

Word-of-Mouth

A technologically mediated agent provocateur

Amalia Kallergi, Maarten Lamers

*Media Technology MSc program
Leiden Institute of Advanced Computer Science (LIACS)
Leiden University
The Netherlands*



Universiteit Leiden

Hello!

My name is Amalia Kallergi and I am a
Media Technologist...

...with a soft spot for (storytelling in)
museums, archives and collections

Background

This project is my graduation work for the
Media Technology
master program in Leiden University

Media Technology is a joint initiative of Leiden University's
Computer Science Institute (LIACS) and the Royal Academy
of Art, the Hague

Background

In Media Technology, we like to
make stuff

in order to answer scientific (but often
unexpected...) questions

Science by creating, creative research

The Human Processor:
Extending Human-based
Computation to the Logic Level

OutRandom:
Using randomness
for competition

**Animal Controlled Computer
Games:**
Playing Pac-Man Against Real Crickets

Lost in the Funhouse:
Postmodern Meta-Reflections in
Videogames

The Cyclotactor:
Towards a Tactile
Platform for Musical
Interaction

Motivation

This project is the outcome of my interest in
the museum
as the space where people interact with a
collection

Motivation

This project is the outcome of my interest in
disruption
as a positive and creative factor

our definition:
disruption as the confrontation with
unexpected, confusing and ambiguous
situations that contradict ones' expectations
of a case

Motivation

“By disrupting how we understand something, we are more likely to challenge its fundamental existence”

Jonah Brucker-Cohen, Disruption Revisited
Ars Electronica 2004

Agent provocateur - Culture jamming -
Superfictions

Research interest

To *explore* the potential value of disruption (of the visitor's expectations) in the museum environment

To *design and implement* a disruptive configuration and *examine* its feasibility and potential impact by means of a prototype and case study

Concept

Word-of-Mouth is an

unauthorized

comment capturing agent that confronts the spectator of an exhibit with the unmediated expressions of the previous viewers

Concept

Word-of-Mouth is a disruption of visitors' expectations on

1. Assigned of roles in meaning making
2. Anticipated behaviour of the ideal visitor
3. The museum as a protected environment (nostalgia factory)

Implementation

1. Recording mechanism

the social audio tour

2. Playback mechanism

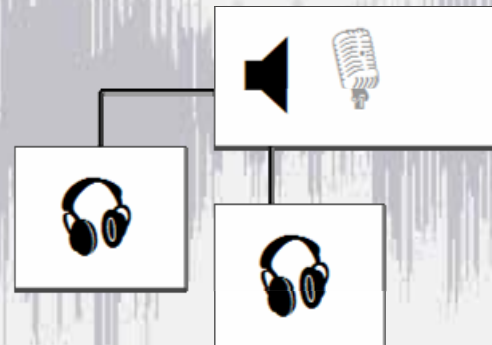
**the extended audio
tour**



Implementation

the social audio tour

Pairs of visitors will record themselves (without their awareness) via a mobile recording facility particularly promoted as an audio tour for pairs



Why a social audio tour?

How can I capture audible comments and expressions?

Not many people talk to themselves... → pairs !

Do I need to stimulate or facilitate conversations?

Audio tours often silence companions... → share an audio tour!

Where am I going to record?

Busy, noisy, no awareness/ cooperation... → “follow” the commentators

Implementation

the extended audio tour

Audio tours that bring together the official museum text and the visitors' comments

Each voice is assigned an audio tour channel of the audio tour pair stereo headphones.

Why an audio tour?

1. A traditional museum tool - disruption from within
2. A more intruding, surprising way to deliver the comments as opposed to open air or installed stand

Case study

A case study was possible thanks to the aid of Naturalis, National Museum of Natural History, Leiden (NL)

1. Social audio tour prototype – Recording session
2. Intermediate session
3. Extended audio tour – Playback session

Intermediate editing phase to assure audible, clear and semantically complete samples

The social audio tour unit

The social audio tour unit



Recording session

Our volunteers. The test was advertised as a research test for an audio tour prototype. None of the participants was aware of the actual function of the system.



Recording session - results

1. Did the social audio tour facilitate interaction, as was proposed?

The participants stated that :

The social audio tour invited them to talk with each other and comment or reflect on the information they listened to, either at the end of the sample or immediately while listening.

2. Did people talk with each other and what about?

More than 2h of recordings (out of 3 pairs)

Five categories

1. About the test procedure or the device itself
e.g. questions and comments on the interface, estimations on the purpose of the test
2. About the accomplishment of the tour as an activity in space
e.g. looking for labels or exhibits
3. About specific exhibits included on the audio tour
4. About exhibits that caught the participants attention
5. Issues of common interest
e.g. study related issues, mild gossip

Relevant examples

- Sharing experiences and examples
“my friend has a ...”
- Sharing knowledge they possess
“did you know that...?”
- Emotions, impressions, reactions
“Nice!”, “Ugly!”
- Elaborate discussions on scientific facts
- “Funny” comments
- Comments that propose questions
- Comments that point out a detail on the exhibit

Relevant examples

VOGELBEKDIER (Platypus)



VALEGIER (Griffon Vulture)



Intermediate session

Playing back the samples to the commentators, to get responses on the potential value and interestingness of the comments

Commentators were surprised by the extend of comments that occurred during their visit

All participants granted permission to use the material

Playback session

We manually produced an extended audio tour instance to test with visitors of Naturalis

Questionnaires, Interviews

While manual production may interfere with the notion of unmediated expressions, this case study emphasises unmediated as being unauthorized. Further possibilities for the production of the extended audio tour are still to be explored.

Playback session - results

1. The comments as a source of information and opinion (disrupting the meaning-maker)

Informative, original, easier to recall than the expert call. Confusion, annoyance: fear of losing information from the “calm” museum voice

2. The comments as real-life expressions (disrupting the ideal visitor)

Impressions and emotions recognized, encouragement

3. The experience (disrupting the nostalgia factory)

A significant amount of visitors did not realize the unauthorized nature of the recordings !

Discussion

Impressed by the quality of the comments: rich in both content and emotions.

Plenty of interest of the listeners, fondness of the comments, also as a counterbalance to the museum expert talk

Disruption as a method can create interesting encounters

Discussion

Certainly, Word-of-Mouth is not proposed to be implemented as such...

Still, we would be interested to improve both units of the system and we would be curious on what could happen in a long term run of the system...

Further questions:

Should we deal, and how to do so, with the expanding deposit of comments?

How can we ensure unmediated recordings again from visitors now aware of this possibility?

Will it stop being disrupting? How soon? Is this an intrinsic weakness of disruption as a method?

Acknowledgments

H.J. Ahrens, Naturalis, for the cooperation
Jos van den Broek, Leiden University, for the advice
Fons Verbeek, Leiden University, for the financial support

I am personally grateful to
Chanoeck den Adel, the voice of the audio tour
Will van Eck, for the equipment
Wim van Eck, for the translations

And all of the participants in this project

Questions?