the culmination of technological advances that allow such deskilling enable consumers to reduce the period of time with which they interact with the good. This in turn limits the intensity of desire that can be reached.

Alternatively, participants who do not use the Auction Sniper tool expressed the feeling that it undermines the eBay experience as a whole. Natalie, a 22 year old sports student, still uses her knowledge of auctions to win desired goods and feels technology such as Auction Sniper ‘takes the fun out of it because you’re never going to win’.

Further to Auction Sniper, the ‘ending soonest’ and Buy it Now filters were prevalent within participants’ stories as tools allowing for the reduction of commitment, as touched upon by Denegri-Knott and Molesworth (2008) and Denegri-Knott and Zwick (2011). As functions provided by eBay, interviewees’ knowledge of said filters within their stories was centred on their convenience and the immediacy they can provide. The stories expressed the nature of the filters to be similar to that of Auction Sniper. Firstly, they reduce the level of effort needed from the eBayer to obtain goods, and secondly they remove the need for previously learned auction skills and knowledge, what skills and knowledges were these. Andy, a 52 year old landscape gardener, told of how he used eBay as a convenient way to buy gifts for his wife and expressed how such tools added to this convenience factor.

For me it would be rather than best match for the search it would be search ending soonest...to see what, cos obviously if there is something ending soonest and it’s ending now, I don’t have to wait, you know one day two days, I can put a bid in and that’s what I want… [I do this for] convenience, so I don’t have to go back to the computer to log on, to look for it again and to consider, you know.

Participants’ stories brought to light the impact this mode of deskilling was having upon eBay as an experience. The enchantment of the ‘competitive games’ created through the auction system eBay has constructed (Denegri-Knott and Molesworth, 2008) where agents can experience a thrill at beating other bidders or manage to obtain an item at a particularly low price was lacking from respondents narratives. Rory, a 22 year old insurance broker, referred to this alteration in eBay use, acknowledging how the site has changed as he has become more routinized in his behaviour.

I think it was seen differently to how it is now. I think everyone saw eBay as kind of like a, a game in a sense. Like, you would kind of go on it and it was more the fun of bidding for an item. So even though that, you maybe didn’t want the item as much you kind of got caught up in the rush... I think the novelty of what eBay was has worn off. So in the sense of eBay being this new thing that everyone was talking about to being more integrated into day to day life.

Through participants’ narratives, it is evident that deskilling has led to a disenchantment of eBayers, and the intense period of knowledge acquisition needed to ‘play the game’ has become more routinized. When Daniel, a 24 year old bartender, was explaining how he got the best deals on eBay, he expressed how these tools enabled him to quickly and simply get the cheapest item.

If I think I’ve got a good deal, I’ll Buy it Now. Because sometimes I think when you’re on eBay you just want it, and sometimes it’s a bit tedious bidding all the time, trying to outbid. You can, you can search like, last minute deals, so you can bid when there’s like a minute left before the bid ends…so if I search, look you can sort by time ending the soonest, so there’s a minute left on that, so you can get your last bid, so you’re more likely to get the item when the item, and get the best deal.

His description of the auction process as ‘tedious’ highlights how deskilling is this an effect of de-skilling though, I don’t see the connection here, the process may always been seen as tedious, new technologies affordances mean that one can avoid them has now overshadowed previous knowledge to such an extent that the rules and skills he had initially attained were now so routinized, any sense of excitement or enchantment was no longer possible. I think a story that speaks more about how little excitement there is and how eBay is used an Amazon would be better suited here. Don’t think that was adding much to the development of ideas.

In the same way as Auction Sniper, the speed with which goods can be acquired through this form of deskilling further reduces the commitment of the eBayer. More data to support this would be desirable Participants’ stories demonstrated that they no longer sought out items with which a relationship could be formed and the key determinant in a purchase decision is becoming the immediacy with which it can be obtained. This shortening of the distance between the ideal and the real (Denegri-Knott and Molesworth, 2010) can be seen to be destroying the associated displaced meaning and desiring mode which was originally held as a central consumption driver of eBay.

**DISCUSSION**

Our interviewees’ stories suggest that technology, both internal and external to eBay, has done more for the consumer than to make the process of eBaying easier. The value once attainable via successful interaction with the site and the implementation of the knowledge learned through such interaction has been hindered. Schau, Muñiz and Arnould (2009) express in their research how community participants ‘derive social and hedonic value’ through experience. Participants’ stories show that the deskilling of eBaying experiences restrict previously achievable value being constructed through the depletion of previously essential knowledge’s being utilised.

Although prosumption has been recognised as a means of co-creating value (Denegri-Knott and Zwick, 2011; Pongsakornrungsilp and Schroeder, 2011), participants stories suggest the means of such co-creation has been impeded due to the delegation of responsibility to technological agents through deskilling. The implementation of human agent skills and knowledge to produce objects of their own consumption has previously been acknowledged as the catalyst for a form of value co-creation. However, participant narratives show that the their incremental use of eBay, and their becoming a more competent eBayer via their use technological aids has negatively impacted this form of value being derived from the experience. Participants highlighted the shortcuts made available to them as a means of speeding up the eBaying processes have resulted in a waning interest and commitment to the site. Overtime what was one new and exciting has become routinsed. The prosumption practices, as detailed by Denegri-Knott and Zwick (2011) of browsing, selling, stocking goods and managing a sale, were all shown by interviewees to have been impacted by deskilling. Although it is noted that each user’s prosumption is differentiated by level of expertise (Denegri-Knott and Zwick, 2011) narratives suggest that deskilling on eBay impacts prosumption regardless of agent capacity through ease of application.

It became apparent that many of the features of eBay which have previously been heralded as the drivers for user interaction, through deskilling have become absent from the site and unnecessary in an eBayers skill-set. Be more specific, what features are you referring to? Denegri-Knott and Molesworth (2010 p14) suggested that eBay users actively seek out strategies to avoid ‘instant gratification’, utilising skills of monitoring an item to maintain desire Is that what you found? I think you found the opposite, make this clear if this is so.. Participants stories present the idea that through deskilling, such behaviours are now actively avoided and convenience and immediacy of purchase are now what are viewed as competent eBaying through use of the technology that allows it. This sentence is not very clear, again be more concrete. Such technology was described in a way which juxtaposed participants’ interaction with eBay against that which has previously been depicted in the literature. The status of eBay as a liminal space (Shield, 2002) enabling the possibilities of experimentation and reflection on the desired goods or event (Turkle, 1995) is brought into question when considered in the context of participants’ stories. Denegri-Knott and Molesworth (2010) attributed the desire generated on eBay to this liminoid status, where ownership could be ‘partially actualised’ allowing the individual to enjoy the pleasures of anticipating winning or losing an auction, focusing on the desire of ownership. However my research has brought to light that overtime deskilling technology means that such behaviours are no longer as prevalent amongst eBayers. Such practices can be boycotted wrong choice of word and the focus was shown to be on immediate ownership rather than eventual ownership.

Participant responses frequently fed through from that which has already been proposed and partially uncovered within the literature surrounding eBay; that the technological advances it is making is ultimately resulting in disenchantment within its users. The boredom produced by routine within the material market place has been attributed to the rise in digital virtual consumption (Denegri-Knott and Molesworth, 2010). However the deskilling eBay has enabled through technological agents appears to have created the same routinisation of consumption within its users. Denegri-Knott and Zwick (2011) recognised the sites efforts to become more efficient through streamlining the numerous practices involved in competent eBaying were producing a more routinised eBay experience. This notion was dominant within the research, as participants expressed a reduction in commitment through deskilling, as well as a boredom of the ‘tedious’ nature of using eBay without assistance from technological agents.

The narratives provided support for the statement that the more skilled an eBay prosumer becomes, the more likely they are to undermine the pleasures available through the originally unpredictable nature of the site (Denegri-Knott and Zwick, 2011). The result of this is that eBay is no longer a space for playful and exciting participation but a more mundane consumption experience. It was clear within the stories that as participants were becoming knowledgeable through skilling, the experience was in line with that depicted within previous literature (Campbell, 2005; Hand and Shove, 2007; Denegri-Knott and Molesworth, 2008; Denegri-Knott and Zwick, 2011). However, as their capacity greatened, their need to implement such behaviours which got them to such a point became unnecessary. Without the emotions initial eBay practices produced within the consumer, the experience is shown to be perceived as mundane as the offline consumption believed to be to catalyst for consumers turning to the digital virtual to escape from (Denegri-Knott and Molesworth, 2010).

With my research further raising the notion that eBayers are becoming disenchanted with the site and the behaviours needed for competent interaction. The deskilling has made eBay less of a space for playful consumption, and more of a realm where the consumption patterns found within an online shop are prevalent rather than an online auction site. While it is useful for more people to be able to successfully consume within an online space, removing the need for skills for competence and enhanced agent capacity, the liminal status of such spaces is at risk of diminishing, along with the benefits it provides to both consumer and business. An awareness of this would allow marketers within digital virtual spaces, including eBay, to develop a balance between the skilling and deskilling of practices. It is key to allow individuals to feel certain know-how is important for competency to generate value from the experience. If the practices become routinised the individual may seek out new consumption experiences where value can be attained through the culmination of new knowledge’s for successful interaction as when eBay was first used.

**CONCLUSION**

State rather the purpose of the paper, ie. The purpose of this paper was…. And then your overall contribution point. In conclusion, I have looked at the skilling and deskilling of practices within the context of eBay. Drawing from the phenomenological data I have discovered that as a result of eBay’s attempts to become a more professional consumption space, it has lost the commitment of enthusiastic and excited individuals. The technological agents available to assist in competent eBaying have now overtaken the skills of the human agent, reducing the possibility for value co-creation through experience.

The deskilling of eBay practices has also meant the enchantment of the site, referred to in the literature (Denegri-Knott and Molesworth, 2008; Denegri-Knott and Molesworth, 2010) is diminishing through the reduction of play. Much of what made eBay unique and created value for the user has been replaced by a more routinized style of consumption where individual know-how and broader knowledge’s are now redundant. The commitment to goods and the emotional attachments formed are limited through deskilling practices allowing immediate purchase and encouraging users to walk away after a single interaction, reducing the time where desire can form.

While literature has touched upon the impact of disenchantment on eBay (Denegri-Knott and Zwick, 2011), the deskilling of practices on eBay is a new concept and leaves scope for its impact on other facets of the site to be explored. The reduction of commitment could be transposed from the goods and its prevalence in the eBay community could be researched; what is the knock on effect of these deskilling practices to the rules of eBay? It also asks whether other digital virtual spaces attempts to become more professional consumption spaces has created similar deskilling practices, and what results this has had on their users and interaction with the space.

While I acknowledge that know-how and broader knowledge’s are required to achieve the deskilling practices highlighted in this research, the resultant negative impact on value co-creation and individual interaction with the digital virtual space has been overlooked within existing literature. As digital virtual consumption becomes more prevalent, it is to be expected that experiences will become more streamlined, with my work promoting that such developments do not simplify engagement to the extent that it becomes routinized.

**I thought the discussion raised some interesting issues , we may think of routinisation and a settling of knowledges and skills, but also accelerating desire that underpins engagement with the site. As your users have exhausted wants, this too must, make the place less exciting. What needs to come out more strongly is this sense of trajectory, in that there is a decline in value creation for the individual users as a result of the kind of operant resources which eBay provides its users with. The technology in itself makes it too easy to become a competent user, the challenge of use them is not sufficient to maintain engagement with the site over time. In this respect it would be interesting to have some of the back stories of your respondents mentioned so that we can have a context for their eBaying. What were their underlying goals and what kind of projects did they want to achieve. For a few it would have been to be an fully fledged power seller, so its important to consider the nature of their engagement with eBay. Have a think about these issues and reflect on them before drafting your final copy which I am am hoping to read! Thanks for all your hard work.**