

Best of Material World: Digital Media

Date : August 7, 2014

Since the Material World Blog began, the digital media landscape changed dramatically. In social media terms, we have moved from Friendster, MySpace and Orkut to Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and WhatsApp, with a range of other digital, mobile and social media becoming embedded within many people's everyday lives around the world. These transformations resulted in an increasing number of posts that explored the changing relationships with digital media and made visible the materiality of the digital worlds. In my review of the best of digital media on Material World Blog, five key themes emerged.

(1) The first theme clusters around questions of place and materiality with the growth in digital media. These include Jean-François Blanchette's wonderful [post](#) analysing bits and the software history as well as Toby Wilkenson's [examination](#) of the consequences of google earth for our relationship to place in a time of google earth. Graham H. Roberts' [discussion](#) of the transition from alcohol branding on bottles to branding on websites and social media in Russia and Lane DeNicola's [post](#) on online shopping and retail also inspire readers to consider the ways in which the online retail experience may be changing our relationships to objects, including objects of consumption.

(2) Research on relationships form a second wave of blog posts. We see this through Mihrini Sirisena's [discussion](#) of dating and missed calls (ring-cut), Elad Ben Elul's [post](#) examining the creation of photo archives among Ghanaian transnational families (including a follow up [post](#) on the design process used to connect transnational families), Sandra Rubia Silva's [analysis](#) of the relationships people have with their mobile phones and the discussion of these relationships on Orkut and last (but not least), Mirca Madianou and Daniel Miller's [introduction](#) to the concept of polymedia and the relationship between the desire to control the nature or content of communication via different platforms.

(3) We also had a fair number of publications focused upon young people and digital media which collectively worked to complicate a series of assumptions about the relationship between young people and technology. This comes out quite explicitly in Tylor Bickford's [analysis](#) of earbud sharing children using mp3 players, Christo Sims [discussion](#) of young people's media practices and identity work, as well as Matt Voight's [post](#) on the trend towards technology deprivation strategies in US summer camps.

(4) A fourth strand of research emerged around the nature and form of online communities. This includes Patricia Lange's [work](#) on video bloggers relationship to place, Larissa Hjorth's [discussion](#) of social media gamers and online communities based on research in Shanghai (with some fantastic photos to illustrate her post!), and Dan Perkel's [analysis](#) of theft among artists who post their creations on Deviant Art.

(5) The fifth and final strand of research explored protest and digital activism. For example, David Thompson's [post](#) examines the Occupy Rio movement and the relationship between the physical space of protests and the online arenas in which photos and videos were constantly uploaded and discussed, not only from Rio but also from Occupy protests around the world. Finally, Gabriella Coleman's shared her [work](#) on humour and hacking in anonymous and a link to an audio recording of Coleman's [public talk](#) at UCL earlier this year. Finally, Chief Editor Haidy Geismar's thoughtful [posts](#) on Open Access highlighted the ways in which forms of digital activism have also impacted our own scholarship through the rise of alternative models of journals, books and other forms of scholarship.