



THE MEDIATED SELF PROJECT

Final Report

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IATL Strategic Project- Final Report

Project Title:

The Mediated Self Project

Project Leads:

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Activities:

The project sought to address, through the production of new teaching and learning materials, the critical skills gap in technology-enhanced scholarship among students who are the **producers of themselves** as mediated individuals. We proposed that learning styles articulated by digitally literate students, who already negotiate their selfhood to a global audience, represent an emerging area of research and scholarship that was not being integrated into curricular activities. Drawing upon our own expertise in media, technology, cultural sociology and communications research, we promoted students from learners into researcher/producers of their own mediated selves in order to produce effective learning materials for the module **The Mediated Self Project**, that ran for the first time in Spring 2016. The project asked two critical and strategic questions: *What are the challenges and opportunities for digitally networked learners who see themselves as emerging global citizens and wish to promote that through media and online? How do we **assess** their ability to be successful managers of that mediated self within, for example, de-hierarchized work, team enterprise and always-on connectivity?* At a practical level the project engaged students as researchers/producers through a Stakeholder Competency Group (SCG).

This project was conceived as connecting two academic years of cohorts of postgraduates who had a vested interest in media and the networked individual. It embedded student responses and experiences from the beginning. In the first half-year (February 2015-Aug 2015) we formed a student SCG and conducted initial focus group-style research with them (see feedback from 'balloons and stones' exercise below), and undertook further research based upon the outcomes of these discussions. We convened a scoping meeting on March 10th, inviting colleagues from the Academic Technology Team, LDC and delivered one workshop on *Thinking about Content* on 2nd June. Postgraduate students contributed their ideas and experiences to this workshop alongside academics with expertise in our identified topics, guest participants and key experts from other UK universities (including Cardiff University, the University of the Arts, London and Brunel University). The module was approved by a Centre staff meeting and forwarded for approval by Arts and Graduate Studies committee in May 2015.

In the second half-year (Sept 2015-Feb 2016), we ran one workshop *Thinking about Delivery* (14th September), again with students interested in contributing to debates about how a practical application of a Mediated Self might be delivered and fairly assessed and through what mechanisms/platforms. Here we invited academic technologists and researchers from inside and outside the university (including from Manchester Metropolitan University, Coventry University and from Squared Online) to contribute to new ways of showcasing and assessing student learning. We concluded with a second meeting of the student SCG to consider the proposed teaching and learning activities for the module's inaugural run in 2016.

In Spring 2016 we ran the module with 19 enrolled MA students from across the CCPS programmes, through an innovative mix of seminars, tutorials, VLE support, a symposium, practical media workshops and a final showcase. Students were supported by industry speakers, an academic technologist and two academic tutors, as well as Moodle. The module was evaluated through Moodle, with 12 of the 19 students responding.

Outcomes:

1) A new module

The substantive outcome of the project is a 20 CAT point option module, initially offered to MA students in CCPS in 2015/6. This includes a Moodle page which archives documents and resources produced by staff and students through the development process. See extract from Module outline below

2) A new form of delivery.

Discussions with student stakeholders, technologists and other colleagues helped us to develop a mode of delivery that moved away from a conventional topic-seminar-assessment model and instead developed a framework based on Themes ('Media Life', 'Seeing Ourselves', 'Love and Control') and Skills ('Making Media', 'Managing Profiles' and 'Self-reflexivity') supported through Moodle curated resources and face-to-face sessions (including three sessions delivered by Rob Batterbee of Careers and Skills) and a dedicated weekend symposium featuring four external speakers involved in self-mediation for professional purposes (including an image consultant, professional journalist/blogger, an artist/photographer and social media trainer/facilitator). Other group face-to-face sessions depended on discussion of weekly student tasks (make a video, take and reflect on a series of 'selfies', read a novel (*The Circle* by Dave Eggers) and 'track' the self through a fitness/diet/position monitoring app).

The student evaluations suggest some students were more comfortable with this approach – a significant departure from the mode of delivery encountered in the autumn term- than others. Overall though, our assessment was that that this framework helped create a dynamic teaching and learning environment in which students were challenged to take responsibility for their learning, and rewarded

for doing so. The project and the first run of the module will allow us to refine this framework for future cohorts.

3) A new form of assessment

Discussions with student stakeholders and colleagues were central to the development of the mode of assessment, combining a 'digital media portfolio' (in most cases a curated blog incorporating video, image and text and requiring research and evaluation in the choice of platform) with a 'critical reflection' on the process. The former exercise was designed so that 'sandpit' work in progress, in which student engagement with weekly tasks and their developing attempts at refining their projects could be submitted alongside their final assessed work. This was designed to be undertaken through the University's Mahara platform, and was supported both through its on-line resources and through permission from the Mahara team for students to access dedicated training. A key aim of the project was to engage learners in ways which a) reflected existing skills which weren't readily present or assessable in the current curriculum b) connected with – but also allowed critical reflection on - the requirements of the contemporary cultural/media professional workplace. This combination of theoretical and practical forms of assessment which are in dialogue with one another is new for both students and teachers. The quality of the student work suggests this investment has been productive and the experience of developing and applying the assessment criteria will be built on in refining this work for future years. See Assessment criteria below.

4) Shared knowledge

We have shared the process of development with students and colleagues within and beyond the University. This has been through presentation at a brown bag staff and student research seminar within the Centre for Cultural Policy Studies (2nd December, 2015), blog posts shared on the Centre's research blog recording key events (see http://blogs.warwick.ac.uk/ccpsresearch/tag/mediated_self_project/) and planned presentation at a Window on Teaching session (forthcoming 19th October 2016). Permission has also been sought from students to curate examples of their work on behalf of future students (see http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/theatre_s/cp/applying/taught/globalmedia/whatformerstudentsay/

Implications:

What are the issues for those interested in research-based learning?

One important insight from the SCG group part of the research is that students can be effective co-researchers in developing the curriculum. While in the contemporary HE environment, and perhaps especially in the PGT sector, students are understandably instrumental in their approach to a 'return' on their 'investment', this does not mean they are lacking in curiosity or critical sensibilities. In this instance –

where one 'conceit' of the project was a distinction between how contemporary media were 'taught' and how they were used or lived with – student knowledge and experience was vital to shaping the agenda. Ways of teaching and learning that enrich student engagement and attention such as symposia, practical media workshops and a final showcase, supported by industry have practical implications in terms of resourcing, room space, and real-world contacts.

This module, its mode of delivery and assessment requires working across academic and academic support scales, with some need for Digital Humanities advice and support, as academics skill up in a wide range of social media platforms, media convergence tools, and social data innovation. The increased academic technologist support and the need for technical skills among students mean that future provision in this area may need access to practical media resources and training, editing studio space, social media skills i.e. such as creating an infographic, and the ability of the university to be nimble in the low-fi solutions that students often embrace. Despite the patient and thorough support provided by Jim Judges and the academic technology team for the use of the Mahara platform, most students chose, in both their sandpit work and final product to use external platforms (Wordpress, Medium etc.). This module was not espousing a professionalization of media skills. Quite the opposite, the everyday-ness and grassroots use of a wide variety of platforms suggests that we will need to be open to understanding that students will use unsupported platforms in their lives and work, and not everything tutors want to use in the classroom can be supported at Warwick.

Equally, though, in the field of media and, we suspect, elsewhere in the curriculum, what students do or do not know should not be taken for granted. There were different levels of skill with the technical aspects of video, visual and written forms of self-mediation evident in our students. A natural 'comfort' with technology cannot be assumed – and if, as we contend, such skills are important for the contemporary workplace, providing opportunities for them to be learned is important in a developing curriculum.

In future, staff and students from any discipline may wish to engage more with creative partners, from the beginning of a module or teaching project to its end point. To think about how cultural production could be folded into learning and pedagogy – for example comics, animation, infographics, digital storytelling, documentary, vlogs, social media activism etc. Knowledge of free tools, training and access to expertise on data visualisation, including info-graphic design would be vital and social media training more widely, particularly how micro-blogging could be part of the student's and teacher's tool kit. Moreover, in terms of general sanity for tutors keen to explore different ways of working with students, more spaces for exploring collaborative, peer-support within the university that is inviting to the creative and media sector: i.e. spaces they would recognise as ones where 'real' creativity happens. We could also include some wider thinking about a shared resource, a creative commons of Assessment briefs, lecture topics, media examples, that are collaborative and creative resources to be digitally shared and improved (such as <https://www.oercommons.org/> but for the HE sector). We struggled to 'create' material for this module

because the materiality of the resources was created by the students. Now we have the first phase of a bank of resources to be folded into the next cohort, who will add to that bank of resources. Our job is to curate that material and make it accessible for future cohorts.

Resources:

Stakeholder Competency Group 1 Feedback

Balloons	Stones
TOPICS	THEORY/PRACTICE
Privacy settings	Too general, not enough theory when interpreting the actions of others online
Privacy	Teaching using too many abstract, intangible concepts, not enough real-life application
Privacy	Using too much theory, real life examples are easier to understand complexity
Privacy and self protection	Need to overcome the abstract concept as some concepts are very philosophical
Private sphere	It's hard to create a whole theoretical system for this module cause the topic is relatively small
Awareness of who can see your online content	Not enough practice
Integration and disintegration of self media platforms – getting control	Too broad
Knowledge of who has access to your data	Oversimplifying the issue/subject
Addiction and how to unplug	May be difficult to form into a systematic syllabus, but could be a part of a module called Social/Digital Media
Marketing communications	Keeping up to date with trends and developments
Using social media for branding yourself and creating your image	STUDENT IDENTITY
Mediating yourself to be a better person or a real person?	Need to overcome language barrier for international students (ie difficult terminology)
Representing the mediated self	Even though there are lots of similarities we are sharing and with people around the world, we still have lots of differences
Intellectual Property issues (rights, consumer behaviour)	Students may develop self media addiction if immersed in it!
Data driven decision making	when it comes to the way we feel and use self-media
Are the size of the social groups smaller or larger online? What are the strengths of these connections? Is the sense of community less tangible now?	Students who are struggling a lot with identity issues
Is taste reflected accurately, is it highly mediated and variable? Is taste reflected differently on different media platforms?	The struggle between two roles as observer and participant in self media. Especially when you are deeply involved in one thing it is so easy to miss the objective perspective as an observer
SKILLS	Disregarding the relationship between your mediated (online) self and your actual (offline) self
Skill: Familiarity with digital technology	Variation from country to country, policies, to policies and therefore not easy to find a general view of mediating self

Skill: video editing, voice editing,	PRAGMATICS
Skill Efficient use of social media, ability to create professional content (video, digital stories, photoshop)	Overemphasis on the communication skills and marketing part but ignore the social impact (both good and bad) of social media
Select right information and present information in a proper way	Avoiding the use of digital technology during the module or lectures
Curation	Having to write an assignment
Networking	
CAREER PATH	
Career: self mediator/operator of various companies	
Career: social media marketing, or e-marketing	
A career path: communication sector, IT services, elaborating new ways of mediating the self	
Career: Marketing sales, create your new brand, like some bloggers and vloggers	
Commercial social media – the aims of users and producers are different	
Successful mediators: become leaders in different areas, they influence the public	
Career campaign manager, political and marketing	
Relationship between technology and the way people mediate themselves	
Virtual teamwork, time shifted and international	
Self media and public relations, self media and politics	
Using self media online presence for benefit (eg career)	

Assessment Brief & Criteria

Assessment 1 (60%) Portfolio Project

This portfolio assessment will comprise of two parts: (1) Finished Work: a curated selection of self-media artefacts (comprising video/s, photographs/images, text) to be embedded in an online structure. (2) Sandpit Work: use of Mahara (or its equivalent) that records sandpit development (i.e. your workings out, development of ideas, relevant in class tasks) over the course of the term.

The Finished Work might be presented as a blog, your own website or on some other platform/s as agreed with the module tutors and academic technologist.

The selection and curation of self-media artefacts and their digital structure should meet the following guidelines:

- Be logical and organised in such a way as to present your mediated self as a coherent and understandable person in the English language
- Be open and accessible to niche and/or broad audiences, communities and organisations
- Be imaginative, informative and playful while also being professional

The portfolio (Parts 1 and 2) provides the evidence of your work and of engagement with the teaching and learning outcomes of the course as they are outlined in the module outline. Students are free to develop the structure of their portfolio as they progress it. The Finished Work will be showcased in Week 10 and in response to feedback can be developed further before submission.

The nature of the Finished Work and the media through which it will be delivered (video, image, text) mean that a specific length or word-count is inappropriate. The final portfolios should represent the equivalent, in terms of time and effort, of a fully referenced and structured 2,500 word written assignment.

Mahara – will provide the space where all your Sandpit Work will be presented, i.e seminar/session tasks, research findings, scratch/test videos/photos/written works. You can have as much as you wish here.

The Finished work should include one example of the key skills of mediating the self as they are discussed in the course, i.e. video, photo and written forms of self-representation. This should include

1 video – 1-2mins

1-10 photos

500-1500 words of text, contextualising and commenting on the other evidence

In producing this material, students should *use only publicly accessible open-source software/apps* and details of these must be provided.

Assessment 1 Criteria

Students will be assessed on their ability to:

- i. Work individually and professionally on a challenging brief to produce an online portfolio project
- ii. Work creatively using available media and technologies to communicate the self effectively
- iii. Research and implement the communication strategies necessary to ensure engagement with the audience

Assessment 2 (40%) Critical Reflection (CR)

You are asked to write a 2000-word Critical Reflection (CR) upon your Portfolio Project drawing upon the theories, concepts and critical thinking you have learned and discussed in the module. More specifically, it will be informed by the written and reflection tasks you will have produced over the term that have been used to build your Portfolio (1 and 2). The CR should demonstrate that you have pursued your own interests, developed your own expertise and reflected on the ideal audience for your Finished Work (1).

To assist you in writing a more critically reflective rather than descriptive piece, we advise you to consider the following:

- You should identify and evaluate at least one issue in the production of your self-media artefacts and one issue in the final curation of your artefacts into a coherent Mediated Self Project.
- You should explore the challenges for producing and managing a mediated self with reference to theoretical perspectives.

- You should consider the audience or audiences from a theoretically informed and critical perspective, that you created your mediated self or selves for.

Assessment 2 Criteria

Students will be assessed on their ability to:

- i. Review their practical work through reference to contemporary practice
- ii. Critically reflect upon their project through the application of theory
- iii. Demonstrate critical and analytical skills at a higher level
- iv. Research and write a professionally referenced written reflection

Module Outline Extract

Introduction

This module takes our increasingly mediated and connected lives as its starting point, and uses that to test the boundaries between theory and practice in both media scholarship and the media industries themselves. In relation to media scholarship it directly engages with what has been identified as Media Studies 2.0 – the shift from a concern with *audiences* for texts created by media producers towards a concern with *users* of technologies producing the texts of their lives. The various forms of data and visual or textual products that emerge from the media practices of these users will be analysed. In relation to the media industries the module engages directly with everyday media practices as reflecting and requiring changes to the ‘ideal’ media professional and to the kinds of work that they can do. As media industries continue to transform into diffuse, networked, flexible generators of content for technologically literate audiences, the following questions are the focus of the module:

What needs do these everyday forms of media life fulfil, and how can we make sense of them?

What kinds of selves are made producible and how can they be nurtured and sustained with new concepts and skills?

What kind of skills do aspiring media professionals need in preparing themselves for this mediated and connected workplace?

Context of the Module

‘The self’, the module will argue, is central to both this new media scholarship and these new models of the media industries. The production, performance and representation of the self is the life-blood of social media, and an increasingly significant part of the inter-relations between online and offline forms of social

life. The promotion and management of a particular version of that self is increasingly significant to building a career within the media industries, either through the branding of oneself as a particular kind of person, or through the explicit production and promotion of self-generated media content, through blogging, social networking or video-sharing etc. Beginning from an audit of what you know about and do with the processes of self-mediation in your existing media life, this module will seek to augment your skills through the provision of a supported and critically reflective set of activities to create an online portfolio of the self. As well as developing these skills, the module offers a theoretical context through which to reflect and understand the processes by which such skills become essential to media work and everyday life. **What might be at stake in these developments for your on-going work on the self?**

This is a module designed for students interested and engaged in digital/online cultures, who want to think more deeply about their construction of their mediated self (online and offline) and with access to everyday technologies of mediation (through a tablet, smartphone or lap-top). Students taking this module should be willing and able to access and make use of these technologies in exploring, representing and reflecting on their personal and professional 'selves'. They should also be willing to learn new and old media skills for self-presentation and performance.

Aims and Learning Outcomes

The module aims to:

- Explore and put into practice the mediation of the self as a digitally literate citizen/consumer able to communicate to niche and broad audiences
- Critically reflect upon the production of a mediated self through reference to established and emerging theories about identity in digital/online cultures.
- Analyse and evaluate new methods of social and personal networking using media and communication strategies

By the end of this module students will be able to:

1. Understand the role of media and technology in the production of the self at personal and professional levels
2. Use new theoretical tools and methods for reflecting and evaluating upon mediated selfhood in a digital economy
3. Assess the nature of the self and selfhood as concepts as well as creatively practiced in mediated environments
4. Research and write a professionally referenced critical report upon a personal project
5. Work creatively and independently, responding to a brief, to develop a response to a personal and professional challenge

Module Framework

This module employs a variety of face-to-face sessions (academic/technical), on-line activities and one compulsory weekend 'day school' networking event with invited media professionals. This module will be supported by Course Extracts, EBooks, Moodle and Mahara (where appropriate).

Three theoretical themes

Three skills



Dialogue between these elements of the module framework provides the rationale for the activities.

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