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AS LIBERAL STUDIES

PROJECT REPORT

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Abstract

This research project investigated the online social awareness of Hong Kong Xangans aged between 16 and 18. The focus was on Xanga.com simply because of its exceptional popularity in Hong Kong. To evaluate the online social awareness of the target group, the research looked at the connectivity, interactivity, and usage of their Xanga Sites. Random samples were drawn out from Xanga Metro of Hong Kong and three other related bloggings. Statistics, observation, and content analysis were the three methods used to process the samples. Statistics indicated Xanga Sites of the target group were more connected. Observation revealed that the connections were weak and confined to a pre-existing social circle. Content analysis made it clear that some sample Xangans updated a blog for the sake of maintaining a relationship; rare instances disclosed sensitive feelings but were well preventing blog readers from reading too deep inside their minds. After synthesising, it was found that the target group had a high online social awareness. However, some connections were weak; most interactions were shallow; quite a number of entries were non-expressive. This left an ambiguous situation as for the target group, Xanga was not a well-established network of people, and was not an ideal place of writing private journals as well. Thus the culture of Xanga and the psychology behind are still to be studied and understood.

Keywords: blog; self-disclosure; social awareness

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Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Background

Social network

A **social network** is a group of interconnected individuals or organisations. Theoretically, any such network is analysed in terms of nodes and ties. A **node** represents an individual or sometimes, certain group of individuals. A **tie** represents a specific type of relationship between two nodes, which can be kinship, common belief, strategic alliance, thesis citation, air route, etc.

Online social networking refers to the formation of social network through the Internet. Internet users can network themselves through different platforms like e-mail, discussion groups, and through different ways of interaction like voice chat or file sharing. Blogging is currently a very popular way for social networking.

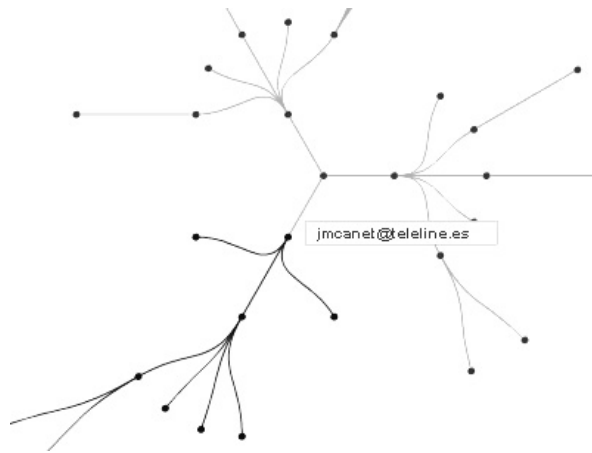


FIGURE 1 (Vilà & Canet, 2005)¹: An activist's e-mail message spreading through his social network

Blogging

A **blog** is a website where entries are displayed in reverse chronological order. It might be updated by a single blogger or co-authored by a team of them. Blogs can present diaries or anything

like news commentary, creative writing, technical support, sales promotion, etc., and contents are often multimedia. Many free blog hosting services are available. The interface for editing entries is made user-friendly and customizable too.

Blogs have certain distinct features which allow bloggers (nodes) to tie up. One is the ability for a reader to post a *comment* on a blog entry. Any comment is displayed immediately after the entry. This is the main way for bloggers and their readers to interact. Through *subscription*, a blogger can retrieve the latest entry of another blog as soon as it gets updated. Bloggers can also tie up by joining the same group, or *blogring*. More directly, they can add each other as *friend*.

Xanga.com, Inc.

Xanga is a New York-based social network service launched in 1999. Now, every Xanga Site is basically made up of a Weblog, Photoblog, Videoblog, Audioblog, Pulse, and a Profile. The Weblog has typical blogging functions: commenting, subscription, blogring, customizable layout, searching and navigation, private messaging, tagging, flagging, so on and so forth. Special features include “**eProps**”, an internal rating system which enables readers to award an entry 0 to 2 eProps to show appreciation; and also Xanga **Metros**, blogrings for Xangans living in the same country. The Photoblog has more or less the same functions but specialises in uploaded image. Likewise, Videoblog and Audioblog specialise in video and audio respectively. ‘Pulse’ is a mini blog, which allows short messages to be uploaded through cell phone. ‘Profile’ supports multiple profile pictures, profile fields, and connection with Xanga Friends. Noticeably, there are convenient facilities for one to tie up with another Xangan, but tying up with external websites may require a bit hacking. These features could suggest that Xanga is insular and cut off from the rest of the blogosphere, i.e. a gated cyber community (Cashmore, 2006)².

Basically Xanga is free. Nonetheless it constantly reminds users to switch to Xanga Premium, a paid service. Xanga displays a disturbingly large and animated advertisement banner on top of every Xanga Site unless the user pays. Many users actually hack and remove the banner from their Sites. Such rather aggressive business strategy of Xanga may explain why it discourages linking to external blogosphere.

1.2 Research Objective

Online social awareness

The primary subject of this research is **online social awareness** of 16 to 18 years-old Hong Kong Xangans (hereafter also referred to as '*the target group*'). It studies how much the target group is aware of, or eager for connecting and interacting with people through *social network site* (SNS), and what they do to achieve it. In other words, it studies the extent and realisation of their social awareness on online social network.

Social awareness exhibited in cyberspace could be quite different from that in real life. In real life, there are situations where people cannot avoid socialising and be too honest. On the contrary, blogging is without face-to-face interaction and can be kept anonymous. Bloggers have the power both to reach wider audience, and to block away unwanted audience. Because of the great freedom permitted in cyberspace, SNS users need not afraid to be sincere. Thus how the target group show up themselves on Xanga, whether private or public, self-centred or socially-oriented, provide more credible clues to their perception and attitude towards self identity and interpersonal relationships.

Grasping a phenomenon

Xanga.com characterises itself as being a 'community of online diaries and journals'³. Discussing certain topics on blogs poses no problem. But diaries have been taken to be personal and private, and exposing them in the public domain makes it somewhat paradoxical; like calling something everybody can know 'a secret'. Yet everybody shall see that, Xanga has long been transformed to an integrated SNS. Journalism is only one of its built-in functions. Building up social network is the real concern. For example, a visible personal profile, or an articulated list of Friends displayed (Boyd & Ellison, 2007)⁴ is as important as the blog entries themselves. It is crucial to bear in mind that blogs are no need to be public, not to mention networked. So the motivation by which local teenagers participate in this trend becomes an intrigue question.

1.3 Research Value

Business potential

SNS relies on network effect. If SNS users have a higher degree of social awareness, they tend to form and engage in larger and more cyber communities. Knowing how to trigger their online social awareness can help sustaining the SNS and attracting profitable business sponsorships.

Understanding teens' preoccupation

59.3% of Xanga users come from Hong Kong as of January 30, 2008⁵. SNSs are 'fairly culture dependent and they become part of the culture as well when they grow more successful' (Wei, 2006)⁶. Thus the understanding of the dependency of Xanga on Hong Kong teenagers, or the other way round, may reveal the culture of this new generation — the culture they spread through SNS, and the culture of online social network itself.

Chapter 2 Literature Review

The emergence of blogging, in its modern sense, can be traced back to early 1990s, along with the explosion of the World Wide Web. After that the explosion of SNSs arrived at 2003. Research literature on this topic is not abundant, as not until recently do scholars begin to pay attention to this new and still evolving trend.

Social network, social networking

Social network sites were formally defined as ‘web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system’ (Boyd & Ellison)⁷. In public discourse ‘social network’ and ‘social networking’ are used interchangeably. The two authors differentiated the two terms clearly. ‘Network’ is often a counterpart of a pre-existing social network in the real world, in which people already know each other; ‘networking’ emphasises relationship initiation, often between strangers (Boyd & Ellison). Such conceptual differentiation is also adopted in this research.

Individualism in disguise

Social network is usually associated with keeping relation ties, ‘being for the sake of others’. But conceivably online social networking could be egoistic, for the sake of oneself. An empirical scrutiny of MySpace profile data found that a social network profile’s lists of interested music, books, movies, television shows, etc., can function as an ‘expressive arena for taste performance. A profile can work as a taste statement, differentiating the profile user’s taste from all others, thus bring the user a feeling of prestige (Liu, 2007)⁸. While some profile users seek to enter a pop culture or subculture group, some others may use the taste statement as a gesture of alienation.

Divided blogosphere

Not only do similar people join similar bloggings, but they also choose the same blogging platforms right from the start. An undergraduate project (Jenks-Brown & Ward, 2002)⁹ divided

blogging platforms into three types: propriety, open source, self-established. It was noted that the content of blogs vary by the type of platform used by the blogger. Another individual study (Choi, 2003)¹⁰ compared Xanga and LiveJournal users. It concluded that Xangans post more comments, but the comments were less serious. Xanga Sites were more 'colourful and elaborate'. By contrast, LiveJournal users talked more about their heart feelings. Hargittai (2007)¹¹ surveyed and compared Facebook, MySpace, Xanga, and Friendster. He suggested that aggregate analyses of SNS usage might miss important trends, since people did not select a blog hosting site randomly. If 'the aggregate concept of SNSs was disaggregated by service', then obviously people of different blogging services differ in gender, race, ethnicity, and parental educational background.

Chapter 3 Research Methods

3.1 Focus

Xanga

Xanga.com was the chosen target SNS. According to Alexa.com, Xanga is exceptionally popular among Hong Kong Internet users. The Alexa traffic ranks as of January 31, 2008 of major Hong Kong SNSs are shown in Table 1.

SNS	local traffic rank	global traffic rank
Xanga	4	103
Facebook	6	7
Blogger.com	13	12
XangaSpy.NET	80	4,492

TABLE 1: 3 mos. avg. traffic ranks of notable SNS of Hong Kong

XangaSpy.NET is a website that let browsers access Xanga Lock enabled sites without logging in, and prevent their information from being logged by Footprint or Trackers¹². Its high local traffic rank tells that (1) SNS is active in Hong Kong, (2) a significant proportion of Hong Kong Internet users cluster around Xanga for online social network. So even the research was focused on Xanga only, the results would in some extent be valid for the majority of Hong Kong SNS users.

16 to 18 years-old Hong Kong teenagers

The target group was 16 to 18 years-old Hong Kong teenagers. They were defined to be local people whose age was within 16.0 to 19.0 by February 1, 2008. This group of adolescents is still in a transitional stage in personal development, although mentally they start to mature and solidify. For adolescents of age of this range, they might either be pressurised in dealing with public examinations or getting used to work in society; they should also have established quite a number of ties to friends and acquaintances in real life. Both in terms of self awareness and social awareness, the target group is leaving adolescence behind and stepping into early adulthood.

3.2 Design

To evaluate the online social awareness of the target group, this research looked at three aspects of any sample of Xanga Site: *connectivity*, *interactivity*, and *usage*.

Connectivity

In Xanga, connectivity is realised by adding Friends, subscribing other Xanga Sites, or joining a blogging. It is more sensible to talk about it in a relative, comparative sense. The research inquired how many ties a Xanga Site set up, and with what it ties up. Connectivity was compared among the target group, as well as to the overall Hong Kong Xangans (hereafter also referred to as '*the population*') to find out whether the target group was typical Xanga users, or a deviant group with traits of its own.

Interactivity

The simplest definition of interaction is 'action and response'. On Xanga Sites, almost all interactions are textual. The research inquired how many comments that Sites of the target group received per entry. What the comments were about was also concerned. It was hoped that special means of interaction would be discovered.

Usage

Down to earth, a blog is just as ordinary as any website. There is an infinite way to use it. While the usage of Xanga Sites may be similar for the majority of Xangans (as a diary and one of the nodes in a virtual community), there are always diverse, minor, stylistic usages of Xanga at the end of *The Long Tail* (Anderson) which is beyond any categorisation. This research approached this by taking out individual cases from the target group sample. They were subjected to a closer inspection to illustrate the possible uses and purposes of a Xanga Site, and they were analysed and explained.

3.3 Data Collection and Processing

Random sampling

In order to obtain a random sample of the population, on January 30, 2008, 100 usernames were fetched from the member list of Hong Kong Metro¹³, by using a web crawler ‘ScrapBook’. The list had already been sorted by their last updated time. Since the sites were all recently updated, it was assumed that the list contained no inactive or abandoned user accounts.

A similar procedure was repeated to obtain a random sample of the target group on January 31, 2008. The first 10 usernames were fetched from the member list of each of the three bloggings: *__1 9 9 1*¹⁴, *[[Made in 1990]]*¹⁵, *__*1989:::*¹⁶.

A Xanga Sites had enabled Friend Lock. Information about their Xanga Sites became completely inaccessible. Moreover, as with some other data gathering for social network analysis, the samples collected surely did not represent the whole community but just the obvious part of it (Krebs, Ricchiuto, & Holle, 2007)¹⁷, because there were invisible nodes on the Web not yet attached to the community or would never do so.

Statistics

The 100 samples representing the population, and the 30 samples representing the target group, were all accessed manually. Their username, date of setting up the blog, and date of birth were recorded. Using a simple formula, their birthdays were converted to their age. Correspondingly, the followings were counted: the number of Friends they had added, the number of Xanga Sites they had subscribed, and the number of bloggings they had joined. All data were tabulated (see Appendix A and Appendix B). Some of the items were missing as Xangans chose not to disclose them. Finally, graphs were generated from the raw data to lay out and to compare the connectivity of Xanga Sites of the target group and local Xangans in general.

Content analysis

Both typical and atypical samples of the target group were selected to go over content analysis. The subject of analysis was the whole or an excerpts of entries and comments (if any), cropped out from the five most recent updates of a Xanga Site. Three questions for the content were to be answered: what, to whom, and why. This method was to determine the interactivity of Xanga Sites of the target group.

Observation

For samples of the target group, some qualitative properties of them were also recorded, such as the category of bloggings joined, the choice of profile picture, the layout, photos shown, widgets embedded, etc. Such observation was to reveal the usage of Xanga Sites of the target group.

3.4 Privacy Concern

During content analysis, entries being read may hold sensitive information. Xangans should have understood that what they publish is open to the public. If they are not willing to disclose anything on the Web, they could have enabled Friend Lock anytime. This research did not attempt to access any Friend Lock-enabled Sites. For Sites accessed, personal information, entries content and photos were kept for academic purpose only and would not be redistributed.

Chapter 4 Results and Interpretations

Estimated from the samples, average age of local Xangans population is 19.9, which shows that the user base is still young anyhow; on the other hand, average age of the target group is 17.5. 13 users in the population sample were found to be of age between 16.0 and 19.0. Though, 19 to 21 years-old was the dominating age group.

4.1 Statistical Comparison

In the population sample, 7 out of 100 had enabled Friend Lock, which means that they wish to keep all strangers away; none of the Xangans in the target group did so. They tend to be more open to social contact.

In terms of self-disclosure, the target group was found to be fairly consistent with Xangans on the whole. Both groups were not so interested in displaying subscription list. Quite amazingly, all 30 samples of the target group disclosed what blogrings they had joined.

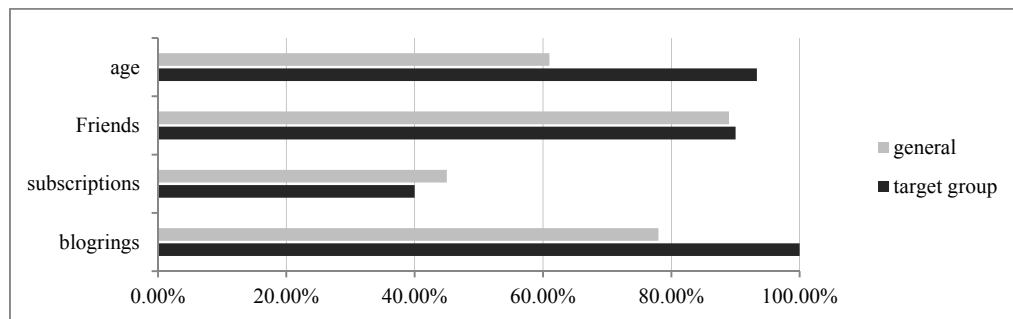


FIGURE 2: Percentage Xangans disclosing their network status

Compared with Xangans in general, the target group showed more number of ties to other Xanga Sites (for those who disclosed them). Friends they added and blogrings they joined were roughly twofold of the amount for Xangans in general (see FIGURE 3). In other words, they tend to ‘show off’ their intimate friendships and their belonging to virtual community to their fellow blog readers.

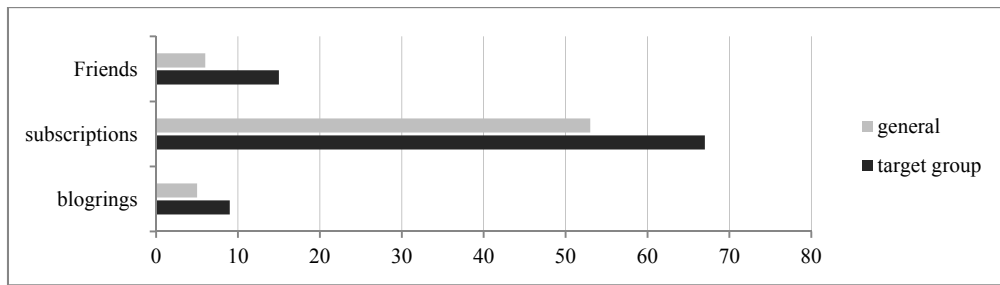


FIGURE 3: Average number of connection per Xanga Site

As to the number of Friends added, a marked deviance was found when the percentage distribution was plotted (see FIGURE 4). For Xangans generally, the distribution resembles a power law curve. The population is consisted of a large number of Xangans who add only a few of Friends, and a few of the remaining add a large number of Friends. For the target group the pattern is not alike. Many of the Sites display quite a number of connections in their Friend list. If only quantity of connection is considered, then the target group is socially much more active than the rest of the local Xangans.

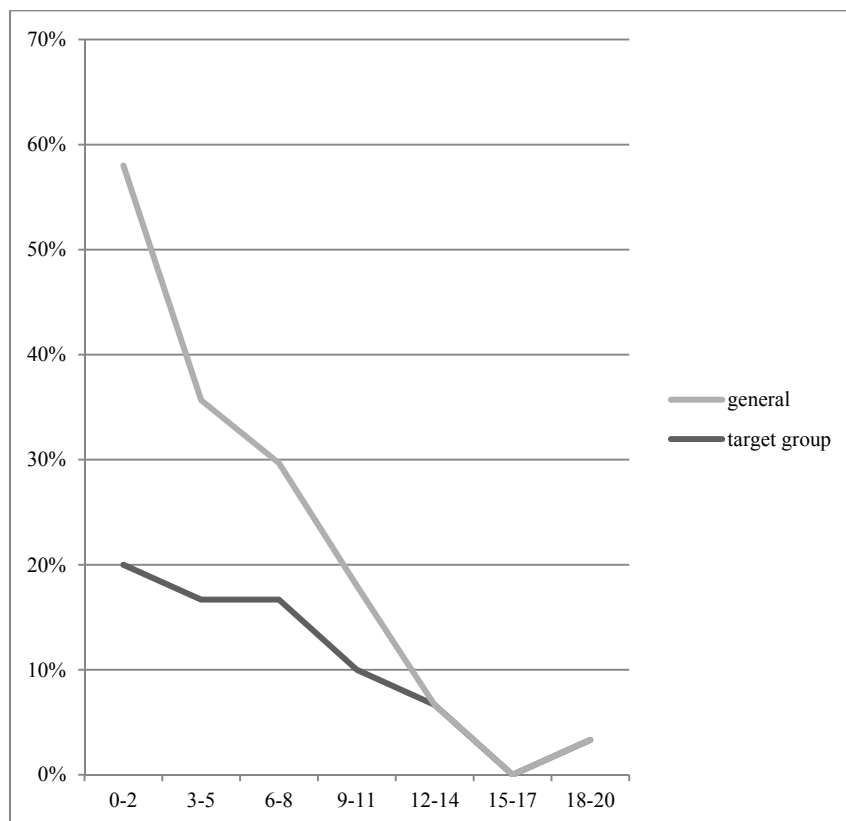


FIGURE 4: Percentage Xangans against number of Friends they added

4.2 Studied Cases

This section presents several snapshots of Sites drawn out of the random sample of the target group, which illuminate their social awareness on SNS.

wan031032

This Xangan included hidden text in his blog. These texts were set to a colour which matched the background colour of the Site. When texts were highlighted, some extra, hidden texts surprisingly appeared.

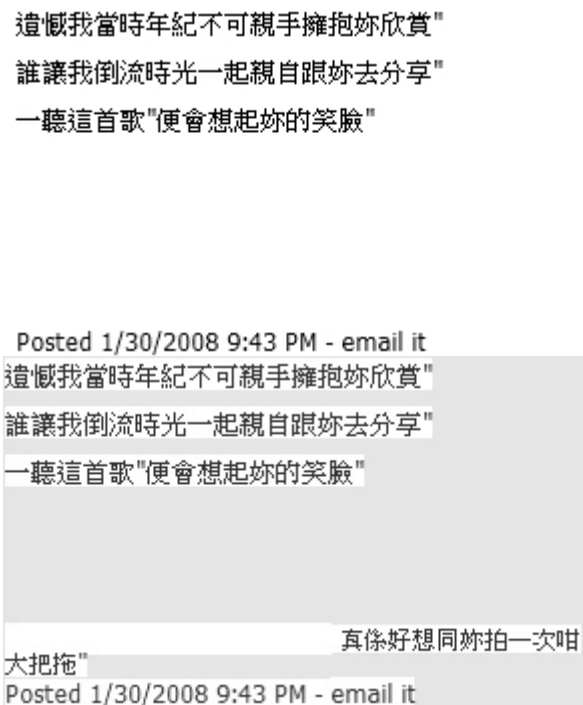


FIGURE 5: Hidden text, from *wan031032*

A piece of Cantopop lyric was pasted to make this entry. The lyric did not point to anything in particular. After the hidden text was uncovered, the whole thing turned comprehensible. Reading the comments followed, it can be sure that none of his Xanga readers had discovered the hidden text. That is to say, the blogger successfully ‘concealed something under public’s eyes’.

9 Comments



踩場，xD

Posted 1/30/2008 10:09 PM by SIUBE2 -
reply



隻秋！XD

Posted 1/30/2008 10:11 PM by
wan031032 - **reply**



隻秋隻，xD
我包您我剪您我鎚您 *V*

Posted 1/30/2008 10:13 PM by SIUBE2 -
reply



冇問題 " XD
我剪妳我鎚妳我包妳 "
YO~ I WIN "

Posted 1/30/2008 10:14 PM by
wan031032 - **reply**



您條友仔慢出，xD
我真係鎚您，xP

Posted 1/30/2008 10:20 PM by SIUBE2 -
reply



呵呵 " 睇下妳下次仲黎唔黎踩場 XD

Posted 1/30/2008 10:24 PM by
wan031032 - **reply**



好感性x)

Posted 1/31/2008 12:26 AM by
erickam520 - **reply**



看看,隨便幫手傳開其他王仲銘的學生呀!
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uNFng-Y0lLw>

Posted 1/31/2008 9:28 PM by edmund852 - **reply**



金：串咀丫—0—

EDMUND：OK=]

FIGURE 6: Comments followed the hidden text

The comments were all unrelated to the entry, and the mood was just the opposite of it. The blog readers did not respond to the entry (one even teased the blogger for his being sentimental).

Instead, they remained relaxed, or playful, probably as they got used to in real life. The blogger was engaged in a real-time dialogue with *SIUBE2*, in which they seemed to be playing a game*. The Xanga Site was transformed to an instant messaging platform. Yet, such interaction on Xanga seemed more alluring than it would be in handier MSN or ICQ. Noted that wan031032 was one of the three persons in the sample who hid his Friends and subscriptions.

lovemyself_sharon



FIGURE 7: Character test, from *lovemyself_sharon*

As observed, posting character test was an extremely common practice among the target group. Many of the Xangans quote such tests, as to boast how mature or how standout they are. As seen in this case, the test showed that the blogger was ‘so-so’, but she still shared the test result. This suggested that sometimes self-disclosure is not for pride or self-expression, but merely for the sake of self-disclosure. Though, she had not been receiving any comment for five entries already. This Site was an example of high connectivity but low interactivity. The blogger intended to seek attention on the Web. Somehow she did not manage to do so.

* http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Transactional_analysis#Games_and_their_analysis

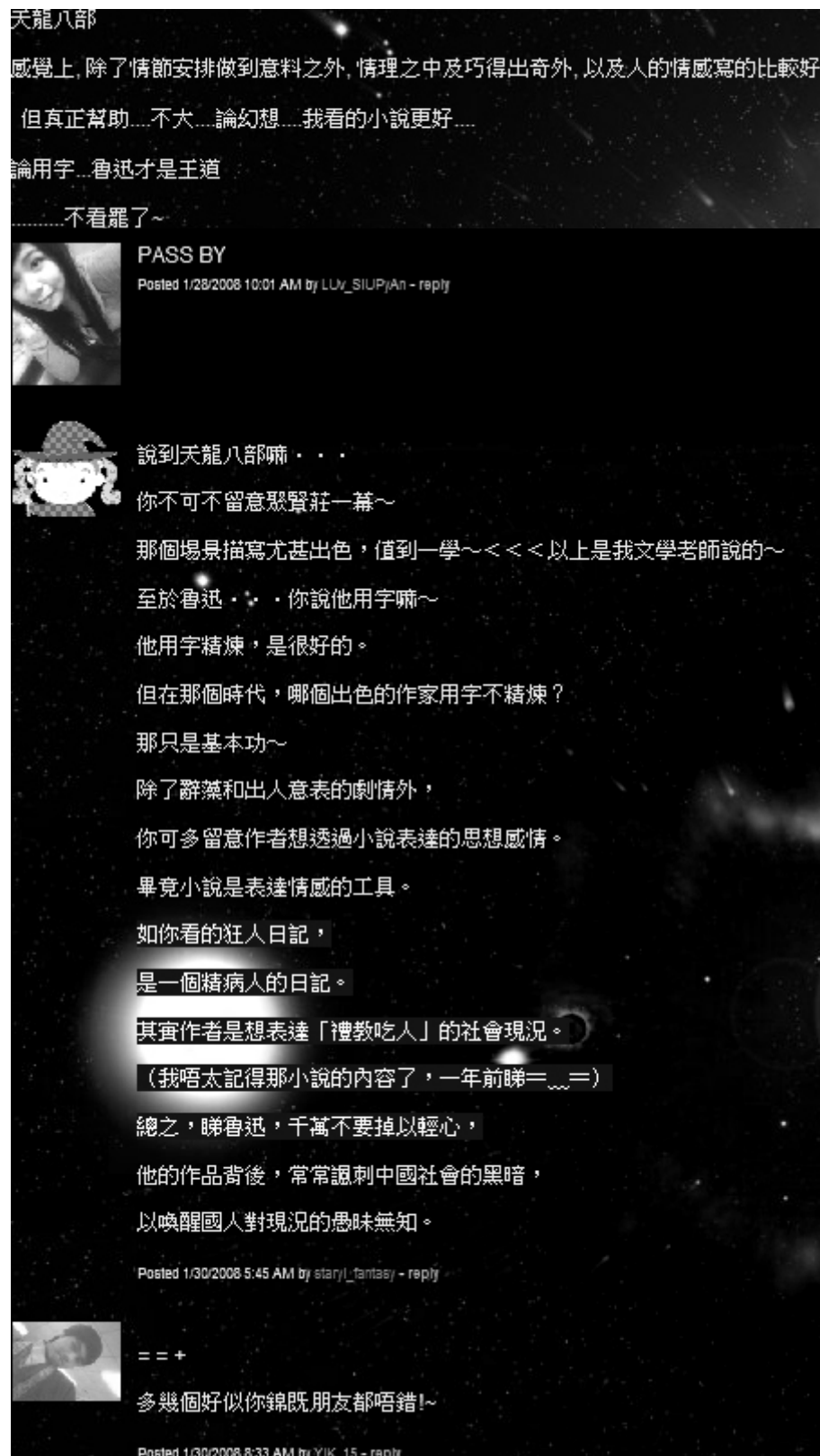


FIGURE 8: Book review, from YIK_15

This Xangan shared his feeling after recently finishing a fiction. The ‘book review’ was by no means a sophisticated one, but it was not about people or incidents. It was about a ‘subject matter’, which was rare among the observed target group. The entry stimulated two comments. The first one was apparently without any purpose, but to declare her mere existence. The second one was very serious, by the standard of the target group. Despite this, the blogger did not sustain a conversation with this reader, unlike *wan013012* (see FIGURE 6: Comments followed the hidden text with his friend. This one-time response was not qualified to be an interaction between the blogger and his reader.

kakit912



FIGURE 9: ‘Phone message’, from *kakit912*

This blogger expressed boredom, and then it attracted an invitation to a phone chat. This kind of message could be sent through mobile phone or IM software too. Instead of keeping it private, the blog reader let it visible to other readers who had visited the same entry.

The intended message was in between words that were missing the point, and fun but detachable emoticons. While this entry was not writing about something particularly positive, the blogger made use of ‘lubricant’ to make the whole thing easier. The blogger made a personal expression that would not otherwise be casually made in real life, but he deliberately created a more exuberant, less deterrent ‘atmosphere’ — a social gesture often made in real life. He was not even whispering something in his mind. He was consciously telling and yelling them out. What he told was personal, but the telling itself was social indeed.



FIGURE 10: On meal, from WINKI_r

Speaking impartially, all entries of this Xangan were that alike. Things were utterly trivial; plenty of photos were displayed; texts were fragmented. Noted that she made her Xanga Site very colourful and the animated background kept flashing all the time. It was as if she took her camera everywhere, shot down images whether significant or not, and prepared to fix some materials onto her over-decorated Site daily no matter what. This Site was nothing ‘personal’; she did share events she involved, but her effort was to keep feeding her peers new stories to read. She did it like satisfying entertainment magazine readers.

梁浩森的說，不要讓太多人失望。
我認同，我自己的遭遇比不少人已好得多了。
自己不珍惜，只好怪自己。
既然如此，我決不會再浪費一分一秒。
九月時候的我，也要回來了。

看著，我不會叫人失望!!!
這日記大概都不會再更新了，
朋友們找我，就得用電話了。
閉關時候都到了，msn都不會再出現`shIng @ SIn Tak這個人了。
五月九日再見了。

p.s 不過，踢波打波唱k食飯吹水都要溫我，唔係我悶死左都未會考 --"
Posted 1/9/2008 9:41 PM - email it

11 Comments



今個星期5出街....--"
Posted 1/9/2008 9:55 PM by shing_lam - reply



@@去邊--我又去
Posted 1/9/2008 10:05 PM by jason249 - reply



我要尋寶呀....--"
Posted 1/9/2008 10:06 PM by shing_lam - reply



我2星期唔on已經有d與世隔絕想死ge感覺...
你由而家到5月9....
睇黎又一冇可能ge事--"
仲要唔update XG...???
Posted 1/9/2008 10:10 PM by shing_lam - reply



林成：去邊度尋寶呀 -v-?
而家到五月九，唔長唔短四個月。
四個月都挨唔到，點可以捱廿分!?
(可能會偷偷地on下既 --")
你兩條蛋散又當我xanga係 chatroom--"
Posted 1/9/2008 10:22 PM by stephy1015_shing1109 - reply

FIGURE 11: Chat room and diary side by side, from *stephy1015_shing1109*

This blogger explicitly referred to his Xanga Site as a 'diary'. And this was well compatible with its being a chat room at the same time. The entry was a public confession. Followed comments appeared unrelated and unconcerned as usually observed.

This Xanga Site functioned much like a 'notice board'. He notified his peers the he would be disappearing from the online community. The blogger safely assumed most of his friends read his Site regularly, so that his Site became a convenient, one-to-many channel that spread his message once and for all. Through this notice board, the blogger also disclosed his thought. But again, readers seemed more comfortable with responding only on trivial matters.

hahahakarin

This Xanga Site was a relatively interesting case from within the sample of the target group.

y, January 30, 2008

Alas
who m i ?!i can't find myslf...
i felt like shit
alwayz havin kinda odd feeling
i find no wordz to exprezz
it juz
m seemz not satisfy wif all theze..
feeling so far apart frm de rdaz
acting like normal z easy yet everytime i bac hm...juz starrin at de bkz but nothin than a shit
i may laugh a lot
cuz m a klutz a nerd
but i can't find happyyness frm all these
a second i went ape n laughin in hyper but then de aft i felt tired n upset right de way...
whz happenin to me.....
i confess dat m kinda cynical about mani stuffzz
so easy to fil antipathy towardz anythingz or anyone
of cuz i won't manifest much
yet i fil bad..
suczz
uh-oh..
m talkin trash again...../ \

8:53 AM - email it

FIGURE 12: Adolescent yearning, from *hahahakarin*

This blogger paid no attention to decorate her Xanga Site. Even the colour and text colour were default. In the sample retrieved, only this Xanga Site had no personalised layout. Entries were written in English. Culturally the blogger was not average as well. Other samples were always showing Cantopop, but this blogger showed a video of Linkin Park on the sidebar.

The blogger talked about typical affairs of the target group, but did not stop after that. She talked about schoolwork, friends' birthday, with whom she had dinner, holiday walkabout. These themes were very common among the target group. However, the blogger also shared news on biology, mentioned her addiction to National Geographic Channel, and accused people of damaging the ecological system. The typical Xangan of the target group would join bloggings of their school, residential district, idols, or even mobile phone network. But this blogger joined a student vegetarian community. Apparently she was an animal lover. And her Site was not only about praising friendship and daily routines, but also her interests and convictions.

One blogging she joined was a community of horse riding lovers. Furthermore in the entry posted on January 29, 2008, she excitingly talked about her 'virgin tram ride'. This Xangan must come from an exceedingly privileged family.

Her update on January 30, 2008 (see FIGURE 12) was a piece of 'stream of consciousness writing'. Similar writings were seen from other samples, but this entry made no use of any lubricant. The blogger expressed her weaknesses in a straightforward manner. Meanwhile she disabled comment. It might be that she wanted to avoid embarrassing response. In the entry, she told readers that she showed up nice and friendly within the social circle, but she was another person when being alone. At the end she said that she 'wouldn't manifest much'. But this entry itself had manifested it all. And her circle of friends should be 'hearing' this very soon.

4.3 Discussion

The whole picture emerges as the findings and interpretations of the statistical comparison and case study are pieced together.

Connectivity

Xangans of the target group have more Friends, more subscription linkage, and more blogging membership. From this single fact, one can conclude that they exhibit more social awareness on SNS, as anyone may expect. It does not matter that many of their ties are actually latent. Because in here, what count are their intentions.

As to the type of linkage, they are almost all about the school network. To a typical Xangan of the target group, his predominant social network in real life is formed in school. What he does is to construct, or copy an identical network on Xanga. Although the target group owns more connections, these connections mostly pre-exist in real life.

Another fact is that connectivity is not proportional to activity (see *lovemyself_sharon*). When massive linkage does not mean frequent interaction, it indicated that the connections are weak. Xangans are tied up with hyperlinks, but that alone does not mean a lively social relationship. It can be the target group are bookmarking social relations. That is to say, Xangans casually subscribe to Sites of acquaintances, giving an illusion that the Xangan has an extensive social network in real life.

There is only one instance in the target group sample that a Xangan confronted a stranger and talked to her (*CAROL_0731*, this case is not presented in this report). It can be said, the target group ‘reserve’ their social awareness only to people they happen to know in real life. Xanga allows them to explore the vast nexus of people on the Web, but they do not. For them, SNS is a tool to maintain and improve old relations, not to discover new ones. Perhaps one exception is *hahahakarin*.

Interactivity

The interactivity of Xanga Sites of the target group is determined to be low. As so many cases have illustrated, there are often so much chatter following an entry, but they are not *responding* the entry in any sense. In some instances, one cannot distinguish a Xanga Site from a chat room (see *stephy1015_shing1109*) or a public message board. Many Xangans are posting comments that literally say nothing but only declare a ‘passing by’, or if re-interpreted, ‘don’t stop writing, I be your audience’. On the other side, bloggers often take their Sites to be notice board as well, and the trivial messages leave no room for interaction at all.

Another commonplace is the use of lubricant words or emoticons, both by bloggers and readers. Obviously, most of the target group avoid interacting seriously or expressively. A naked confession by the blogger is acceptable. But a naked conversation with Xanga reader was never seen in the sample. To avoid such a ‘direct confrontation’, Xangans may disable comment (such as *hahahakarin*).

Usage

Regarding usage, all samples did not fall out of two categories: maintain existing social network and self-disclosure.

MINKI_r demonstrated the most extreme use of a Xanga Site to compete for attention within the social circle. In this way, self disclosure serves as a *means* to maintain relationships. Because it is a trend to self-disclose, so a blogger follows the trend. It is like teenagers going to karaoke. Goers can dislike singing but still go for a group activity. It is functional.

As observed, the majority of the target group find self disclosure quite pleasurable. Many of them are sharing detailed daily activities. A very few of the samples summon up to share something more introspective. *hahahakarin* appeared shy but she was still indulged to make her anxiety visible. She spoke her heart out, which was rare among the target group. *wan031032* encoded his love concern in a piece of Cantopop lyric borrowed, but he kept the key texts hidden. These two special cases, along with other samples, suggested that self-disclosure has a limitation. But self-disclosure, to any extent, is

always socially-oriented. If one wants to keep a secret but still struggles to share some part of it, it only highlights one's eagerness to share thoughts and feelings with friends, hence one's social awareness. More appropriately, it is a hybrid of self- and social awareness.

Chapter 5 Conclusion

This research inquired the eagerness of 16 to 18 years-old Hong Kong Xangans to connect and interact through Xanga. The research found that on average the target group was highly aware of socialising on Xanga Sites. They connected a lot and interacted quite frequently. But it was also found that the connections were not strong and the interactions were not substantial. Connections were not only weak, but were also confined to social circles they adhered in real life. So to say, their social awareness was exercised over separated online social circles, not an extensive online social network. Xanga Sites of the target group were in some extent function. Self-disclosure need not to go in very deep or inner side of a Xangan in order to maintain a relationship, so the target group most ordinarily share slices of their real life, but not slices of their real feelings. In spite of the negligible exceptions, all in all, the target group showed high online social awareness. But they exploited Xanga not for communication, but for a convenient platform for chatter as usual or a regular group activity.

Word-count: 4,958

Appendix A: Age and Connectivity of local Xangans in general

Usernames of Xangans who enabled Friend Lock had been paled. Age is obtained by first calculating the number of days between January 30, 2008 (the day when these data were collected) and the corresponding birthday. Then this difference is divided by 365.25, to give age in one decimal place.

<u>username</u>	<u>member since</u>	<u>birthday</u>	<u>age</u>	<u>friends</u>	<u>subscriptions</u>	<u>bloggings</u>
CKTKelvin	12/06/2007	04/10/1994	13.8	1	1	0
sum678						
yingng123	07/08/2006			3	31	3
siu_peg26	05/01/2005	11/26/1990	17.2	1		
TsangTze6348	09/24/2005			45	10	15
inez1022	05/04/2007				33	3
sally_1104	09/25/2005			3		8
NIKI_CHOW_1011	04/11/2006	10/11/1992	15.3	0		7
The_Luke_Cafe	04/20/2003			7	90	3
kelly_wong_101314						
siu_yan_1116	01/06/2008	11/16/1988	19.2	0		2
ChInTiNg	10/20/2004	05/20/1985	22.7	4	28	2
lovelypumpkin1031	05/28/2007			1	7	0
chord531	12/19/2003			1		1
milkmlk3344	03/15/2006	06/30/1987	20.6	2		
tat0gd	06/07/2007	01/22/1990	18.0	4	0	0
patrick3012	12/07/2004			1	29	3
raymondwong668	05/16/2004	12/31/1983	24.1	40		11
cu1215	02/06/2007	10/12/1991	16.3	1	3	2
stevenshum	07/14/2005	05/09/1988	19.7	4		6
sandy_suiting	03/02/2005	01/25/1986	22.0	2	18	1
eric257	09/24/2005	02/27/1985	22.9	9	11	
nana_linna	03/12/2004	03/30/1983	24.8	14	73	7
Soutsuki_Ayane	07/20/2005			8		3
sung_son	06/16/2005	10/01/1988	19.3	4		6
queenbeebi						
leona1408	06/14/2003	08/14/1985	22.5	1		8
kira_D_ming	11/07/2006			1		2
Eva_thy	06/03/2006	10/14/1987	20.3	5	2	10
meow_monster	09/28/2006			6	13	6
swkaster	05/23/2007			3	7	0
hang_lau	07/25/2005	09/25/1988	19.4	1	85	5
happykennis	09/30/2004	04/15/1988	19.8	3		8
love_han520	06/10/2007			6	111	
hongcph	09/22/2005	03/25/1988	19.9	3		1
hoktihomark						
milkboyhome	08/01/2005					
aeka39	02/12/2005	11/30/1990	17.2	10	120	10
Queeniettw	09/29/2005	08/02/1991	16.5	6	51	1
ngchifaiwing	03/09/2005	04/27/1986	21.8	0		7
brianwong2000	04/21/2006			1		
marktigtse	09/18/2006	12/13/1986		3	14	
sokai_sam	12/13/2006			0	1	

niki900	06/18/2005	08/06/1990	17.5	25		10
candycmh	03/21/2006			10		1
mcgradyfung	12/01/2006	09/27/1985	22.3	8		
MZ_08	11/18/2004	01/08/1986	22.1	2		
skjason	02/05/2006	07/08/1987	20.6	1	31	1
gracelo	03/21/2005	03/31/1988	19.8	2		1
holim60107956	01/08/2005	05/27/1987	20.7	2		2
hangy27	09/14/2007	02/07/1987	21.0	2	4	0
arbee116	07/02/2006	11/06/1989	18.2	1	48	5
wah518	03/12/2005	05/18/1987	20.7	0	0	0
le_Rayo	12/18/2004	05/15/1988	19.7	16		16
thelittlepig	04/06/2005	07/06/1984	23.6	1		2
jasonhei	11/13/2004				8	2
FuyumiKT	03/11/2006	02/02/1991	17.0	1		1
ivy_1028	10/06/2005	10/28/1988	19.3	0		
yiuting	03/20/2004			2		3
parrotliu	11/14/2004	10/21/1985	22.3	1		3
missmo1314	07/17/2007			3	5	
fran_lin	11/11/2004	05/01/1987	20.8	7		8
wilson0607	08/08/2006	06/07/1989	18.7	2	38	2
CeLiAhO	03/10/2006			6	86	11
manman401	08/15/2006	11/07/1987	20.2	1	0	0
fegg122	11/19/2005	01/22/1991	17.0	1		1
tung_keith	12/30/2006			19	58	11
boris07	12/11/2004	10/19/1987	20.3	5		10
connie_0503	03/29/2006			5	60	5
HUNNI_w	07/29/2005	12/17/1992	15.1	8		17
waterfairy_1202	11/08/2006			2		5
SISIHUI						
mayb1984						
hippo0921	01/08/2006			9		5
Sho_annho	06/08/2006	05/17/1989	18.7	11		1
mylai_lky	05/31/2007			1	2	1
esther1990	03/17/2006	08/15/1990	17.5	8	30	2
law_keung	04/17/2007			4	3	
fiona0413	05/19/2005	04/13/1992	15.8	9		7
siu_yan_9025	11/28/2007			3	50	1
heman_Plato	07/31/2005			24	208	11
go2andkathy	10/11/2005	10/18/1988	19.3	43	90	13
failam228	05/05/2006			6		4
wongka86	07/26/2005	05/04/1986	21.7	31	625	20
bennyYPK	10/24/2006	06/04/1990	17.7	2		8
lokson1016	12/07/2004	10/16/1981	26.3	10		6
toby_1119	12/30/2004	11/19/1987	20.2	6	199	9
Zyoni	04/06/2005	08/01/1987	20.5	0		
gypsy_oil	09/04/2006			0	20	0
kay1520	03/31/2005	06/02/1988	19.7	5	29	2
paulkwong	10/16/2004	08/19/1986	21.5	10		2
piano_kat_kat	05/01/2006	11/27/1986	21.2	0		2
abckiki						
ck_Zhang	08/07/2005	01/14/1983	25.0			2
Kuro1122	1/26/2005	11/22/1988	19.2	3	51	7
lowb7	3/24/2005	11/11/1988	19.2	0	20	4
ultimate811	4/25/2004	8/11/1984	23.5	6		11
mobile_ling	11/11/2004	6/26/1989	18.6	0		
toxic_devilcat	9/23/2005			4		1
shirlebb_0619	01/19/2006	06/19/1992		46		17

Appendix B: Age and Connectivity of local 16 to 18 years-old Xangans

<u>username</u>	<u>member since</u>	<u>birthday</u>	<u>age</u>	<u>friends</u>	<u>subscriptions</u>	<u>bloggings</u>
wan031032		6/4/1991	16.7			4
ding_1104	9/20/2005	11/4/1991	16.3	11		5
lovemyself_sharon	12/29/2006	12/2/1991	16.2	4	28	5
kiu_yun	9/4/2005	12/5/1991	16.2	1		6
YIK_15	8/23/2006	11/15/1991	16.2	12	31	4
shou666	7/8/2006	7/22/1991	16.5	1	38	8
sam_0123	5/23/2005	1/23/1991	17.0	2	60	6
kakit912	9/20/2005	9/12/1991	16.4	5	65	11
fung0604	4/25/2005	6/4/1991	16.7	0	104	9
Enoch729	7/31/2005	7/29/1991	16.5	6		10
win_fighting	3/1/2006	8/14/1990	17.5	2		8
WINKI_r	4/10/2006	12/19/1990	17.1	5		6
yingyip	8/19/2004			12	122	8
issac_wong23	9/27/2005	10/8/1990	17.3	27		20
keitamaine	8/23/2005	10/20/1990	17.3			10
stephy1015_shing1109	7/28/2006	11/9/1990	17.2	3		8
virginia0609	12/17/2003	6/9/1990	17.7	11	107	10
CAROL_0731	2/3/2007	7/31/1990	17.5	19	39	9
HAHAHAkarin	2/15/2007	9/20/1990	17.4	8		5
nardodo	10/9/2005			4	31	10
pig_alvin_joe	6/11/2006	1/21/1989	19.0	7		7
mancichan	8/14/2005	9/23/1989	18.4	77		20
littlitttleling	2/13/2005	6/12/1989	18.6	29		8
bananayee	9/18/2005	1/18/1989	19.0	6		6
im_karen	3/30/2006	2/22/1989	18.9	1		10
coneblackangel	12/20/2005	8/5/1989	18.5	10	75	8
kamantsui522	1/17/2005	5/22/1989	18.7	27		9
garfield926	7/2/2007	9/26/1989	18.4			5
sillysuet	11/4/2004	10/11/1989	18.3	6	104	6
ninisa	6/28/2004	9/19/1989	18.4	98		18

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