Dear reader,

At the time of the MIT8's conference, the paper I presented was still a draft. In the meantime it has been published by Social Cosmos, a peer-reviewed magazine of the Utrecht University's 'Von Humbold' honors College. Social Cosmos works with a creative commons 3.0 license to stimulate further use and reuse of the papers for the benefit of the students' academic careers.

Because of the time-limited validity of empirical data in anthropological research, it will not be possible to reinterpret the gathered information in the perspective of the Public Media / Private Media conference. Nevertheless I submitted the paper for inclusion in the MIT8's anthology, for I think it would make a good case of empirical research in young peoples perception of privacy as a regulation of social boundaries.

The present research sheds light on the discussion about youngsters who share social information. It is not treated from an outsiders' problematized perspective of 'oversharing', but from within. This insiders' point of view shows these young employees struggling to define their social boundaries with the new communication technologies they have at hand.

Attached to this letter you will find an abstract from the original paper to exemplify the nature of the paper in relation to the anthology's subject.

My curriculum vitae is enclosed as a separate PDF for further personal information.

Yours faithfully,

Jeroen de Vos

Social proximity in the network society: Online and offline boundaries in a business community

Jeroen J.M. de Vos

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Liberal Arts & Sciences: Major Cultural Anthropology

Abstract

The introduction of wireless internet and the smartphone has made a lot of new communication channels available to many people (e.g., Skype, Whatsapp, Google Chat, Twitter, and Facebook). Communication technologies offer many opportunities for staying connected. In addition, these technologies constitute an equally important instrument for regulating, organizing and terminating
social connections. What role do communication technologies have in the creation of social proximity within a small business? To answer this question, the present article conducted qualitative research on a group of young tech-savvy people who are working together in a small company called SETUP. The goal of this fieldwork was to acquire in-depth insights into the way such individuals relate to newly offered opportunities to structure their online and offline social environment. Each person in this group struggles in his or her own way with defining social boundaries between “self” and “other”; between “colleagues” and “friends”; and between “us” and “them.” Communication technologies are additional tools for ensuring that new ways are found for establishing such privacy boundaries, both online and offline.

Because of the small number of informants (a total of 17) the external validity of this research only accounts for this specific situation, and the SETUP community is not a representative sample of “tech-savvy” people. Nevertheless, the in-depth information presented here reflects certain widespread societal issues. Many of us have to deal with communication technologies and the possibilities they offer, and this research provides a good example of how young tech-savvy people incorporate communication technologies into their everyday lives.

I received many answers to the question what role these communication technologies have in the creation of social proximity within SETUP as a community. Answers that forced me to think outside of my existing theoretical framework, and to search for new theories and ideas that would explain the meaning of the data I was gathering. The meaning that communication technology has for members of SETUP is multifaceted, consisting of four levels of meaning. In this conclusion, the practical, symbolic, structuring and regulating role of technology will briefly be described, after which an integrated vision of the way SETUP-ers give meaning to communication technology will be presented.

The first role is a very practical one: communication technology connects SETUP-ers “in the cloud,” thus facilitating work-related and non-work related contact through the various online platforms used. They can work where they want and when they want, for these platforms facilitate a
workflow that is not strictly bound by space or time.

The second role of communication technology is a bit more difficult to grasp, as it is a symbolic one. Communication technologies are part of the “internet culture and intangible heritage,” (e.g., popular movies, games, social media, series and memes). These are shared points of interests that connect the SETUP-ers in negotiating the meaning of this shared knowledge. This symbolic role of communication technology for the community is even underlined by the specific language and humor that have evolved from it. The constant references to the digital culture strongly confirm the feeling of belonging to the SETUP group, and therefore also define those who “don’t belong.”

Thirdly, communication technology fulfills an structuring role as it gives us the opportunity to stay connected in different ways. On the one hand, it offers possibilities to structure and organize our social surroundings, but on the other hand it forces us to do this in a certain manner. It thus provides a new social structure.

Lastly, communication technology fulfills a regulatory role. They offer us the option to always be reachable, but are an equally important instrument in regulating and shutting off social connections. Marshall McLuhan, a famous media scholar, argues in “Understanding Media” that technology is an extension of our body (McLuhan, 2001, pp. 5-8). Since online and offline are completely interconnected, this point of view does more justice to the way the SETUP group experiences technology and their social surroundings than the binary distinction between man and technology. There is no rigid distinction between the regulation of social contact offline through attitudes, gestures and word choices, and the regulation of online social contact through platform choice, recontextualization, accessibility, etc.

Defining social boundaries is something that people and societies have been doing since time immemorial, but with new technologies there are new tools at hand to organize the social environment. In line with McLuhan’s statement, new communication technologies can be seen as additional tools that are used in the interpersonal boundary regulation process. I have seen many
SETUP-ers using the broad scope of technologies in order to define their privacy.

The fundamental way that SETUP-ers give meaning to communication technology, as it is an extension of their verbal and non-verbal communication, offers them new tools to create balance between connection and disconnection, to disclose as much information as they want, and to organize their social environment beyond the borders of online and offline. Face-to-face, as well as technologically mediated social behaviors, are for SETUP-ers a coherent performance of social and cultural identity.

In conclusion, it is my view that people and technology cannot be researched separately. Instead, an overarching vision allows us to have more in-depth insights into the tension between technology, with all opportunities it offers, and man, as a social being that uses these technologies to organize and control his social boundaries.

**Keywords**: business anthropology, SETUP, network society, privacy, communication technology, social proximity

**References**

[currently in APA 6th style, it needs to be redrafted to Chicago 16th style]


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SETUP. (2012c). *Verslag: Make a Meme [Report: Make a Meme]*. Retrieved 01/30, 2013, from [http://setup.nl/content/verslag-make-meme](http://setup.nl/content/verslag-make-meme)

Curriculum Vitae

Jeroen Matthijs de Vos
Date of birth: 31-12-1988
Marital status: Single
Nationality: Dutch
Driving license: yes

/Ambition
To get out there, immerse myself and collect stories to place empirical arguments in a bigger theoretical framework. My goal with bottom-up qualitative research? Writing anthropological ethnographies of the 'encultivation' (or 'appropriation') of communication technologies within different groups of people, to come to an integrated comparative vision of the multifaceted meaning of new media technologies. An Ipad in the hands of a teenager has a different meaning than the same Ipad in the hands of an older gentleman.

/Near past
For the research I recently presented at MIT's conference Public Media / Private Media, I submerged myself into a small company called SETUP, a 'media laboratory' where young tech-savvy people work together. My research question was: What role do the many communication technologies have in the way SETUP-ers organize their social surroundings? To them, the great variety of communicative channels and possibilities, prove to be of essential importance to facilitate the way they organize their social surroundings beyond the online and offline dichotomy.

/Near future
Where this first group lives and breathes mediated communication, my next research focuses on elderly people, the ones more often on the other end of the 'media literacy' scale. In the near future I hope to shed light on the way the elderly experience being part of this more and more technologically enhanced society, impregnated with a constant flow of information. With limitations to their abilities, knowledge, and will to get to know these new developments: In what way, and to which extend do they feel connected to this information society?

Academic Experiences
Januari 2013 – Present, Self employed media anthropologist, Amsterdam
Conducting new research | Blogging | See: www.jeroendevos.nl
June 2013, **Publication of thesis**, Utrecht – The Netherlands
*Social Cosmos | Peer reviewed magazine | Utrecht University | See: [socialcosmos.library.uu.nl](http://socialcosmos.library.uu.nl)

May 2013, **Presenting at the MIT's**, Boston USA
*Presenting bachelor thesis | Massachusetts Institute of Technology | MIT8 conference: Public Media / Private Media

May 2013, **Presenting at the KU Leuven**, Louvain la neuve, Belgium
*Presenting bachelor thesis | Singleton Chair Conference | Contemporary anthropology

January 2013 – June 2013, **Translating and editing thesis**, Utrecht – The Netherlands
*Social proximity in the network society: Online and offline boundaries in a business community

May 2012 – July 2012, **Writing bachelorthesis**, Utrecht – The Netherlands
*Business anthropologist | Qualitative research | Bachelor fieldwork

February 2012 – May 2012, **Internal anthropologist: SETUP**, Utrecht – The Netherlands
*Business anthropologist | Qualitative research | Bachelor fieldwork

**Education:**

2008-2012, **Liberal Arts & Sciences** (Bachelor of Arts), Utrecht University – The Netherlands

Liberal Arts & Sciences focuses on an interdisciplinary approach of societal problems. Within this trajectory, one gains indepth insights in every major scientific field and later integrates these visions into their own point of view which often transgresses boundaries between different disciplines.

With a major in Cultural Anthropology, a minor in 'Culture, Media & Sociology' and a pre-master in 'New Media & Digital Culture', my own scope is typically interdisciplinary. Although my own point of view is founded in anthropology, out of own interest I found myself to be a more contemporary anthropologist interested in the gray area where man and technology meet.

Major: Cultural Anthropology
Minor: Culture, Media & Sociology
Pre-master: New Media & Digital Culture