

Thesis Abstract

No. _____

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Thesis Title Managing Narrative Architecture for Prejudice Reduction			
Thesis Summary Social media has paradoxically fostered both connection and division, influencing intergroup prejudice through both the narratives it carries and user interaction (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2008). In this dissertation, I explore how networked narratives and stories, delivered and emerging within an interconnected ecosystem, modulate viewer prejudice towards cultural outgroups. Action Design Research (ADR) was applied to videos on a YouTube project titled <i>Ethnic Neighbourhoods</i> (Sein et al., 2011). The project was guided by intergroup contact theory and involved developing narrative frameworks that enabled viewers to (1) gain knowledge, (2) reduce anxiety, and (3) foster empathy. Throughout the project, I observed significant variation in viewer emotions, especially in replies to comments. I hypothesised that this variation in narrative reception could be explained by YouTube’s algorithmic curation and digital network effects. This hypothesis was tested in two stages. In Stage 1, automated emotion analysis of user comments identified the varying emotions. Then, in Stage 2, contextual factors surrounding each video on YouTube were qualitatively analysed, focusing on algorithmic curation inferred from traffic sources, region, and search keywords. Findings revealed that viewer emotions were more negative when videos were promoted through negative algorithmic curation. In addition, initially negative comments triggered increasingly negative responses in the comments section, creating chains of escalating negative sentiment in user interactions. On the other hand, viewers who watched the storyteller’s other videos tended to be more positive about the video in question, and watched it for longer. This suggests that consistent exposure within the channel can foster more positive acceptance of cultural outgroups by building trust and reducing anxiety. When viewers see their own group being recognised by the storyteller, their self-esteem increases, which also positively affects intergroup contact. Thus, to mitigate prejudice where the narrative cannot be fully controlled, storytellers need to actively curate the interaction. The study highlights the need for storytellers to actively curate user interactions and mitigate prejudice in digital contexts. Based on the findings, the dissertation introduces the concept of “narrative architecture”, a framework to guide the adaptation of digital narratives to the dynamic nature of social media. I propose strategies to curate digital spaces in which we can transform anxiety into empathy and form a shared sense of belonging enriched by diversity.			

Keywords: Narrative, Intergroup Contact, Social Media, Intercultural Communications,
Digital Architecture