22. TRANSFORMATIONS IN DIGITAL VIRTUAL CONSUMPTION

Janice Denegri-Knott (0000-0001-5208-8575), Rebecca Jenkins (0000-0003-3989-8770) and Mike Molesworth (0000-0002-6028-3431)

ABSTRACT

In this chapter, we consider digital virtual consumption (DVC) as a location that combines aspects of materiality and the imagination allowing for new experiences and with them transformations in consumers and their practices. We map out possible DVC practices and more specifically focus on the moments of reflection and transformation these may produce in individuals and discuss how digital media may be enabling or constraining these. To that end we show how DVC practices are shaped by the coming together of digital affordances and consumers' own mediations. What begins in consumers' imagination (virtual consumption) as a goal of 'becoming someone' or 'doing something', together with consumers' intentionality and know-how in relation to specific platform affordances in DVC shape the texture and trajectory of DVC practices themselves (stimulating desire, actualizing daydreams and fantasy and supporting self-experimentation and transformation). Acknowledging high, mid and low affordance levels allow us to see the correspondence between consumer mediations and platform infrastructure in shaping DVC practices. High level affordances correspond to the contents of virtual consumption (desired transformation sustained by imaginative thinking), while mid-level and low level affordances correspond to situated, consumer intentions and know-how in relation to a specific platform.

Keywords
Affordances, desire, digital media, digital virtual consumption, transformation

INTRODUCTION

We begin this chapter with a telling quote we found on Pinterest (2020). It reads: "Pinners began using the platform to answer everyday questions like 'What should I cook?' and 'What should I wear?' They also used it for epic goals like getting a tattoo or building motorcycles. Whatever the interest, people have told us that life gets a little bit better when they can use these ideas to make more of their moments." This quote captures the sense of optimism with which many approach digital platforms. So much so, that today, much of our aspirations for personal transformation are reliant on digital media. In one internet minute in 2020, TikTok was installed 2,704 times, 500 hours of YouTube videos and 347,222 stories on Instagram were posted (Domo 2020). The total number of life-inspiring pins on Pinterest was 240 billion (Pinterest 2020). Fortnite, the free online game, made $2.4 billion in 2018, mostly from selling 'skins' that change the appearance of avatars. There is no shortage of inspiration for new things to want. As a result, the anticipatory cycles of revelation that produce much of the enjoyment that propels both material and digital consumption have become, as Belk, Kozinets and Weijo (2020, p.3) argue, faster, binding eager consumers "in the perpetual marketplace drama that seeks to anoint something as the next new thing". These accelerated cycles also represent new alliances between platforms and consumer desiring modes, where algorithms and other platform features like wishlists take on some of the effortful browsing associated with shopping, replacing playful flânerie with efficient paths to purchase.

Not surprisingly, the question of whether or not digital media enchants or disenchants consumer desire has been subject to debate. Some studies maintain that when aspects of desiring practices are delegated to a platform, be it Amazon's wish lists or eBay's watch functions, the full experience of desire can be compromised, producing disenchantment (Denegri-Knott and Molesworth 2013; Denegri-Knott and Zwick 2012). A further threat to the enchanting potential of digital media are algorithmic recommendations which resolve the burdens of choice-making with curated options based on past preferences, bypassing browsing altogether (Denegri-Knott, Jenkins and Lindley 2020; MacKenzie 2015). On the other hand, evidence of its enchanting potential is also documented, as is the addictive and enthralling quality that characterizes consumers' engagement with digital media platforms.

Here, digital media entices consumers to anticipate and search for the possibilities that it signals (Zwick and Dholakia 2006) and is energized by a collective effervescence of consumers communing around a shared passion (Kozinets, Patterson and Ashman 2017) and the aspiration to accrue attentional status (Eckhard and Bardhi 2020). These disenchantments-enchantments also speak to the promise of transformation that is pinned onto technology and consumption. On digital media, transformations are not only invited, but also supported. As our opening vignette illustrates, consumers come to platforms like Pinterest with very punctual questions as to what they should cook, wear, or do, in the hope that their life can get "a little bit better". Covid-19 made this dependence more apparent in all sorts of transformation attempts from adopting healthy-living practices to home-decorating and securing a location to actualize blocked and new desires, including increased uptake of videogames. In these examples digital media appears as a potentially enchanting destination to actualize blocked aspirations be it virtual or augmented reality tourism, trialing new practices digitally, or in the promise of achieving fame by becoming a social media sensation (a dream shared by many children in the UK and the US) (The Independent 2019).

In this chapter we deal with such transformations. What is missing in previous work is scrutiny regarding how platform affordances impact consumer practices to produce sometimes enchanting, sometimes disenchanting experiences of consumer desire and transformation. We put forth a series of theoretical openings that integrate a practice-orientated sensibility with the concept of digital affordances, so that consumer and technological intentionality can be accounted for in a balanced and situated way. We adhere to the practice theory tradition, where practices are defined as a series of interconnected elements, namely, forms of bodily and mental activities, 'things' or 'technologies' and their use, know-hows as well as motivational knowledge and emotional states (Schatzki 1996; Warde 2005). The practices that interest us here, are consumption orientated ones- such as browsing, using and divesting that are mediated by digital platforms, and therefore deal with transformations within these. We approach affordances as features that enable or constrain a person's ability to achieve goals and intentions, subject to that person's ability to perceive, value and execute given intentionality (Costa 2018; Kieran 2015). This allows us to begin to consider how desire-stimulating and transformative digital virtual consumption (DVC) practices are enabled and constrained by platform affordances and consumers' own mediations - that is, their own intentions, motivational states and know-how.

We start by making a case for why consumption can be understood as being suffused with reflective and transformative potential. Drawing on research insights we have gained from our studies of eBay and wishlists (Denegri-Knott and Molesworth 2013; Denegri-Knott and Zwick 2011), video games (Molesworth 2009), digital possessions, (Denegri-Knott et al. 2020) and other explorations of social media, desire and transformation (e.g., Belk et al. 2020; Drenden and Tuncay Zayer, 2018; Kozinets et al. 2017), we offer examples to better understand the transformative potential of DVC. Although our illustrations may seem very different in that they possess their own distinct logics, meanings, ways of doing, and infrastructures, they are included here as complementary cases that help draw attention to how different platform affordances *and* consumers' mediations- informed by their know-how and intentionality- concurrently shape DVC practices. We recognize that although consumers may adopt the classification systems imposed by markets when they discuss their experiences of platforms (videogames are not the same as social media, which are not the same as e-commerce platforms), in terms of what users do, and what those actions mean, distinctions become blurred. For example, browsing a skin in a video for a special event, may feel a lot like browsing Instagram for outfit inspiration. The emphasis we place on affordances stems from an ongoing intergenerational study of digital consumption where platform affordances are emerging as a focal point of attention in consumers' experiences. In sum, we note how the scope of transformation in the DVC framework can be expanded beyond the original emphasis placed on consumers' agentic efforts in initiating the stimulation of desire, its actualization and transformative practices, to advocate for a more granular and situated analysis of affordances-consumer mediation interactions in shaping transformations.

CONSUMPTION AS TRANSFORMATION

Grant McCracken (2006) noted that self-reinvention is a major preoccupation of contemporary consumer culture. Consumers enter consumption experiences in hope that transformation will ensue, for example, that a desired home will bring idyllic living, or that a pair of running shoes will make us better runners. This drive for transformation has been dealt with through the lens of consumer desire (Belk, Askegaard and Ger 2003; Campbell 1987) where research has concluded that any hope of contentment from permanent transformation is truncated. In part, this is because displaced meanings attached to goods (McCracken 1988) – an imagined future, past, or geography – are *too* ideal to be fully tested and because desire for desire is too important to be forsaken (Belk et al. 2003; Campbell 1987). There are, however, more optimistic analyses that see consumption as conducive to

small triumphs and transformations (Miller 1997), produced by the kind of reflective activity that Campbell (2004) has expressed as a form of 'getting to know oneself', by testing, defining and refining our tastes through consumption. For example, Falk and Campbell (1997, p. 4) note that while shopping:

> "The self is mirrored in the potential object of acquisition with questions which are rarely formulated and hardly ever articulated: 'Is that for me?'; 'Am I like that?'; 'Could that be (part of) me?'; 'Could I be like that?'; 'Would I like to be like that?', and so on; an endless series of questions which are acts of self-formation in themselves."

This self-knowing function pollinates practice-based research, where 'self-knowing' and change surface from negotiations between various forms of knowing, specific know-hows and skills entangled in using material objects to achieve goals and complete projects (Watson and Shove 2008; Shove, Pantzar and Watson 2012). Practice theory presents innovation and transformation as a by-product of engaging in a particular practice (Warde 2005; Watson and Shove 2008). Warde, for example, writes that practices "are dynamic by virtue of their own internal logic of operation, as people in myriad situations adapt, improvise and experiment" (2005, p. 140) and Watson and Shove (2008, p. 83) describe transformation as something that is "developed through an iterative process of doing, reflecting and adapting". For de Certeau (1984), transformation is manifested within the boundaries of practice itself, where differences in practice are framed by individual projects, for instance, the need to keep in with certain standards of use, or contamination by other practices as consumers borrow ways of knowing and doing from other domains of experience (for example the rise of videogame cosplay, and the adoption of videogames as a platform for new fashion, Tran 2020).

As consumption becomes digitalized, we find new spaces through which such transformations may be pursued. Websites, apps, social media platforms, videogames, immersive digital virtual worlds, the online stock market and eBay all offer interim platforms – somewhere between the idealism of consumption taking place in consumers' imagination, and material consumption practices – which may expand the opportunity and latitude for change. We call this DVC.

DIGITAL VIRTUAL CONSUMPTION

To theorize DVC we deploy Rob Shields' (2003) concept of the digital virtual as liminoid space – somewhere between the imagination and the material. Key in this analysis is Shields' insistence that we should not see the imagination as an opposite of the material, but rather that we should recognize that what we imagine (the virtual) is real, but ideal; whereas the material is real and actual. The ideal includes ideas, memories, daydreams, fantasies and intentions that are experienced in the mind, but not actualized. The actual is what has happened in a concrete, physical way. If the ideal and the actual are complementary rather than opposites, they may more usefully be compared to what is ideally possible and what is actually possible. Possible ideals are abstractions or fantasies, (a time machine or a dragon). We can know of and imagine these things, but we cannot physically experience them. Something actually possible is something that could happen, such as buying car, or a new outfit. The former is abstract, the latter probable. Our imagination is constrained only by what is ideally possible and this includes myths, taboos, fictions and fantasies, whereas the material is constrained by what is actually possible in everyday experience (see Figure 22.1). In a videogame, however, a dragon, space ship, or elite sporting event is not only imagined, yet is not materially real either. It follows then, that in DVC an object of consumption cannot be used in material reality but is also free from the limitations of what is actually possible. A digital virtual car cannot drive its owner to work but also needs no fossil fuel, finance agreement or warranty plan to be experienced; a digital virtual magic sword cannot cut material flesh, but may slay exotic foes in digital virtual battles.

Figure 22.1. Relationships between virtual, material, and DVC

[INSERT FIGURE 22.1]

Source: own elaboration

DVC therefore includes mechanisms that elaborate and actualize consumers' desires for material commodities and services via their imagination, but also offers the potential to exceed or negate these. The result is that the range of questions an individual may ask themselves, and the answers about who they are or might be, have the potential for considerable expansion. Indeed, within these spaces an individual may suspend their physical characteristics. For example in World of Warcraft an individual may explore the game world as human, elf, goblin, dwarf and as warrior, druid, priest or warlock. In fact, for

Shields (2003) the potential for individual change supercharges the potential for transformation present in the liminal, not as a space to manage societal change through the rites of passage that once characterized transitions in life (starting work, getting married, having children, retiring, etc.) but smaller, individual, liminoid change through personal and often private experimentation. In DVC, this possibility of transformation remains wired into commodities and consumer experiences, but also instils the possibility that the more transgressive practices, which are blocked in the actually real because they are too difficult, risky or taboo to actualize, can be enacted in the digital virtual.

DVC practices

DVC practices have two orientations with accompanying implications and properties. First, under the rubric of DVC as stimulation of consumer desire and actualization of daydreams and fantasy, we discuss DVC practices as ignition, fueling and actualization. We then consider DVC practices as experimentation and transformation.

DVC as stimulation of desire and actualization of consumer daydreams and fantasy

DVC practices are characterized as a coming together of a desiring consumer and digital media as epistemic object of consumption which reveals itself progressively through interaction, use and evaluation (Zwick and Dholakia 2006). Videogames, shopping apps and social media platforms are always in the process of being defined, acquiring new properties and shedding old ones as closer scrutiny reveals a structure of absence, a chain of always mutating and exploding possibilities. This makes them a perennial source for things to desire. Their material elusiveness and ontological openness demand psychological flexibility and affective investment from consumers, which is then returned as emotional stimulation and pleasure by increasingly interesting and exciting possibilities. For example, Tik Tok, Pinterest and Instagram bind consumers in intense and ongoing cycles of exploration and discovery, where things to want can be searched for or stumbled across. Many videogames do something similar. Grand Theft Auto, for example, offers ever more elaborate vehicles, extending to fully armed fighter planes, helicopters, tanks and patrol boats for players who accumulate enough in game currency. Alternatively, Fortnite, offers new levels each 'season', with the option of new skins based on implausible superhero, animal and alien designs in addition to physics-defying emotes (virtual dance moves used to celebrate a win)

in exchange for real money. At one level, such platforms fuel desire for goods and aid daydreaming by giving a more tangible shape to diffuse daydreams and by increasing hope that a desired item may now be had. They also appear to accelerate the speed within which desire is ignited, actualized and re-ignited, creating shorter, concatenated bursts of desiring moments (Denegri-Knott and Molesworth 2013). In one intense session of Grand Theft Auto a player may acquire more digital virtual vehicles than they would ever own in a material lifetime. This intensification is apparent in other platforms. In their study of how social networks on digital media interact with consumer desire for food, Kozinets and his colleagues (2017), found that ongoing engagement with different social networks centered around a common interest, produces intensified and accelerated desiring states. Here digital media enchants.

However, besides being compelling epistemic consumption objects, many platforms are introducing efficiencies, conflating flânerie with interim ownership and purchasing opportunities. Things may be 'almost had' as items saved in a wishlist or as digital virtual representations of desired goods - be it cars or luxurious homes in video games. Recently, social media platforms have introduced 'shop now' features which allow consumers to shop for stuff featured on stories or pins - shortening the distance between DVC and actual consumption and absorbing the search functions previously carried out by consumers. Similarly, algorithmic recommendations filter and organize options based on consumers' past online behaviors, producing curated choices that are iterative, and therefore less likely to be novel, in a manner that threatens consumer autonomy (MacKenzie 2015). Such algorithmic curation is theoretically problematic for the ignition and stimulation of a desiring state inasmuch as desire relies on both consumer autonomy and the promise of novelty (Campbell 1987). Here digital media can be disenchanting.

Desiring is not only the preserve of agentic consumers, but a practice that happens in the coming together of consumers and digital platforms. In their coming together, aspects of competence and commitment to desire construction, maintenance and actualization are redistributed between consumers and digital media, leading to new - sometimes enchanting, sometimes less so - configurations of consumer desire. In this respect, digital media may augment consumers' capacity to desire by enhancing the number of things that can be wished for, but may also transform the experience from enjoyable, pleasurable pursuit to functional, predictable, goal-orientated activity (Denegri-Knott and Molesworth 2013).

DVC as experimentation and transformation

Belk and colleagues (2020) have recently focused on the cultural dimension of technology adoption to explore how consumers become enchanted and disenchanted by technology which offers a transformation or the promise of a positive future. Technology that enables individuals to experience a sense of self, of Other or of community is charged with agency and regarded as 'enchanting'. In this sense, DVC as experimentation and transformation are possible as a result of the temporary suspension of the quotidian, typical of liminoid spaces (Shields 2003; Turner 1982, 1988) that allow for the adoption of new subject positions and practices not easily possible in the materially real. This potential for transformation can be clarified by invoking Turner's (1982, 1988) metaphor of social dramas which explains individual change with a universal pattern for its management. Social dramas are marked by: a breach (the emergence of a flaw in social norms), crisis (the coming to a head of that flaw that requires action), redressive action (to 'mend' the flaw) and finally reintegration (the return to normal, or coming to terms with the ongoing breach or change). The redressive part of a social drama includes increased reflexivity "arousing consciousness of ourselves as we see ourselves" (Turner 1982, p. 75) which activates transformative processes. Key elements supporting the reflective and transformative potential of DVC are the awareness of tastes, personal affinities and competencies that result from animating a desiring state and the different subject positions and practices that can be enacted. Subject positions may include those that are part of a substantive daydream, for instance, a yearning for a particular lifestyle or an altered sense of self through the accumulation of commodities or those that are trialed in moments of transition. Drenden and Tuncay Zayer (2018) recount how a young woman turned to Pinterest to navigate her own transition from single to married woman, by pinning images that helped her visualize her impending wedding and possible future home. More transgressive consumptive practices may also be given into, through a temporary state of almost owning which allows the suspension of moral straitjackets blocking desires in the materially real. In addition, individuals may explore taboos in videogames such as Grand Theft Auto where theft, gun crime, prostitution and drug taking are necessary to complete the game.

Digital media can also supply means of upskilling needed to produce transformations in everyday practices, from make-up application to adopting a vegan diet, with engaging

tutorials, apps and video content walking the novice through processes needed to achieve practice-orientated goals. To illustrate their potency Twine (2018) showed how people became initiated into vegan practices through ongoing engagement with digitally enabled positive representations of veganism, resulting in socialization into vegan practices through acquiring the knowledge and skills necessary to prepare vegan meals. These practice trials or proto practices (Shove et al. 2012) can trigger moments of self-awareness and reflection, necessary for the fourth phase of the social drama– reintegration and the acceptance of a new practice. Such transformation can be contrasted with the return to normal that we might expect following videogame play. In Turner's work, both crisis and redressive actions have liminal characteristics and thus furnish a necessary "distanced replication and critique of events leading to the crisis" (Turner 1988, p. 75), needed to "confront, under-stand and assign meaning to, and sometime coping with the crisis" (Turner 1982, p. 11). Reintegration requires reflection, for example, by recognizing the irreparable schism that displaced meanings cannot be actualized. Alternatively, this point of self-awareness can bring forth a new order for the individual. The transformative potential of digital media in this process may be determined by its enabling and constraining functions. With these functions, certain actions or options may be more likely than others to be engaged in or pursued, while others may be neglected or unavailable (Kiran 2015). We now explore what such affordances mean for DVC.

AFFORDANCES: ENABLING AND CONSTRAINING TRANSFORMATION

In sociology, affordances refer to socio-technical architecture: the capacity of things to configure the environment in a way that shapes participants' engagement, thereby influencing the agency of social actors (Boyd 2011). For example, on Twitter you can write whatever you want as long as it does not exceed 280 characters. This encourages users to produce short, witty or provocative statements. Algorithms encourage the views of popular content, suggest the 'right' content to access, contributing towards 'rabbit holes' and 'echo-chambers' but also expand taste via exposure to novel material (Bonini and Gandini 2019). In short, digital media has an enabling-constraining structure that enables us to do specific things, but also shapes how we do these things, diverting attention from alternative actions (Kiran 2015). In diverting attention and focus towards the 'new', platform affordances execute intermittent schedules of rewards such as notifications of likes, new stock, and new content, which are designed to be rewarding and enjoyable. The release of dopamine that accompanies a 'find',

or the social validation of a 'like' becomes integral to desiring states (Haynes 2018), something not missed by critics of social media platforms, which have been accused of engineering addiction. In this decentering of desire, desiring moments are concatenated, short-lived highs. Endless, fleeting external stimuli becomes the focus of desire, transforming the stimulation of desire practices. In diverting our attention towards what is yet to come on the screen, there is less attentional energy to pursue enjoyable and prolonged daydreaming or to cultivate meaningful practices with material consumption. Daydreaming is externalized in what Kozinets et al. (2017) refer to as the displacement of established traditions and meaningful practices. For example, by streaming music the need for space to store a music collection is displaced and the social practice of going to a music store with friends is eliminated. The language of enabling and constraining helps us to make sense of this: clearer shelves, less material 'stuff', a tidier home, even a step toward minimalism, and a wide range of music to access with ease is enabled, but other social or personal practices and experiences are constrained as a result. The constraining and enabling potential of affordances operate within the practices and socio-cultural context where they take place, and because of this, they are best not to be defined a priori, or to cite Costa (2018, p. 3643): "predetermined outside of their situated everyday actions and habits of usage." This means that affordances are best approached as features that enable or constrain a person's ability to achieve a given goal or intention, subject to their ability to perceive, value and execute given intentionality in accordance with the socio-cultural context in which they are situated (Costa 2018).

With this clarification in mind we can reconcile contradictory narratives about DVC and transformative desire by locating these as the outcomes of socio-culturally situated platform–consumer relations. Referring to Kozinets et al.'s (2017) study, when participants report feelings of desire being intensified, those feelings are in part enabled by platform-specific affordances like hashtags or photo sharing, but also by a common culture of 'food porn' which binds participants in playful and engaging dialogue around specific food interests. Thus, DVC stimulation of desire practices are transformed from an intimate and personal passion for food, into a "desire to share food images into an interest in creating posts that will be liked, commented on, shared, and otherwise engaged with" (Kozinets et al. 2017 p. 669). Platform affordances that enable consumers to share their passion with others and gain attentional status through features such as likes, re-tweets, photo sharing or use of hashtags, produce desiring practices that are "all-consuming or addictive" (p.671) but also new means for actualizing daydreams. Likewise, the actualization of fantasy afforded by videogaming in

particular, can be entangled with more mundane daydreams of accruing status and success, through streaming videogaming exploits on platforms like YouTube or Twitch. Similarly, when we report that eBay accelerates desire for collectibles, we can see how platform affordances of searchability and auction monitoring enable the platform to absorb some of the skill and competence needed to conjure up desire (Denegri-Knott and Zwick 2012).

An outcome of these transformations is that cycles of desire initiated in the imagination (virtual consumption) and digital media (DVC), do not culminate in consumption in the actually real (material consumption) as anticipated by the DVC framework, but rather, once food is made or ordered, photographed and eaten, desire is returned to the digital virtual in the form of a photograph where it prolongs the emotional rewards of experiencing desire through social recognition and even material success, through monetization. Desire is for accumulation of attentional capital and status which can be accrued via a well-liked photograph (see Eckhardt and Bardhi 2020), rather than the actualization of food-centered daydreams through material consumption. Even the actualising fantasies of winning battles against daemons in a videogame, may be similarly extended into a monetized stream and associated social recognition.

Practices centered around experimentation too are altered, potentially becoming open-ended projects. Here, platforms like Pinterest or Instagram operate as epistemic objects of consumption (Zwick and Dholakia 2006) which tantalize users with endless promises of a better solution or inspiration for enacting a practice. Making desired practices themselves open-ended projects - where the already fragile arrangements between different components of practice become even more precarious, and the possibility of new configurations of practice becoming apparent - with new meanings, skills, and materials being revealed through ongoing exploration of digital content. In addition, the potential of a breach is never too far away, further fracturing tenuous configurations of practice – 'what I thought was an environmentally friendly ingredient, isn't' – therefore the closure that could come with readdressing a breach is forfeited, extending liminal transitions ad infinitum. These transformations are enabled by platform affordances; that is, each platform has a distinct technological intentionality (Ihde 1990), which is made possible by its affording capabilities which are in turn appropriated by consumers based on their own understanding, competency and context. Platform affordances' enabling and constraining functions are enacted in a situated context, and, to borrow from Don Ihde (1990), remain 'multistable'. Here,

consumers' own mediations, informed by their own situated know-how and intentions, interact with platform affordances to realize them in a given way. For the eBayer looking for moments of enchantment, platform affordances like ability to search and monitor the fluctuation of goods, which are meant to streamline and optimize searching and purchasing, can be appropriated to play 'eBay roulette', where the auction system is used to bid for items without purchase intent (Denegri-Knott and Zwick 2012).

Going forward, our analysis may be given greater acuity if we account for how platform affordances transform DVC practices themselves. Building on Bucher and Helmond's (2017) distinction between levels of affordance, we suggest three interrelated, but distinct levels of affordances. At a high level we consider what the affordance is enabling in terms of achieving some type of end goal that transforms identity, for example becoming a good parent or a better runner. In the idiom of consumer desire, these are akin to what Belk and his colleagues (2003, p. 335) described as "altered states"- being admired, winning a race, or enjoying enriching relationships with others- which are informed by virtual consumption (imaginative thinking). These goals are connected to the meanings or the motivational knowledge which inflects or infuses practices with their significance (Shove et al. 2012). Mid-level affordances are the kinds of dynamics and conditions enabled by technical devices, platforms and media – the way engagement between user and technology is structured. These affordances would be such things as persistence, replicability, scalability, and searchability, which boyd (2011) sees as structuring the engagement of social media users. These qualities are sought by users, in that they present an attractive or normative way of realizing high level affordances, for instance, the realization of goals to do with parenting, may translate, in a series of intentions, one being announcing a birth in the family. To borrow from Shrock (2015)- the practice of making birth announcements is now enabled through the broadcasting affordances of social media platforms in ways that displace announcement cards. Finally, low-level affordances refer to the technical features of a platform (buttons, screens) that afford certain actions (clicking, sharing, liking) through which intentions (mid level affordance) and ultimate goals (high level affordance) may be enacted. Both social media platforms and videogames seem particularity good at innovation in terms of low-level affordances, even if these less often align with higher-level ones, suggesting a need to further investigate how these levels interact (or interfere) with goals. To illustrate further, in our intergenerational study of valuable digital possessions we can see how, at a high level, Amazon's Alexa enables one participant to enact his goal of being a good parent. Alexa helps

answer questions about homework, entertains his son with quizzes, and reminds him to brush his teeth (with greater success than both parents combined) – all enhancing his capability to look after his son. But it also makes possible a more detached form of parenting where physical presence is not always encouraged or required. At this level, we can see how digital brands like Amazon mediate practices like parenting, redefining what it means to be a good parent, and the goals that we assume correspond to being one. The mid-level interaction is structured via Amazon's search abilities and programming in terms of sources used to answer questions and the way it allows the user to set up certain functions, which in turn become low level affordances.

In order to understand the transformative potential of DVC, we must confront how DVC itself is being transformed. Our starting point is that while affordances are enabling and constraining, DVC practices themselves are not fixed or stable properties which apply in toto across all digital media platforms and users (see Costa 2018). Instead, coming to grips with transformations in DVC necessitates that we observe how these happen within specific consumer orientated practices like desiring, but also in everyday practices, like cooking and parenting. In doing so, we may locate how platform affordances, plus consumers' own mediations, their intentionality, skills, the socio-cultural context and their motivational state, come together and change how things are done, and the things that are desired. We should therefore approach each platform receptive to new unanticipated configurations of practice, where the constraining and enabling power of affordances can be duly recognized as well as the interpretative power of context and individual.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

In this chapter we have mapped out possible DVC practices and focused on moments of reflection and transformation these may produce. We have also begun to consider how digital media may be enabling or constraining these, and in doing so transforming DVC practices themselves (see Figure 22.2). To that end we show how DVC practices are shaped by the coming together of digital affordances and consumers' own mediations. What begins in consumers' imagination (virtual consumption) as a goal of 'becoming someone' or 'doing something', together with consumers' intentionality and know-how in relation to specific platform affordances in DVC shape the texture and trajectory of DVC practices themselves

(stimulating desire, actualizing daydreams and fantasy and supporting self-experimentation and transformation). Acknowledging high, mid and low affordance levels allow us to see the correspondence between consumer mediations and platform infrastructure in shaping DVC practices. High level affordances correspond to the contents of virtual consumption (desired transformation sustained by imaginative thinking), while mid-level and low level affordances correspond to situated, consumer intentions and know-how in relation to a specific platform.

Figure 22.2. Consumer mediation and platform affordance interaction shaping DVC practices
[INSERT FIGURE 22.2]
Source: own elaboration

The many small and individual transformations consumers undertake enabled by digital media invite broader questions about consumption. For example, what might the accelerated ownership of desirable goods, whether material or digital mean for the experience of desire? What might this also tell us about how ownership itself is understood? The 'promiscuous consumer' (Denegri-Knott and Molesworth 2010) who buys commodities with a mind to later sell them on via eBay may seem to form much lighter attachments to things while paying more attention to their desires for new goods, for example. The accomplished player of an online game may invest time and energy in their digital goods and be less concerned with the pleasures of material shopping, or even achievement outside of videogames (Molesworth 2009). We must further ask about strategies consumers adopt to manage all these new knowledges and their accelerated careers. Will this lead to more superficial and transient engagement with practices such that individuals ask 'maybe I'm this, but no worries if I'm not, I can try something else tomorrow', or will we see new angst in individuals who must now try to achieve much more, completing multiple careers, but forever feeling that none of them will be mastered? Will they ask, 'How can I be all these things?'; 'Where is the time?', or; 'What if I miss something important?'. In addressing these questions, we invite further research in re-mapping trajectories from virtual, digital virtual and material consumption to put to empirical test some of the new flows we have suggested- from material consumption back to DVC, from DVC back to virtual consumption.

We have begun to extend the DVC framework by considering how platform affordances and consumer mediations shape DVC practices themselves. A sensitizing to the enabling and constraining structure of digital media via affordances-consumer mediation interactions

allows us to ponder on the various ways DVC itself is being transformed, and with it, consumer desire and other everyday practices.   To have a more complete picture of these transformations and their enchanting-disenchanting potential we must study the coming together of consumers' own intentionality with that of digital media they use to pursue all sorts of transformative quests. Our proposed framework can provide guiding principles that can be productively used across different platforms. Of particular interest would be to consider the role of algorithms in enabling and constraining the discovery of things to want as this potentially contravenes conventional thinking in consumer research, which regards autonomy as pre-requisite to enjoyable daydreaming. Similarly, the externalization of daydreaming to social media platforms and virtual and augmented reality merit particular attention, as their role in stimulating desire and actualizing consumer daydreams and fantasy is little known. Arguably, the design of popular videogames is already intuitively moving towards extending the possibilities of fantastic consumption, guiding players to the next level, whilst inviting consumption of a wide range of digital virtual goods that encourage identity play. Videogames have also innovated on freemium models, new forms of consumer gambling (loot boxes), and the social sharing of the outcomes of play. Affordance theory provides us with the intellectual tools to explore and critique such developments.

Further reading

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