And Action! Live in Front of the Camera:
An Evaluation of the Social Live Streaming Service YouNow

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ABSTRACT

The arising knowledge society seems to produce its own digital services. In the last few years, with social live streaming services a new type of synchronous social media emerged. What functions do such services offer? What information need and information behavior do users of this services exhibit? Method: As a heuristic theoretical basis, the Information Service Evaluation (ISE) model was applied to analyze YouNow as a case study of this kind of new social media. The evaluation is based on an online-survey among YouNow's users as well as observations of the live-streams. Results. YouNow is mainly used by adolescents and young adults. For this group, it is important to interact with friends, be a part of the community and find ways of self-expression. This is exactly what YouNow offers its users. Most of them enjoy the functions of the service. The experience of "flow" was sometimes perceived. Possible law infringements (such as copyright and personality rights violations) were detected.

KEYWORDS

Acceptance, Environment, ISE Model, Law, Social Live Streaming Service, Social Media, Social Network Service, User, Information Behavior, YouNow

INTRODUCTION

In knowledge society, there "has been an extraordinary increase in the information in social circulation" (Webster, 2014, 21). Technology has "enabled the 'knowledification' of our society (providing information through digital means)" (Carroll, 2014, 12). In fact, "the world has been reinvented, as well as individuals and organization" (Lucas de Azevedo & Borges, 2015, 1). Especially social media play important roles in knowledge societies. Such information services allow users to act both as producers and as consumers ("prosumers"). Prosumers in social media are characterized by shared goals. They form virtual communities (Linde & Stock, 2011, 259 ff.). One kind of social media are social networking services (SNSs), which are platforms for self-presentation and communication with other members of the community (Boyd & Ellison, 2007). Most SNSs are asynchronous (as for instance Facebook) (Khoo, 2014, 81), which means that there is a time lag between sending a post and receiving an answer (a comment, "like," or share). With social live streaming services synchronous SNSs arrived.

Live streaming services emerged during the last few years and became important trough the popularity of YouTube and electronic sports events (e-sports). On social live streaming services, every user has the opportunity to stream one's own live show in real-time. Its viewers are able to interact with the streamers through a chat and can bestow them with virtual rewards. There are general types of live streaming services without any thematic relation just like Twitter's Periscope, Google

Hangouts, IBM's Ustream and YouNow as well as topic-specific live streaming services, e.g. Twitch (video games) and Picarto (art). YouNow is applicable via smartphone as well as via webcam and PC. Every user can broadcast every time at every location.

Our case study of social live streaming services is YouNow. When searching for literature on YouNow, there are only a few results of papers and other studies. A paper about connection times on YouNow (Stohr, Li, Wilk, Santini, & Effelsberg, 2015), an article on technical issues of such services (LeSure, 2015), one about ethical problems (Henning, 2015) and a study on possible law infringements of YouNow users while streaming (Honka, Frommelius, Mehlem, Tolles, & Fietkiewicz, 2015) could be found. According to Fietkiewicz, Lins, Baran and Stock (2016) members of Generation X (born between 1960 and 1980) prefer to use Twitter and Xing, members of Generation Y (born between 1980 and 1996) mostly apply 9gag, Xing, Facebook and YouNow and, finally, Generation Z (born after 1996) mainly use Instagram and YouNow, while all generations work with YouTube. Therefore, our study is the first comprehensive empirical evaluation of the general live streaming platform YouNow.

Along with the Information Service Evaluation (ISE) model (Schuman & Stock, 2014) this study critically evaluates the four facets service, user, acceptance and environment of YouNow. What functions does YouNow offer? Is the service easy applicable? How did the users come across YouNow? Why and how often are they using the service? What information behavior and information need do users exhibit? Would users recommend the service and what could be reasons for opting out? To answer these questions, the researchers have prepared an online survey with YouNow users as participants. For information environment a study of potential law infringements in YouNow streams by Honka et al. (2015) was added to the analysis.

YouNow is operated by YouNow Inc. in New York City since 2011. It offers the opportunity to stream wherever you want to without any time limit. Indeed, the empirical investigation shows that users stream for several days without a single break, even while they are eating, working, or sleeping. Some users apply their mobile devices (e.g., smartphones, tablets) to broadcast from different locations.

THE ONLINE LIVE STREAMING PLATFORM YOUNOW AS A CASE STUDY

"YouNow is the best way to discover talented broadcasters, watch live streams and video chat live with people from around the world" (YouNow, 2016). It was initially meant for YouTubers to get in contact with fans, to chat with them and to answer their questions in real-time. Many teenagers enjoyed the functions of the live streaming service, shared their experiences with friends and started to build their own fan base. According to Adi Sideman, founder and CEO of YouNow, this information service broadcasts about 150,000 unique livestreams daily (2015).

In order to enter YouNow one has to confirm to be 13 years old or older. To create an account, one has to be a Facebook, Twitter, Instagram or Google+ user; there is no option to register by email address. After entering the site a stream will start automatically. If a user wants to start an own stream, he or she can add a hashtag to the broadcast (other users can search for it) and share the stream on other social media platforms. As shown in the screenshot (Figure 1), the live stream is located in the center of the website together with the number of likes and shares, the current streaming time and the number of viewers.

The profile picture, user name, level, and profile description of the streamer are placed above the stream. On the left-hand side of the website you find lists of trending hashtags and trending current streamers. On the right-hand side, there is a chat to interact with the live broadcaster; only users that logged in are allowed to send chat messages. It is also possible to get a list of all the viewers and to be a video guest in a live stream.

The YouNow community bestows gifts through the chat, like stickers, emojis, icons or likes, not only to show their acceptance and interest to the broadcaster, but also to stand out from the crowd. In order to be able to buy a gift, it is necessary to earn "coins," one of the virtual currencies of YouNow. One can collect coins through various site-activities like going online, being live, watching streams

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