Paper 13 iLeisure and Youth

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I Leisure and quality of life

Introduction

Leisure is a vital part of life with research indicating that satisfaction with leisure is an important determinant of quality of life (Lloyd and Auld, 2001). It is one of the basic human rights guaranteed by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Article 24). Consumer expenditure for leisure may be as high as 25% of overall consumer expenditure in developed economies (Veal and Lynch, 2001). Leisure is strongly associated with youth and youth sub-culture (Passmore and French, 2001). Some have argued that, particularly in Western societies, leisure occupies 40% of young people's waking time (Robertson, Kent, Kaivola and Lee, 2008). Advances in the Internet, innovative technologies and interactive services (Sullivan Mort and Drennan, 2007), have allowed access to a continual supply of information, changed the nature of businesses and enabled enhanced leisure activities: in ways inconceivable even in the

recent past. Current research (Dusseldorp Skills Forum, 2007; Vromen, 2007; OECD, 2006) indicates that interactive services are most likely to be utilised by young people, and with young people having less need for business and government service applications, their increasing usage is directed towards leisure. While there is a large body of literature examining the role of communication technologies in the shaping of contemporary society, relatively little attention has been given to the influence of technology on the organization and experience of leisure (Bryce, 2000). In particular, there is little research addressing the recent advanced internet facilitated interactive leisure services and implications for quality of life for young people. The purpose of this paper is to offer a brief overview of the extant literature and offer set of propositions of the relationship of consumption of online leisure and quality of life for young people.

Australian consumers have had access to affordable dial up services (Clarke, 2004) since the 1990s. The recent influx of accessible broadband services has changed the dynamics of online consumption patterns with large-scale deployments and the reduction of prices of broadband services contributing to the shift away from dial up to broadband technologies (ABS, 2008; The Broadband Advisory Group, 2003; ACCC, 2006). This increased access to Broadband has led to accessibility of the Internet beyond the educational and work environment. Recent statistics found 74% of households within Australia have readily accessible technology available within the home (ABS, 2008). With this number of households using the Internet and Broadband

technology, understanding the characteristics of the typical youth consumers using Broadband capabilities and applications accessed from home, and the impact of applications with faster download capabilities, is paramount for the development of knowledge regarding youth online leisure.

Broadband services have offered an estimated 9.9 million Australians [(private non-business users) (ABS, 2008)] streamlined access to information, interactive applications, video, pictures and music downloads. The largest use of the Internet is found in households with children under the age of fifteen, with high levels of income, located in metropolitan areas (ABS, 2010). A significant portion of youth have been found to be users of high speed Internet technologies with more than 75% of children aged between 5-14 years accessing the Internet from home more than once a day (ABS, 2010). The majority of industry and academic reports have highlighted the use of interactive Internet services as particularly prevalent in youth. This appear to be due to their enhanced technological confidence, interactive ability and a willingness to try new methods of communicating and obtaining information, yet little to no empirical research has focussed specifically in this area or on this cohort (Gross, 2004; Valkenburg and Peter, 2007; Ofcom, 2008a; Lenhart, Madden, Macgill and Smith, 2007). Youth are not only the primary users of interactive media as stated previously but are considered to be increasingly technologically confident, inquisitive, socially attentive and possess a high degree of influence over their parents (Berson and Berson, 2005; Bennett,

2006). Young people participate in online activities, but also have other commitments (Dusseldorp Skills Forum, 2007; ABS, 2006). Recent statistics suggest, 86% of 15-19 year old Australians are undertaking fulltime work or study commitments (Dusseldorp Skills Forum, 2007), 63% participated in organised sports and 97% spent 20 hours or more watching television and videos (Screen Australia, 2007).

The evolution of interactive services

Traditional methods of communication including landline calls and face-to-face interactions are losing appeal and popularity to technologies that allow greater interactivity (Bargh and McKenna, 2004; Hinduja and Patchin, 2008). Synchronous methods of communication enabled in real time have become the interaction preference (Lenhart et al., 2007; Valkenburg and Peter, 2007; Castells, 2007). Richards (2005) recently suggested 'technology has the ability to respond to a user's inputs or talk back to the user' (Richards, 2005, p532). Younger consumers are drawn to the use of interactive services for a range of leisure options; real time social interactions, entertainment and gathering information to share. They are also drawn to use interactive services to establish channels to communicate about teenage identity issues and the transition to adulthood (Bargh and McKenna, 2004; Valkenburg and Peter, 2007; Suler, 2005). Teenage angst is a popular term used to describe negative emotional experiences relating to experimenting with identity, establishing belonging, seeking to become independent from parents,

in particular, frustration and anger (Suler, 2005; Ingrey and Colvin, 2005; Pera and Hancock, 2006). '[I]interactive technologies have enabled young consumers to produce fast, high quality reproductions of their lives and what is important to them (Arthur et al, 2006).

Conceptual Development of the Model

Surfing websites

Surfing the web is one of the first identified online activities with a general leisure orientation. Surfing has the connotation of undirected, repetitive but enjoyable behaviour (Borzekowski and Rickert, 2001) It is suggested to constitute a type of passive leisure activity (Livingstone, 2003). High speed access enhances the experience of surfing the net making the movement between websites a seemless and thus more enjoyable experience, not disrupting engagement or flow (Bryce and Rutter, 2001; Csikszentmihalyi, 1997).
Proposition 1 Surfing websites enhances young people's online leisure and overall quality of life.

Instant messaging and chatrooms

The use of chat applications to instant message (IM) via a technological device is one of the most popular methods for adolescent leisure to conduct social communication (on the Internet) (Green, Hilken, Friedman, Grossman, Gasiewski, Adler and Sabini, 2005; Greenfield and Subrahmanyam, 2003; Thulin and Vilhelmson, 2007; Ling and Baron, 2007). The Pew Internet and American Life Project (2001) indicate

almost 74% of adolescents utilise chat functions such as instant messages and approximately 68% use IM at least three days per week (Lenhart et al, 2007). High speed Internet access allows the use of the interactive features associated with instant messaging media such as group chat functions, conferencing services (voice and video), conversation logs, games and file transfers (Garrett and Danziger, 2008). Proposition 2 Instant messaging and chatrooms enhance young people's online leisure and overall quality of life.

Social networking sites

The use of social networking sites (SNSs) has expanded phenomenally from the inception of social networking sites such as My Space, Facebook, Bebo and Pixco. Reid and Grey (2007) note 92 popular social networking sites worldwide with user counts ranging from over one billion to under 100 (Reid and Grey, 2007). These social networking sites are widely used for online communication (Boyd, 2007; Gross and Acquisiti, 2005; Ofcom, 2008b; Raacke, and Bonds-Raacke, 2008; Ellison, Steinfield and Lampe, 2006; Hargittai, 2007) with over 50% of American teens between the ages of 12-17 years creating personalised My Space or Facebook profiles (Lenhart et al, 2007). Social networking sites seek to provide users with the ability to create profiles and share or allow their personal interests and relationships to be publicly expressed with other users of the networking medium, inviting comment and discussions (Barnes, 2008; Boyd, 2007; Raacke, and Bonds-Raacke, 2008). Classed as a voyeuristic medium,

individuals can provide what is personally relevant to them on an SNS that can be viewed on a worldwide scale, only restricted in the first instance, to those connected to the Internet (Boyd, 2007; Kim and Yun, 2007; Mayer and Puller, 2007). Proposition 3 Social networking sites enhance young people's online leisure and overall quality of life.

User generated video and music applications

User generated video and music download sites, such as YouTube, draw over 6 million viewers per day (Goo, 2006). Since its inception in 2005, YouTube has received massive acceptance amongst young consumers as a form of social interaction and networking (Cheng, Dale, Liu, 2007). Goo (2006) describes YouTube as a medium to allow a person 'their one chance of fame' (Goo, 2006). Facilitating YouTube's success is access to readily available high-speed Broadband, allowing consumers to upload and download media rich content with minimal grief (Shields, 2008). The preceding discussion leads to the following proposition: Proposition 4 User generated video and music applications enhance young people's online leisure and overall quality of life.

Massively multi player online role playing games (MMORPG)

Massively Multiplayer Online Role Playing Games (MMORPG) or Multi User Dimensions (MUD) are other forms of interactive services that allow users to assume new identities and function in a global online environment. MMORPG and MUD are 'played online

over the Internet in a [constant] world with hundreds, or even thousands of people simultaneously connected' (Achterbosch, Pierce and Simmons 2008, p2). MMORPGs offer anonymity and the creation of a world built on fantasy (Whang and Chang, 2004; Duecheneaut et al., 2006; Allison, Wahlde, Shockley and Gabbard, 2006; Childress and Braswell, 2006; Kolo and Baur, 2004). Young people are drawn to MMORPGs due to the experience offered by playing a game with known or unknown friends (Allison, et al., 2006). Proposition 5 Massively multiplayer online role playing games enhance young people's online leisure and overall quality of life.

File sharing peer-to-peer

Peer-to-Peer (P2P) networks are typically used for connecting users via largely unplanned connections. These networks have been useful for many purposes including sharing content files in real-time transfer that contain audio, video, data to anything in digital form. The digital content that is transferred is stored on and served by the personal computers of the users. Most people who engage in file sharing on the Internet both provide files for upload and receive files as downloads. Peer to peer file sharing is distinct from file trading, that does not require users to upload (Heidmiller, 2002). Most often peer-to-peer technology is considered to refer only to file-sharing services that let you get free music, movies, and pornography over the Internet (Xiaohe, 2006). Proposition 6 File sharing peer to peer technology enhance young people's online leisure and overall quality of life.

Technological confidence

Technological confidence is a feeling of self-efficacy in using the interactive applications currently available through high-speed Internet access (Bure, 2006; Bandura, Barrabaranelli, Vittorio, and Pastorelli, 2003; Tung and Chang, 2007). Recent research describes youth as 'active agents who can manipulate, adapt, create and disseminate ideas and products through communication technologies' (Berson and Berson, 2005, p29). As educational institutions incorporate skill building in compulsory curriculum for students, a degree of interactive ability (media literacy) and resulting feelings of (technological) confidence results (Dwyer, 2007; Ofcom, 2008a). Up to 90% of students state "confidence in the use of the Internet and interactive technologies" (Thomson and De Bortoli, 2007; OECD, 2006). Research suggests that with maturity, young people's media literacy (interactive ability) expands as they adapt to the ongoing technological advancements and innovations . This leads to the following proposition:
Proposition 7 Technological confidence moderates the relationship between young people's online leisure and overall quality of life.

Youth online leisure

Leisure is freedom from occupation or time spent doing what you want. "Young people seek 'quiet' time away where it is possible to reflect and interact with friends away from adult supervision," (Robertson, Kent, Kaivola and Lee, 2008). Increasingly they find opportunities for

leisure using online interactive services. The influx of high-speed broadband access resulting in unlimited accessibility of synchronous interactive services (Lenhart et al., 2007; Boyd and Ellison, 2007) allows young people to immerse themselves in an enriched leisure environment. This leads to the following proposition:Proposition 8 Youth online leisure enhances youth overall quality of life.

Quality of life

Quality of life is a measure of an individual's perceived level of well-being and happiness (Lloyd and Auld, 2001). Subjective consumer well-being is a substantive issue requiring attention by those investigating the impact of consumer consumption patterns (Cornwell and Drennan, 2004;Diener, Suh, Lucas and Smith, 1999, p. 277). New technologies, new audiences and new uses challenge researchers in the area of technology (Haddon, 2006; Hekkert, Suurs, Negro, Kuhlmann and Smits, 2007) to expand beyond the study of individual cognitive processes and to consider the longer-term consequences for individual and social behaviours of technology consumption (Hekkert et al., 2007) and its relationship to quality of life. The preceding discussion leads to the proposed model of youth online leisure and quality of life . The conceptualisation of youth online leisure in an experiential consumption framework (Bigne, Mattila and Andreau, 2008; Firat and Dholakia, 1998; Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982) modelled within the overall relationship between leisure and quality of life (Lloyd and Auld, 2001). The propositions argue the early

possible causal relationships, which invite empirical estimation.

Conclusion

Young people spend an increasing amount of their leisure in an online environment, yet this area is at an early stage of research development and lacks a rigorous conceptual framework. The proposed model provides a feasible path of investigation for researchers aiming to build a consistent body of knowledge about youth online leisure by providing a conceptualization grounded in experiential consumption and linking leisure and quality of life issues.

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