

Computer-supported collaborative distraction

Description

Communicating with others via laptop, mobile phone or tablet computer while I'm supposed to be listening to a lecture, contributing to a meeting, or socialising face-to-face can be desperately unproductive, and profoundly anti-social. The cure for a wandering mind is to unplug according to recent reports ([THE](#)).

But social media can nudge the architectural design studio to heightened states of productivity according to a report by recent graduate Mario Andre Kong.

“Architecture students appear to use Facebook for anything and everything: to communicate privately, to communicate publicly, to ask questions, to socialise, to work, for entertainment and even for dating.”

He continues “Indeed, one most regularly sees students working on AutoCAD and browsing Facebook profiles and pages in parallel. Even most “offline conversations” will occur surrounding online content either on a laptop or smart-phone (and more recently a few tablets). Throughout a normal day in the studio, one is certain to hear the word “Facebook” said more often than “building”. Facebook has come to absorb almost every student in the studio – it is an organisational platform for their (or should I say our) lives.

“Architecture students also choose to engage with Facebook to collaborate and communicate with their peers about university work; it is not exclusively social. University based platforms like The University of Edinburgh’s MyEd and SMS mail are almost exclusively used for communication between students and tutors – rarely between students. For this Facebook is preferred.

“For instance, in the Architectural Design Option courses where the studio is split into different units, students informally set up private groups for those students in each unit to communicate through messages, live chat or posts, to organise meetings, and to exchange data between peers. This presents a remarkable scenario whereby students log into their private social profiles to engage with their academic and work related projects, in a seamless transition between personal life and work. Facebook is the easiest method of communicating with everyone, given that everyone is so active on it already; there is no need to set up more complicated alternative forums or blogs that are not part of everyone’s daily interaction.”



In functioning as a source of distraction, such media

integrate work into everyday life.

Computer-supported collaborative working (CSCW) has been around for many years. It is an offshoot of even earlier ideas about office automation (OA).

CSCW is typically concerned with fully integrated collaborative work platforms, such as computer-aided design (CAD) systems where different designers share the same digital workspace, and even work across distances, as if working in a "virtual design studio." These are systems that concentrate the mind and collaboration on the task at hand.

Social media bypass such bespoke systems. The introduction of social media into the design studio challenges the ethos of computer-supported collaborative working.

Delegates at a collaborative design conference in 2008, COOP08, saw the challenge.

New "social" technologies, with concomitant affordances, have arrived with unprecedented speed (who had heard of "tagging", "tag clouds", "social bookmarking" or "Facebook" 5 years ago?). We still struggle to understand what application they might have in the near future (Randall, and Salembier, 2010).

Conference contributors identified the main problem with CSCW technologies as their failure to appeal to potential users in ways that would require and encourage their use on a regular basis. For example, it is difficult to switch from working alone on a CAD system to then work in a bespoke collaborative CAD environment. Neither is the transition seamless. Nor do CSCW systems integrate easily into daily work practices.

Social media tools seem to have solved these problems of acceptance, at least within their particular fields of operation. As observed by Mario Andre Kong computer users now readily multitask within the computer desktop environment, running several applications at once, including web browsers, shopping and social network sites, email, and Skype video conferencing. These tools and environments have achieved sufficient social acceptance, ubiquity and ease of use. Users of social media applications more readily transfer their activities from lone working to collaboration, and in the context of entertainment, leisure, play, consumption, and socializing, as well as work-related interactions.

Mario's account of current studio practice amongst the Y-generation confirms this change from monolithic bespoke computer-supported collaborative working environments to heterogeneous, fluid, and

hoc, opportunistic uses of social media, harnessing these supposedly distracting media for good uses.

Also see [Profile yourself](#).

Bibliography

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