Attention, power and gatekeeping in participatory media

Not so democratic after all?

Marion.Walton@uct.ac.za
Centre for Film and Media Studies, University of Cape Town
beyond user-generated content

- Users don’t ‘generate’ something called ‘content’ – people communicate with other people in a particular context.
- Communication is always a form of social action
Mediated communication as social action includes:

- Traditional *speech acts* (Austin, Searle) Promise, vow, beg, marry, sentence to death etc) and
- *Interacts* (Halliday, Kress) Social confirmation of force of speech act e.g. Question - Answer, Demand - Obey
- *Gift-giving* (e.g. Mauss) Facebook apps and mXit credits used to establish and maintain social relationships and
- New forms of *visual and multimodally mediated action* (e.g. Controlling a missile to bomb Iraq or ‘Pwning’ a friend in an online game)

Acknowledged in HCI by e.g. Suchman and...
mediated action

- We are dealing with new forms of *media* – this has ethical and political implications, particularly from the perspective of the majority world.
  - Who may enter the conversation, and who decides?
  - Do they enter as clients or as owners in relation to the channel?
  - Whose voices and images are amplified? (gatekeeping and agenda-setting)
  - Who profits?
- How does social power shape the medium, its genres, human relationships and our society?
- Whose laws, regulations and speech do these new media respect, encode or enforce?
- Whose rules and conventions do they ignore?
In journalism studies, a gatekeeper is an individual who filters out and disregards unwanted, uninteresting, and/or unimportant information or stories and attends to information of more import (e.g. news editor).

Highly subjective value judgements
- What kind of story passes through the gate?
- What parameters are used to distinguish between news/not news?
- What is the social impact of these judgements?

News is not simply selected, but rather constructed in relation to perceived criteria of acceptance through complex interactions in a socio-economic context e.g. news coverage of Africa

Search engines as automated gatekeepers for all types of knowledge – question ‘objective’ algorithms.
Users tend to choose the most relevant result of the first two matches to a query (Joachims et al., 2005),

Nielsen (2005a) refers to these positions (without a trace of irony) as the ‘default values’ for a search query.

Search algorithms accord disproportionate ‘visibility’ to certain categories of sites, and these ‘default values’ cause problems with education in poor communities.
new global gatekeepers
‘bringing order to the web’

- The Google algorithm as an ‘objective’ way of deciding the ‘relative importance’ of a web page.

- Test - ‘top’ universities
Cumulative advantage for US sites (Vaughan and Thelwall, 2004; and Thelwall and Vaughan, 2004). – counteracted recently by national portals and localisation of results

Spam, gaming, and search engine optimisation – commercial sites with a public relations budget have higher visibility (Machill, Neuberger and Schindler, 2003).

Rich get richer (Cho and Roy, 2004; Baeza-Yates et al., 2002). – virtuous cycle for top-ranking sites

Secrecy, lack of public service mandate, and lack of regulation in search engine industry (Introna and Nissenbaum, 2000, Van Couvering, 2004)

Promise of open source engines. (Van Couvering, 2004)
Erica and Faiza are working together. Erica takes charge of the keyboard, and Faiza takes the mouse. Without waiting for instructions from their teacher, they type in www.google.com into the browser’s search field. They are redirected to the google.co.za portal, where Erica types ‘apartheid’ into the Google search box, and Faiza presses the Enter key. They wait a few seconds for the results to appear, and then click on the first link, which takes them to a page entitled ‘The History of Apartheid in South Africa’. They spend the next ten minutes reading the article. When they are done, they copy down the first two paragraphs of the article carefully on pieces of paper that they brought into the lab with them.

Stanford Computer Science student project (1995)
Are they really ‘searching’ or continuing their usual classroom activity of ‘transcribing’ from scarce and valuable texts?
Local practice

Default values

The History of Apartheid in South Africa
Starting in the 50's, a plan of "Grand Apartheid" was executed, ... With the enactment of apartheid laws in 1948, racial discrimination was ...
www.cs-students.stanford.edu/~cale/cs201/apartheid hist.html - 6k - Cached - Similar pages

History of South Africa in the apartheid era - Wikipedia, the free ...
Under apartheid, the races were separated and black people were denied voting ... That white South Africans considered the implementation of apartheid ...
en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Apartheid - 101k - Cached - Similar pages

Apartheid Museum - www.apartheidmuseum.org
>> Click to Enter. Send to a friend | Bookmark | Webmaster Tel: 011 309 4700 (Local) or +27 11 309 4700 (International)
www.apartheidmuseum.org/ - 3k - Cached - Similar pages

Apartheid -- Africans
Apartheid, social and political policy of racial segregation and ... The term apartheid (from the Afrikaans word for "apartness") was coined in the 1930s ...
www.africaencyclopedia.com/apartheid/apartheid.html - 6k - Cached - Similar pages

Anti-Apartheid Wall Campaign
Stop The Wall is the grassroots Palestinian Anti-Apartheid Wall Campaign.
www.stopthewall.org/ - 23k - 11 Mar 2006 - Cached - Similar pages

Mr Dowling's Apartheid Page
Apartheid was the system of racial separation that existed in South Africa until 1993. Learn more in a lesson designed for middle school students.
www.mrdowling.com/503-apartheid.html - 13k - Cached - Similar pages

Historical Documents Archive
The crisis of apartheid and negotiations leading to democratic elections, 1966-1994. Part II World Against Apartheid and International Solidarity with the ...
www.anc.org.za/an/docs/history/ - 20k - Cached - Similar pages
The History of Apartheid in South Africa

South Africa (see man) is a country blessed with an abundance of natural resources including fertile farmlands and unique mineral resources. South African mine production of diamonds and gold as well as strategic metals such as platinum. The climate is mild, reportedly resembling the San Francisco bay area weather world.

South Africa was colonized by the English and Dutch in the seventeenth century. English domination of the Dutch descendents (known as Boers or Afrikaners), establishing the new colonies of Orange Free State and Transvaal. The discovery of diamonds in these lands around 1900 resulted in an English invasion which followed independence from England, an uneasy power-sharing between the two groups held sway until the 1940's, when the Afrikaner National Party was elected in the National Party invented apartheid as a means to cement their control over the economic and social system. Initially, aim of the apartheid was while extending racial separation. Starting in the 60's, a plan of "Grand Apartheid" was executed, emphasizing territorial separation and police repression.

With the enactment of apartheid laws in 1948, racial discrimination was institutionalized. Race laws touched every aspect of social life, including a prohibition against intermarriage between black and whites, and the sanctioning of "white-only" jobs. In 1950, the Population Registration Act required that all South Africans be racially classified into one of three races: black (African), colored (of mixed decent). The coloured category included major subgroups of Indians and Asians. Classification into these categories was based on appearance, acceptance, and descent. For example, a white person was defined as "in appearance obviously a white person or generally accepted as a white person." A black was either one of his or her parents were non-white. The determination that a person was "obviously white" would take into account "his habits, education, and demeanor." A black person would be of or accepted as a member of an African tribe or race, and a colored person is one that is not black or white. The Department (government bureau) was responsible for the classification of the citizenry. Non-compliance with the race laws were dealt with harshly. All blacks were required containing fingerprints, photo and information on access to non-black areas.

In 1951, the Bantu Authorities Act established a basis for ethnic government in African reserves, known as "homelands." These homelands were independent states to which each African was assigned by the government according to the record of origin (which was frequently inaccurate). All political rights, including voting, held by an African were restricted to the designated homeland. The idea was that they would be citizens of the homeland, losing their citizenship in South Africa and any right of involvement with the South African Parliament which held complete hegemony over the homelands. From 1976 to 1981, four of these homelands were created, denationalizing nine million South Africans. The homeland administrations refused the nominal independence, maintaining pressure for political rights within the country as a whole. Nevertheless, Africans living in the homelands needed passports to enter South Africa: aliens in their own country.

In 1953, the Public Safety Act and the Criminal Law Amendment Act were passed, which empowered the government to declare stringent states of emergency and increased penalties for protesting against or supporting the repeal of a law. The penalties included fines,
Search through the entire Athlone Website using the facilities provided below.

Search

Results 1 - 10 for apartheid (0.38 seconds)

The History of Apartheid in South Africa
Strategists in the National Party invented apartheid as a means to cement their control over the economic and social system. Initially, aim of the apartheid ...
www.cs-students.stanford.edu/~cale/cs201/apartheid.htm

History of South Africa in the Apartheid era - Wikipedia, the free ...
Although the creation of apartheid is usually attributed to the Afrikaans-dominated government of 1948-1994, it is also partially a legacy of British ...
en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Apartheid

Apartheid and South Africa
Apartheid consisted of numerous laws that allowed the ruling white minority in South Africa to segregate, exploit and terrorize the vast majority: Africans, ...

Apartheid Legislation in South Africa
Descriptions of the main apartheid legislation enacted in South Africa.
africanhistory.about.com/library/bl/bil6laws.htm

Apartheid - MSN Encarta
Apartheid, policy of racial segregation formerly followed in South Africa. The word apartheid means "separateness" in the Afrikaans language and it...
encarta.msn.com/encyclopedia_761661373/Apartheid.html
Apartheid South Africa

The apartheid policy was designed to separate black and white South Africans, to oppress, dominate and control blacks, and in the same breath to enrich white South Africans at the expense of the oppressed people.

The creation of an apartheid society

The immorality, population registration and segregation act.

Bantu Education - The homeland system - Black resistance.

The Freedom Charter that culminated in a "Treason Trial".

Defiance campaigns and the Sharpville massacre

Interesting links click below

- War in Africa
- AIDS/HIV in Africa
- Child Abuse
- Mapungubwe African History denied
- Map of Africa
- South Africa Bill of rights
- Cape Town cool carnival
- Slavery Africa
- Africa's Miracle weight loss plant

View Cart
- African masks
- African Hats - Kofia
- Zulu Hats & Juju Hats
- Chess sets
- Ostrich egg art
- African Art Paintings
- Djembe - Drums
- Jewelry
- Accessories
- Clothing
- Fertility dolls
- Shadow Boxes
- Bronze Sculpture
- Home Decor
- Figurines
- Granary doors
- Candle holders

Hoodia Gordonii
- Kalahari Hoodia Gordonii
- Pure South African
- Kung Bushman Hoodia

Art History
- Intro African Art
- Mask History
- Rock Art San tribe
- 9 Basic Mask Forms
- Djembe History
- Traditional Clothing
- Bronze sculpture
- Tribal Masks
- Ceremonial Masks

Africa countries
- Fact sheets and info
- Flags Of Africa
- Maps Of Africa
- Map of the continent
South Africa’s new National Curriculum (Department of Education, 2002a:6) proposes new approaches to history and social science in order to allow children to participate in a new kind of conversation about South Africa’s past, one that would ‘give space to the silent voices of history and to marginalised communities’.
appropriate local knowledge

Teacher skills and ‘computer driver’s license’?
Produce more local knowledge e.g. Klipfontein Road interactive documentaries, ensure that material is optimised for search engine access, use Wikipedia
Where the advertising money is (for a handful of U.S. companies)
Automated gatekeeping and editing rules determine who gets attention (e.g. U.S. bias of PageRank, ‘fast’ bias of Google News algo, demographics who have time/leisure money get attention etc.)
Organic editing rules can be gamed, if you have the time/budget
Interesting possibilities of local and niche aggregators (e.g. Amagama GameRiot)
The digital divide has to do with access to technology; the participation gap has to do with access to cultural experiences and the skills that people acquire through their participation within ongoing online communities and social networks. (Henry Jenkins)
participation != diversity

- Is it important to be able to differentiate between grassroots contributions and carefully planned viral campaigns (what Jenkins calls ‘astroturf’)?
- Beware assumptions about mobile AND desktop access
- Gift economy vs. Commodity relations
- Participation does not equal diversity
- (Henry Jenkins)
**blogger demographics**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographic Profile of US Adult Bloggers*, January 2008 (% of respondents)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Race/Ethnicity</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>African American</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average age</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average income</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average years of education</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: ages 18+; *who regularly or occasionally write in a blog; **numbers do not add up to 100% as respondents who chose "Hispanic" were also allowed to choose another category
73% of bloggers on SA ThoughtLeader platform are male, 70% are white (Analysis by Dominic Tweedie)

Vincent Maher explains:

- The criteria [for inviting someone], in short, were that the person could provide high-quality critical commentary on his or her field of expertise and provide leadership in terms of starting important conversations.
- As we went through the process of inviting contributors for the first phase, our lists were slanted in favour of women and racially balanced, but what we found is that white males responded more positively.
participation gap

- As we went through the process of inviting contributors for the first phase, our lists were slanted in favour of women and racially balanced, but what we found is that white males responded more positively.
going viral

- New field for public relations and marketing
- Have you ever watched a video with 100,000 views on YouTube and thought to yourself: “How the hell did that video get so many views?” Chances are pretty good that this didn’t happen naturally, but rather that some company worked hard to make it happen – some company like mine (Dan Greenberg)