

SMALL IS BEAUTIFUL – LURKERS ENGAGING THROUGH MICRO CONTRIBUTIONS

Mette Wichmand & Sisse Siggard Jensen

Department of Communication, Business and Information Technologies, Roskilde University,
Denmark

ABSTRACT

In this paper we argue that we need to refine our understanding of lurkers and their engagement with social media if we want to design for and make use of all the human resources available in these online spaces.

We will argue that the deterministic idea of how the affordances of social media generates a 'Participatory Culture' where we are all engaged as *creators* together with the way that we often frame the majority of social media users as un-engaged free riding '*lurkers*' prevents us from taking full advantage of the opportunities for participation and engagement these new media spaces offers. By drawing on literature about lurking as a form of engagement and empirical material from an emerging case study of the social network game Urgent Evoke we want to show how, what we call micro-deeds performed by 'lurkers' in the game are playing a vital role for the sustainability of the community of gamers and for the overall success of the game.

KEY WORDS

Lurkers, engagement, social media, micro contributions

INTRODUCTION

In 1992 Henry Jenkins coined the term 'Participatory Culture'. The term conveyed the idea that the Internet had created a new culture defined by open access and co-creation, a culture transforming an passive audience used to consuming into an active crowd of people sharing knowledge, ideas and files in a collective process of producing common good(s). Over the years, the idea of a participatory culture has grown stronger and in the popular as well as academic discourse framing the concept, social media like Facebook, Wikipedia and YouTube has often been given the leading role as powerful change agents with a built-in capacity to engage the crowd. This discourse has been feed by the tales of how e.g. old dictatorial regimes tumbles at the will of a youth powered by their Facebook network¹ or how unresolved scientific riddles are being cracked in a wink of an eye by a community of on-line gamers playing with the

¹ <http://www.washington.edu/news/2011/09/12/new-study-quantifies-use-of-social-media-in-arab-spring/>

facts². And as social media have made our communitarian optimism grow, *engagement* has become the key concept. Armed with permanent internet access via their smart phones and lap-tops the crowd is seen as an ever ready army of engaged clients, customers, citizens or total strangers willing to contribute to the shared pool of collective intelligence with the ultimate goal of creating better services and products - or even a better world.

But even though most of us have been enchanted and mesmerist by the development of social media a critical voice of some journalists, researchers and social media professionals (Smith and Kollock, 1996; McGonigal, 2008; Fuchs, 2011) has also pointed to the fact that even if many social platforms succeed in getting the attention of the crowds, they do not necessarily catch their engagement. A statement finding it's underpinning in research showing that only about 10% of all visitors to online sites and platforms create or curate (collect content from the creators and re-blog about the best of the original creations) content, the rest are 'lurkers' (Nonnecke and Preece, 2000). A term used to describe people on the Internet who spends most of their time looking or liking and hearting what other people have thought, said and created and only occasionally contributes original content them selves.

With this discrepancy between on one side the discourse framing social media with it's strong focus on voice and creation and on the other side the lurkers there seems to be only two solutions – generate more creators or find ways to make use of what ever little the massive numbers of lurkers are giving.

In this paper we will argue for the latter solution. In our argument we will draw empirical material from a developing in-depth case study of the online game Urgent Evoke. Urgent Evoke – and games like it - belong under the umbrella concept of 'social media'. Their aim is to establish social networks among the players and facilitate a shared creative dialog that should support the player's creation of solutions to different pressing social challenges derived from the physical world. Urgent Evoke is developed by the World Bank together with game developer Jane McGonigal. The aim of Urgent Evoke is to empower players to:

“Investigate the most pressing challenges around the world, collaborate to generate innovative and creative solutions, and act to turn ideas into realty within their own communities and beyond” (Project Evaluation Evoke, 2010, p.9).

But just as the quote echoes the social media rhetoric, the game also suffers from the 1-9-90-rule as social media in general do – 1 percent creators, 9 percent curators and 90 percent lurkers³. Web-traffic data shows that UE received 286,219 visits by 171,958 different individuals during the ten weeks the game was running But from the 171,958 individual visitors of Urgent Evoke only 19.386 (11.2%) registered as players and from the group of registered players only 6.618 (3.8 %) really started playing (completed at least one mission or quest). From the 6.618 players 142 (0.73 % of the registered players)

² <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Foldit>

³ [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1%25_rule_\(Internet_culture\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1%25_rule_(Internet_culture))

completed all ten missions and quests and 73 people (0.37 % of the registered players) submitted an Evokation⁴. So out of the 171,958 individuals willing to give Urgent Evoke some attention just 73 people or 0.37 % of the registered players or 0.042% of the total number of visitors were willing to engage with the game in the way that the World Bank was aiming for.

But with an evaluation presenting massive numbers of lurkers and only a small percentage of players displaying the sought after form of engagement how come that the World Bank still see their game as a success and are planning to play a second round in the beginning of 2013?

In this paper we discuss the concept of lurkers with regard to theoretical concepts as well as empirical data. In this, we draw on theories about lurking (Crawford, 2009; Kollock and M. Smith, 1996; Nonnecke and Preece, 2000 and 2004; Rafaeli, Ravid and Soroka, 2004; Yeow, Johnson and Faraj, 2006), to examine similarities and differences. The aim of this examination is to analyse how the concept of lurkers and their engagement in social media has developed over time. To answer the above question we also refer to empirical data from emerging in-dept case study of the game Urgent Evoked financed by the World Bank. We argue that we need a more refined understanding of lurkers and their engagement in relation to social media. An understanding that is less deterministic in its appreciation of the affordance of social media and more focused on the variety of opportunities for participation and engagement these new social spaces offer and should offer. Because our argument builds on and emerging case study we would like to end the paper by raising some research questions that should guide further research on the subject of social media, lurking and engagement.

FROM LURKERS TO LISTENERS

An overwhelming amount of literature has been written about engagement. Researchers from political science, education, the fine arts and many other fields have taken an interest in engagement. In this cacophony of researchers eager to describe and define engagement it is impossible to pick out one clear definition. We have therefore for this review chosen to narrow down the number voices and focus on the literature dealing with engagement, social media and lurkers. In the following, we have picked out distinct articles that exemplify similarities, difference and developments in the way of thinking about engagement and lurkers.

Even though most social media users can pride themselves with the title 'lurkers', their high numbers aren't matched by a great scientific interest in the phenomenon. But over the years a raising number of

⁴ An evocation is detailed and innovative plan identifying a problem in the physical world outside the game that the player would like to tackle and describing its solution. The evocations turned in are evaluated by a team formed by the World Bank and the plans found most promising are rewarded with seed-money, mentorships by respected social innovators, entrepreneurs and international development professionals and an opportunity for the players to put-up their project for crowd funding on the Global Giving Challenge (www.globalgiving.org/evoke). A subset of winners would also be invited to an EVOKE summit held in Washington DC

intriguing articles have been written, articles that deliver different concepts and manage to nuance the idea and influence of lurking.

In the beginning the take on lurkers was negative. In their pioneering work from 1996, Kollock and Smith describe lurkers as *free-riders*, i.e., non-contributing, resource-taking members of computer communities (Kollock and Smith, 1996). In the perception of Kollock and Smith lurkers embodied the anti-concept of engagement and they presented a problem that endangered the existence of online communities. To Kollock and Smith an important aim for designers of on-line communities where to find ways to force lurkers to 'de-lurk' and become creators.

In the literature following Kollock and Smith, several researchers have challenged their negative perception of lurkers and attempted to nuance the debate by developing a better understanding of lurkers and a more positive framing.

Nonnecke and Preece are the two researchers that have spent most time researching and writing about lurkers. The core aim of their research has been to understand why lurkers lurk? From their research Nonnecke and Preece have extracted a top five of reasons for lurking. These reasons are:

“not needing to post; needing to find out more about the group before participating; thinking that they were being helpful by not posting; not being able to make the software work (i.e., poor usability); and not liking the group dynamics or the community was a poor fit for them”. (Nonnecke, Preece and Andrews, 2004).

As the top five shows there are several reasons for lurkers to lurk and the one-sided negative understanding that Kollock and Smith are representing can't be maintained. '*Not needing to post*' is related to the way the online communities are design. In some communities it is possible to follow all traffic with out contributing, while other communities has been designed in such a way that it is only possible to see the full extend of categories/treads that you have contributed to your self. This is the one reason in the top five that comes closest to Kollock and Smith's perception of lurkers and the idea that they should be forced by design to contribute in specific ways. '*Needing to find out more about the group before participating*' tell us that some lurkers are insecure and need to test the water for a while to feel comfortable with sharing. '*Thinking that they were being helpful by not posting*', is an interesting answer because it indicates a concern for the well being of the community as a total. Instead of being focused on airing their own voice just because it is possible and thereby running the risk of repeating what others have already said and create a disturbing noise instead of substance this group of lurkers rather remain silent. This point towards the idea that lurkers are often more preoccupied with the community than with their own ego and voice. '*Not being able to make the software work (i.e., poor usability)*', is a sad but very straightforward reason for being a lurker, that tells us that lurking is not always an deliberate choice but sometimes a result of bad usability or lurker's low technical skills. '*Not liking the group dynamics or the community was a poor fit for them*', is the consequence of the fact that the tone-of-voice in some communities can be harsh. Because of the anonymity that the Internet can offer some user forget their

manners and seize that change to verbally abuse other user or ignite a aggressive quarrel, a behaviour that is also called trolling. The conclusion that Nonnecke and Preece are drawing from their work is that lurkers have many motivations for lurking, and free-riding definitely not the only one. Most lurkers do not enter the online communities with the idea that they want to lurk. Lurking is therefore often not an intended behaviour but a result of varying factors (Preece, Nonnecke and Andrews, 2004). The research of Preece and Nonnecke's softens the image of lurkers, but don't take away the interest in finding out how to 'de-lurk' the lurkers and make real contributors out of them.

Rafaeli, Ravid and Soroka are very open about their aim in their article, "De-lurking in virtual communities: A social communication network approach to measuring the effects of social and cultural capital" from 2004. Here, the lurker is no longer seen as a threat, but creation is still the ideal form of participation and the writers are looking for ways to make lurkers transform into creators.

At first glance, it seems like Yeow, Johnson and Farai are aiming a something very different than Rafaeli, Ravid and Soroka with their article from 2006 - 'Lurking: Legitimate or illegitimate peripheral participation?' Instead of talking about how to de-lurk lurkers Yeow, Johnson and Farai are contrasting the phenomenon of lurking with Lave and Wengers theory of communities of practices and legitimate peripheral participation in an attempt to legitimize lurkers. Their argument is that online communities could be regarded as learning communities comparable to Lave and Wenger communities of practice: communities where users/participants share their knowledge, thoughts and ideas and thereby learn from and with each other. In Lave and Wengers theory participants can hold different positions within the community. In the middle of the community stand the experts and virtuous participants. They are performing their 'trade' and are at the same time visible to all participants, in that way they can show and involve other less skilled participants in their work/performance to a greater or lesser extent. In Lave and Wengers theory it is legitimate for a new/less skilled participant who needs to learn the ways of the community to take a peripheral positions and just watch the more skilled and knowledgeable practioners until they are ready to take part in the activities. By drawing on Lave and Wenger, Yeow, Johnson and Farai makes is possible to question why we are willing to accept and embrace a theory about legitimate peripheral participation and at the same time not accept lurking as precisely that. By looking at lurkers through the Lave and Wenger stained glasses they suddenly change character from no-good free-riding parasites to engaged learners getting ready to get their hands dirty and start practicing the trade of the community. Yeow, Johnson and Farai aim is to frame lurkers in a new and positive way, making them legitimate. We like their attempt but at the same time we will argue that their choice of theory hinders them from really offering lurkers a legitimate position. Lave and Wengers theory praises the movement of participants from a peripheral to a central position. In Lave and Wengers theory the legitimate peripheral practioners are not supposed to stay peripheral, they are supposed to start their journey towards the centre of the community and transform themselves from spectators to active performers cable and willing to show the next generation of peripheral participants the way to the centre of the community. By adopting the theory of Lave and Wenger, Yeow, Johnson and Farai indirectly say that lurking is not a 'wanted' position in it selves. By comparing lurking with legitimate peripheral participation Yeow, Johnson

and Farai is telling us that we should expect lurkers to - at some point - step out of their role as voyeurs and unfold their wings as productive community members. So even though it is way more positive to be called a legitimate peripheral participant than a lurker, Yeow, Johnson and Farai hasn't moved so far away from the ideas that Kollock and Smith introduced us to. We might understand the phenomenon a little better and we are maybe able to nuance our perspective more, but at the bottom-line even by Yeow, Johnson and Farai lurking is still not an appreciated position in it self and the aim is still to turn lurkers into creators.

Than in 2009 Kate Crawford gives us a new way of looking at and talking about lurkers. By introducing us to the term listening in the context of social media, lurkers gets the possibility to gain a position for them selves that is respectful and recognized on its own terms. Crawford argues that listening is a form of engagement in the sense that listeners are devoting the attention and time to hear what others have to say as well as reflect on what is said. In Crawford's perspective listening is not a passive way of being present. By listening you have to actively engage with what you hear by reflecting on it, letting it affect you ideas, emotions and maybe even actions. Crawford talks against the dominant focus on voice in relation to public engagement with social media. According to Kate Crawford listening is a central activity to a democracy, because if no one listens talking makes no sense. The central point in having a democratic public sphere is not that every body is talking, but that all arguments are aired, not repeated endlessly. In Crawford's analysis, in contrast to the previous texts, it is okay to be and to stay a listener/lurker and Crawford sees it as very beneficial for the individual listener/lurker to listen in as he or she is becoming more informed and has the possibility to learn. What happens in Crawford's article is that the focus moves away from the collective, social and shared aspects of social media and the engagement with them becomes a private cause more than a question of contributing to a common good.

As the review shows, we have conceptually move from lurkers to listeners but lurkers have until now not gained a position for them selves within the social communities they inhabit. Either they are supposed to capitulate and become creators or they stay outside the community in the role as listeners. In the following we will contrast the concepts of lurkers that we have seen so fare and show that lurkers might have much more to offer and play a fare more vital role for the communitarian results that we see and praise in relation to social media. But first of all we will introduce our case Urgent Evoke.

URGENT EVOKE

In the following we will describe the game Urgent Evoke and its background. The description is in no way exhaustive, but should help the reader understand how the game works and what is it for a social space it is offering.

Urgent Evoke (UE) is developed by the World Bank Institute together with game developer Jane McGonigal. The game is designed to concentrate players' engagement, simultaneously on one platform,

on global challenges and social innovation. UE was played the first time during ten weeks running from March 3 until May 12, 2010 and there are plans for a second round in the first quarter of 2013. The game is open for players of any age around the world (although it was recommended for players above the age of 13 and especially young people in South Africa and to some extent other sub-Saharan countries were targeted) and it is free to play, but a staple Internet connection via a computer or mobile phone is needed (which in Africa can be a problem sometimes).

UE is a social network game. That means that the game is designed to bring players together and make them work collectively on the challenges presented by the game.

With Urgent Evoke the World Bank wanted to involve ordinary citizens in the fight against the wicked problems that the World Bank are dealing with (poverty, hunger, human trafficking etc.) By offering people a space to meet and work together, resources (links and mentors) and a framework for personal development, they wanted to help players become social innovators. In other words the aim of UE is not just to deliver an entertaining experience or teach players about global challenges, but to transform the initial game motivation of the players into a post-game social engagement, an engagement that should materialize in social innovations⁵ and actions to implement those innovations in the physical world.

The Game itself is build-up around a narrative told in the form of a graphic novel. Every week a new chapter is released. The story of Urgent Evoke is a story of a secret network of international agents with innovation superpowers capable of solving some of the most complex problems facing the international community. The agents can be reached by sending out an Evoke (stays hazy how you do that). The Evoke is answered by Alchemy, the leader of the network. He puts together a team of agents, who immediately gets in action. The team travels to all corners of the world to face problems like famine, epidemics and natural catastrophes. Together they are a very resourceful and able group with innovative ideas and the power to implement those ideas. The team that we follow consists of three members – Eureka, Ember and Quinn. Each member of the group has a defining background story and characteristics, skills and knowledge that set them apart but makes them a very resourceful team. The leader, Alchemy, is from the Republic of Congo. He has been a child soldier himself and continued his life on the rough pad by stealing the natural resources of his home village. When he was shot he decided that should he survive his injuries he would take the money he had made on exploiting his community and create the Evoke network.

As a player of Urgent Evoke you are a member of the secret Evoke network. During the ten weeks that the game lasts players faces 10 missions and 10 quests. The 10 *quests* are meant to help players

⁵ In the evaluation the World Bank describe social innovation as the development of new forms of action, organization, transaction or other social interaction that meet existing and emerging social needs. Even though it is explicitly stated in the report that they draw on Peter Drucker's definition of social innovation they do not anticipate that players will (necessarily) develop activities that are "globally new." Social innovations in the context of Urgent Evoke are therefore also ideas that are new to the players and their communities as innovations.

discover their own abilities and strengths as social innovators. The quests nudge players to think about their own capacities, potentials and dreams and to express how they would like to develop themselves. Players are e.g. asked to think about their motivation for playing Urgent Evoke or in another quest to describe the skills and capacities of a person they admire.

The 10 *missions* of the game are all about finding solutions to the bigger questions, e.g. how to solve a hunger crisis in Japan. Every week a new mission is revealed together with a new chapter in the graphic novel. The topics addressed in the missions included: social innovation, food security, power, water crisis, money, empowering women, urban resilience, indigenous knowledge, and crisis networking. Each mission requires completion of activities in three categories: *Learn*, *Act* and *Imagine*. The *Learn*, *Act* and *Imagine* activities for each weekly mission are different.

In the *Learn* activity players are provided with information and links to help them attain an in-depth knowledge on the topic. Players are encouraged to look for further information themselves and then share their new knowledge with other players.

The *Act* activity asks players to carry out actions in their communities related to the mission. An example could be to tell your network of friends and families what they could do to help secure that the World can feed its children.

In the *Imagine* activity players have to imagine how they would address the topic effectively in the near future.

The 10th and last mission is to write an evocation, the earlier described detailed plan of action of a project the player wants to take on outside the game.

During the game players will build up a personal page within the game. This page functions in many ways as the personal pages we know from Facebook. It is a page that you can personalize (pictures, personal information etc.) and use to communicate with other players. But the page is also a logbook, where players collect, showcase and develop their material from the completed quests and missions (written reflections, video's, links, photos...). Players can visit each other's sites and communicate with each other by leaving feedback or awarding each other points for missions and quests well done.

Another communication tool is the chat room where the community as a whole can discuss larger issues connected to the game.

Assigned to the game are 11 game runners. Their job included assigning points to players, providing players with feedback, answering questions about the game, encouraging players, facilitating players interactions and game inputs, creating active discussions, and keeping the game moving forward smoothly.

To win the game the players have to finish all quests, complete at least three assignments per mission (*learn*, *act*, *imagine*) and develop an Evocation, all within the ten weeks the game is running. But players who do not turn in an evocation but complete *all* ten missions and quests will receive a WBI certificate and be recognized on the website as Certified EVOKE Social Innovators – Class of 2010. Players who

complete one or more missions and quests were also recognized as the EVOKE class of 2010 graduates on the website, but do not receive a certificate.

Even though the above description of Urgent Evoke is limited and doesn't account for all details in the game it gives an idea of the kind of engagement that the World Bank was aiming for. Looking at the formulated goal and the design of the game it is very clear that the World Bank is hoping to see players engage actively. Urgent Evoke challenges its players *to do* research, *produce* 'evidence' for their personal page in the form of written reflections, photo series or video clips and, *communicate* with fellow players about their knowledge and ideas as well as *provide* other players with feedback. But Urgent Evoke differs from most games in the sense that the action aimed for is not limited to the game itself. To win the game players have to develop an evocation. The evocation works as a bridge to the physical world. In the evocation players have to focus on a problem outside the game, problems that are no longer just drivers in a good story, but wicked challenges obstructing the lives of people of flesh and blood. So the kind of engagement that the World Bank is looking for transcends the game. To win you have to produce an evocation that shows your intention to turn your motivation for playing into a longer lasting commitment to change the world.

THE EVALUATION

In the introduction we showed some of the traffic data from Urgent Evoke, revealing that 171,958 individuals visited the game but on 73 players ended up turning in an Evocation and thereby showing the form of engagement the World Bank was looking for. We also asked the question: "... with an evaluation presenting massive numbers of lurkers and only a small percentage of players displaying the sought after form of engagement how come that the World Bank still see their game as a success and are planning to play a second round in the beginning of 2013?" In the following, we will present some more traffic data as well as three small case stories gained through interviews with Robert Hawkins, Senior Advisor in the World Bank and Urgent Evoke's executive producer and Paul Holze, player and winner of Urgent Evoke. The additional data and the insights the three case stories deliver suggest an possible answer to our question as well as it indicates that we should refine our of the understanding of lurkers, their engagement and impact.

One of the reasons why the World Bank defines Urgent Evoke as a success could – surprisingly - be found in the data about the lurkers, or as the World Bank diplomatic calls them, "the visitors that did not meet the criteria for "active players"". From the evaluation World Bank knows that:

"[...] in addition to 19.000 registered players, approximately 80,000 repeat visitors *also* participated in EVOKE by repeatedly visiting the site to read the graphic novel, read blog posts and linked web resources, and view photos and videos." (Project Evaluation Evoke, 2010, p.17)

According to the literature about lurkers and their engagement this data could be interpreted in two ways. One that would be linked to the negative perspective of Kollock and Smith that would see the data as another proof of the massive numbers of free-riders surfing the internet. Or another more positive approach that would look at the 80,000 lurkers either as e.g.: potential creators in need of a de-lurking process, legitimate peripheral participants getting ready to take the first step in the direction of the centre of the community or as listeners gathering important information helping them take more informed decisions later.

To above standing data about the numbers of the lurkers and their presence in the Urgent Evoke the project evaluation adds the remark:

“This inference is further supported by the fact the 16.6 percent of the 518 survey respondents report that they completed neither mission nor quest, per the section, *Completion rates of survey and interview respondents*, suggesting that they spent time on urgentevoke.com reading information posted by others.” (Project Evaluation Evoke, 2010, p.17)

A remark that indicates that 16.6 percent of the responses to the survey at the end of the game were given by lurkers, which again indicates a form of engagement in the sense that this group of lurkers were willing to stay to the end of the game and donate time to answer the survey and thereby provide the World Bank with important data and insights. To us this level reciprocity makes it impossible to define the lurkers of Urgent Evoke as free-riders. But defining them as de-lurked lurkers, legitimate peripheral participants or listeners doesn't seem adequate either. The gamers are not de-lurked in the sense that their reaction is not taking place *in* the game but in *connection* to it. The same goes for the role as legitimate peripheral participants as these lurkers are not attempting to perform within the community or move towards a position as a more central 'expert' player. And since they are providing feedback to the World Bank they can't be defined strictly as listeners either. So how to define their role then? In the following we will introduce three small case studies that will provide us with possible new definitions.

Case Story 1/ The Ambassador

Paul Holze is one of the winners of Urgent Evoke. He is 34 years old and is living in the USA. He holds a master in Biology and has for years been working at as a teacher.

When asked about what motivated him to play Urgent Evoke Paul Holze starts telling a very personal story about how he for years had been interested in global social issues and was searching for a way to get involved. In this personal development process he was getting advice from an older female friend, who was acting as a sort of mentor for him. The mentor herself has heard about Urgent Evoke and she has visited the game to check it out. She has no intentions of playing herself but is interested in the issues dealt with in the game. After her visit she tells Paul Holze about the game and suggests that he

plays. Paul follows her advice and ends up as one of the winners of Urgent Evoke. In the traffic data Paul Holze's mentor will figure as one of the lurkers who came, peeked and went a way with out a word. But we argue that by spending a little time in Urgent Evoke she was able to become an ambassador for the game and she made a micro donation to the game by her act of spreading the word about the game, which had an immense impact on the further development of the game. Her engagement in Urgent Evoke is too short to be seen as significant in the evaluation and in the literature that we have reviewed there are no concepts capturing her actions either: she is not a free-rider, she never de-lurked, and she never stayed long enough to count as a legitimate peripheral participant or a listener. But with out her micro engagement there would not have been a Paul Holze and the game would have missed one of its most active players and creators. So even though she was lurking and her actions were taking place outside the game Urgent Evoke would not have been the same with out her donation of time, attention and effort to spread the word.

Case story 2/ The Assistant

Robert Hawkins is senior advisor in the World Bank and Urgent Evokes executive producer. In the interview with him one of the questions he was asked was, "what surprised you the most about the game". A question that prompted a surprising answer.

Robert Hawkins started talking about the lurkers, the people who were spending time on the game but not playing themselves, but still influenced the game. And as an example he told us about a librarian who was a lurker, but who offered his help to active players how needed to do a literature research in order to move on with the quests and missions in the game. This man was never going to play himself but he was obvious interested in the issues dealt with in the game and had enough faith in that the game's possible impact that he was willing to donate his time and professional resources to the active players in an attempt to help them find and share knowledge and become social innovators. As Robert Hawkins noted, the developers had never thought about designing for people like the librarian. The whole game was focused on having players create content and not on ways of including other forms engagement.

Once again neither the game nor the literature about lurkers have the tools or the terms to grasp the role of the librarian. Even though this man do not want to play, he wants to help the creators in the game getting as fare as possible in their pursue of the new innovative ideas. He chooses to take on the role as knowledge broker and assistant. So even though his engagement with the game is very different than that of the players and his actions are partly taking place outside the game, he is – just like the mentor in the previous case story - influencing the game by donating a micro part of his professional life to assist the creators.

Case story 3/ The Cheerleader

The third story is once again coming from Paul Holze. He was one of the 73 people who went all the way

in the game and choose to send in an Evocation to the World Bank and he was selected as one of the winners. The evocation he produced, which was selected by the World Bank, was a plan for a documentary film called 'The story of Happiness'. Paul Holze didn't want to produce the film that was only telling a story. He wanted to produce a film where the production work was empowering the people portrayed in the film to ask different questions about their living conditions and start looking for new answers that could help them improve their living conditions. Paul Holze has a degree in Animal Science, but he has always had a passion for filmmaking. A passion that before Urgent Evoke was cultivated in his spare time. After Urgent Evoke Paul Holze decided to quit his job as a teacher and devote all his time to implement the ideas he had described in his evocation.

When asked about what made him go all the way in the game and create an evocation and also make radical life changes to implement the plan Paul Holze points to the many people who liked and hearted his work in the game. During the game Paul Holze choose to produce much of his evidence for his missions and quests by filming. He loved filming, but had never considered it more than a hobby. During Urgent Evoke filming became a tool for expressing his thoughts, and the crowd of Urgent Evoke proved a positive audience. This audience reflected a picture of himself as a guy who could move other people with his visual productions, and he started to look at himself in a different way.

We have no way of knowing whether the people liking and hearting Holze's work in the game were lurkers. But liking and hearting are typical actions of lurkers. For Paul Holze being cheered on boosted his confidence to such an extent that he decided to change his life radically. Liking and hearting a micro deeds performed in a second, all you have to do is to push a button, but their effect was in this case great. They are examples of a way that designers have managed to design solutions that makes it easy to engage and make it legitimate to be present in other ways than as a creator.

DISCUSSION AND FUTURE WORK

With the three case stories another picture of lurkers are drawn than what we have been able to find in the literature about lurkers. The three examples shows that lurkers a definitely not free riders and that they are very actively engaged in the gaming community although in a very different ways than the players and most often in other ways than the designers designed for. Our case stories show that lurkers can play a variety of active role in different stages of the game and even though non of them need or intend to become players or creators in the game their mini contributions have an impact on the results of the game and on the process of the creators. The mentor of Paul Holze is as an ambassador playing an important role in spreading the word and attracting player to the game. The massa of players needed to create a community and to identify a small group of creators.

The librarian in the role as knowledge broker and assistant is helping the players become smarter and to perform better with in the game, making it easier for the creators to find the knowledge they need to learn and be innovative.

The cheerleaders are boosting the confidence of the players making them feel recognized and good

about themselves. For Paul Holze being watched and cheered on made him perform and go all the way.

The three case stories indicates that by developing and expanding our understanding of engagement to include micro forms of engagement and by giving the users the possibility to be recognized for their micro deeds, we are might able to create more thriving and creative online communities. If our aim is to have a participatory culture and breed as many creators as possible we might have to accept that there are many organisations – some more needy than others - trying to harvest our engagement and that not every user is interested in, capable of or willing to invest the time and energy it costs to engage as a creator. By accepting this we might be able to create really vibrant and interesting communities where many micro contributions help the few potential creators perform their best. We think that the reason why the World Bank sees Urgent Evoke as a success is because they have recognized the important role that the lurkers are playing for the well being and development of the gaming community and the fostering creators.

We think that the empirical material presented in the paper raises questions of whether other forms of micro deeds exist, what such deeds could be and what motivates the performers to these deeds. Further more, it would be relevant to not only look at the individual performers of micro deeds but to investigate through a social network analysis to what extent these performers are connected with each other and with the creators and how these connections influences the creators creative process.

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