

Digitization of Shoes

Introduction

We live in an age, in which less and less of our daily activities takes places in the *real world*. *The Digital Age, or Information Age*, it is called. Symbolized by the introduction of the personal computer, the rapid development have made us reach a point in time were almost everything has gone digital. We relax, socialize, play, etc. through digital medias, and the current pandemic situation shows that work and studies in many cases can be done through digital medias.

The digitalization of the world have made parts of our lives measurable in ways, we might not normally think about them. For instance the rise of social medias like Snapchat and Facebook, have made our friendships *digital* - attached with a long list of categories/values. Snapchat measure friendships by *streaks/icons* attached to friends (in your *friends-collection*), were as Facebooks *mutual friends* could represent the same kind of information; how close, or closely related, you are to a given person.

As Katharina in *Rearranging the World* cites Claire Bishop; “*Everyone with a personal computer [...] has become a de facto archivist storing and filing thousands of documents, images, and music files.*” (2020, p. 232). And as my example above illustrates, even friendship have been turned into somekind of collection through social medias. Further more it highlights, how the same “*object*” can be represented and digitalized in different ways, which in turn can impact the way we interpret it. This have been the motivation behind the creation of my *collection/dataset*.

Creating the dataset

In *The Politics of Mass Digitization* Nanna B. Thylstrup address a political struggle between The US and Europe when Google attempted to digitalize every book in the world (2018, chapter 1). The European response to Google Books, led by France, was Europeana, and the necessity of an European counterpart were illustrated by a quote from Jeanneney (Then-head of France’s Bibliothèque) regarding Google Books; “*a crushing American domination of the formation of future generations’ ideas about the world.*” (Ibid. p. 15).

Inspired by this, I wanted to examine how an analogue object could take different forms when digitalized, by different people. My initial idea was to simulate the cultural differences by involving my four year old daughter in the project. I wanted to look at an ordinary object, to be able to talk with my daughter about it, and started digitalizing our shoes. I photographed them, and then started on the taxonomy, which I wanted to illustrate how a pair of shoes commonly would be thought of in a digital form - like the taxonomy of shoes in an online store (*brand, size, type, materials etc.*). But as it is often the case with children (or at least mine), their willingness to participate can never be taken for granted, and I had to abandon this idea.

I erased everything but the images, and started on a new taxonomy, which quickly turned out to be biased by my conception of our shoes, and how data about them could be

useful. I ended up with the following categories; *Owner, type, wear and tear (1-3, 1:good, 3:bad), in use (yes/no)*. This data could point out shoes to get rid of, and what kind of shoes to buy or not. Reflecting upon these categories, it was clear to me, that my opinion on the number of shoes (way to many) had been an underlying driver for the taxonomy, and that the purpose were to support that claim. Further more it is thought-provoking, that I would go as far as creating a dataset about our shoes, in order to make an assessment of them, and potentially get rid of them. If my dataset from now on should monitor our shoes, the agency would no longer be mine (or ours) alone, but to a certain degree rely on the data available in the dataset. Ulises A. Mejias and Nick Couldry also adressed this in their article on *datafication*;

This line of critique argues that we are, through datafication, becoming dependent on (external, privatised) data measurements to tell us who we are, what we are feeling, and what we should be doing, which challenges our basic conception of human agency and knowledge. (2019, p. 6)

With my dataset complete, which was biased by my interpretation, I went back to my initial aim, to compare two different views on an object and the proces of digitalizing it. Without sharing details of my process, I had my girlfriend go through the process of creating a taxonomy for the shoes, and highlighted that it should be in a way, that she would find useful, which turned out to be very different form mine; *owner, season, and occasion*. Instead of an aim to toss out shoes, when and were a certain pair of shoes should be used, was seen as useful information. Two very different views, when no common ground, except the keyword *useful*, were established. I had her do it once again, but this time made sure that the situation, in which the taxonomy was created, were the same - shoes to toss out. Her taxonomy then *transformed* into; *size, season, wear and tear, and time not used*. Without being 1:1, her updated taxonomy was more closely related to mine. *Owner and size* would refer to the same user. *Type* of shoe and *season* could resemble almost comparable variables, as some types of shoes would be used in the summer/winter. Both of us picked wear and tear, and lastly *in use* and *time not used* also represent the same kind of data, the biggest difference being the binary format of my data.

Findings

Through my experiment, I illustrated that turning *analogue* into *digital*, and creating a taxonomy for it, is not a straight forward proces. I found that even the digitalization of an ordinary thing as a pair of shoes can differ greatly, depending on what is thought of as useful information. Even giving a certain purpose to the creation of the taxonomy, will not necessary give the same outcome, even though the resemblance between the taxonomies became stronger. Looking at the different ways the digital object (the images), could be interpreted based on the taxonomies, e.g. through visualization, could be future work within this project.

Bibliography

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