Academic Identity Statement

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My focus

My current research focus is on media studies, particularly video games and online media. I am interested in looking at how these newer media technologies have impacted our cultural landscape, both locally and worldwide.

Video games and the Internet enable users to not only intake media, but to participate. This paradigm shift has changed the way we as a society communicate, and I am interested in looking at that change.

The research

Within the subject of video game studies, researchers' focuses include the audience, content and effects of playing video games.

Audience: Who is playing video games? Who plays which kind of video games? What are the motivations for playing a certain game or type of game? How do those people play video games (time spent, dedication)?

Content is the most widely-investigated focus in video games research, and scholars come from both media studies and cultural studies backgrounds.

Researchers look at the presence of certain demographics (race, gender, age, LGBT status, etc.) within a certain game or game genre. For example, in "Games and Culture," a bimonthly journal published by SAGE Publications that focuses on interactive media, articles have looked at racial biases in the online multiplayer game *World of Warcraft*, both of players and of avatars.

There has also been extensive research on the presence of controversial content devices like violence, gore and sexuality in video games, and the impact the presence of those devices has on users. Much of the research of the effects of video games on users is done in the field of psychology, but there are some communication and media studies scholars looking at that topic.

My interest in video games and in new media overlap with the topic of online communities. Early video games were single-player or local multiplayer. With the Internet came massive multiplayer games and the ability for players to connect with each other despite not being physically together.

I am interested in looking at the impact virtual relationships have on use of a medium - a video game, a television show, a sporting event, etc.

Do virtual relationships change the level of interest or understanding of a medium? Does participation of other fans or the medium itself impact the level of interest? For example, when looking Trekkies (fans of the "Star Trek" franchise), how does interaction with other fans impact interest level? How does interaction with stars impact interest level?

This focus on virtual relationships can connect to social media and news reporting; how has social media changed the way we report news? Consumers of news content now become creators. News is reported immediately. The source of news has changed from television, radio and newspaper to the Internet.

The impact of social media and the Internet are topics of considerable interest to communications researchers, with numerous studies being published in journals like "Communication Research" and "Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly."

The impact of social media and Internet technologies on activism and social change has also been of some interest for communications researchers with the popularity of the Occupy Wall Street movement in the United States and the Arab Spring revolutions in the Middle East. Research also focuses on Anonymous and other "hacktivist" groups as well as the idea of "slacktivism."

While most of my current research interest is on new media, I'm also interested in studying television, particularly reality television. Not surprisingly, research topics in television studies vary greatly. Like video game studies, research focuses on the audience, content and effect.

My position

At this point in my studies, I haven't narrowed down my position within the conversations of media studies and new media. Right now, I'm just looking to get involved.

Within video game studies, I'm interested in looking at news media perceptions of video game violence.

In online media, I'm interested in looking at celebrity "fandoms" and interaction of celebrities with their fans on social media and how it impacts fans' dedication.

I'm interested in the role social media and the Internet play in activism, like the Arab Spring and the Occupy movement. I'm also interested in passive activism, or "slacktivism."

I've had a lifelong interest in mass media. As a young child, it was television and movies. By the time I was a teenager, reality television dominated primetime and the Internet was taking over American society. I was able to connect online with other fans of reality shows, which deepened my interest. When I started college, social media like Facebook and Twitter changed the way we communicate.

My process

Before college and in my first three years of an undergraduate, my interest was in the natural sciences, particularly mathematics and statistics, and my mind still naturally tends towards behaviorism and causal relationships.

However, humans are significantly more complicated than molecules in a chemical reaction or variables in a mathematical equation, and simple analysis isn't always effective.

I have a natural preference for quantitative analysis, but the nature of media studies is often not best investigated via quantitative methods, so content analysis and meta-analysis would be better suited in some cases.

My contribution

While my academic focus was on the sciences, I had a lifelong passion for mass media, whether it was movies, television or the Internet.

When I was in my early teens, reality shows dominated primetime television and the Internet began to change the way we communicate. I was able to connect with other fans of my favorite reality shows, and that connection deepened my interest in the shows.

By the time I went to college, social media like Facebook and Twitter started to develop a new, virtual society. I got involved in video games and the video game community.

When I was in my third year of my undergraduate studies, I had a crisis of faith and dropped my mathematics major. That year, I decided to follow my passion and study communication.

I come to the communication research community as not only an academic, but a fan. That first-hand perspective in the media that I'm studying will enable me to have a deeper understanding of my research.