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Understanding the Emergence of Social Protocols on MySpace: Impact and its Ramifications

Comprendiendo la aparición de los protocolos sociales en MySpace: impacto y ramificaciones

ABSTRACT

Over the recent years, MySpace has been vital to fostering the growth of independent musicians' followings and have played critical roles in helping mainstream artists maintain fan communities. The popularity of MySpace has been accompanied by the establishment of social protocols which allow musicians to network with one another in an efficient and successful way. These protocols have inspired the publication of various books (such as «MySpace Music Profit Monster!: Proven Online Marketing Strategies!» by Nicky Kalliongis devoted to providing tips and strategies for musicians. While some of these protocols pertain to being savvy with the technological aspect of MySpace, other protocols are directly related to learning a particular manner to network on MySpace. Furthermore, these practices are considered a serious work as they require a lot of time and networking skills to achieve a certain level of success, i.e. increasing the number of friends on one's network. Thus, this article examines the emerging social protocols on MySpace as a form of affective and immaterial labor. The author argues that the implementation of various tips as provided by MySpace expert will possibly have a regressive effect on musicians' social networking practices as these could become a standardized and repetitive practice. As a whole, this article traces the evolution of MySpace, especially in regards to the decreasing popularity of the site as a current trend.

RESUMEN

En los últimos años, MySpace ha sido crucial para promover el aumento de los seguidores de músicos independientes y ha representado un papel muy importante a la hora de ayudar a artistas populares a mantener las comunidades de fans. La popularidad de MySpace ha ido acompañada del establecimiento de protocolos sociales que han permitido a los músicos establecer vínculos entre ellos de una manera eficaz y exitosa. Estos protocolos han servido de inspiración para publicar varios libros (como «MySpace Music Profit Monster!: Proven Online Marketing Strategies!» de Nicky Kalliongis) con consejos y estrategias para los músicos. Si bien, algunos de estos protocolos pretenden conocer el aspecto tecnológico de MySpace, otros protocolos están directamente relacionados con el aprendizaje de una manera particular de conexión en red a través de MySpace. Además, estas prácticas son consideradas un trabajo serio, ya que requieren mucho tiempo y habilidades de conexión en red para lograr un cierto nivel de éxito, es decir, aumentar el número de amigos en la red personal. Así que, en este artículo, se analizan los protocolos sociales emergentes en MySpace como una forma de trabajo afectivo e inmaterial. La autora sostiene que la implementación de algunos consejos, como los proporcionados por expertos en MySpace, posiblemente pueda tener un efecto regresivo en las prácticas de los músicos en redes sociales, ya que podrían estandarizarizarse y volverse repetitivas. En conjunto, este artículo describe la evolución de MySpace, sobre todo en lo que respecta a la decreciente popularidad del sitio como una tendencia actual.

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1. Introduction

MySpace has become an integral part of musicians' social networking practices; MySpace is used as a way to easily promote, market, and distribute music. Because of the growing importance of the site, the number of self-help books related to MySpace has also increased. Purportedly these publications help musicians to expand their exposure and popularity. These books argue –either implicitly or explicitly- that gaining more exposure and winning new fans can be achieved by simply following a certain manual. In analyzing the art of social networking in this article, the discrete website protocols will be individually presented, as online social networking requires new methods for the act of befriending people.

Henry Jenkins (2006) highlights the importance of protocol by drawing on the work of Lisa Gitelman (2006). Jenkins states that «a medium is a set of associated 'protocols' or social and cultural practices that have grown up around that technology. Delivery systems are simply and only technologies; media are also cultural systems… Protocols express a huge variety of social, economic, and material relationships» (Jenkins, 2006: 13-14).

Protocols are of particular importance in reference to participatory culture: «As long as the focus remains on access, reform remains focused on technologies; as soon as we begin talking about participation, the emphasis shifts to cultural protocols and practices» (Jenkins, 2006: 23). The notion of protocols is critical because every social networking site has created a unique set of procedures that one must learn in order to maximize the benefits offered by each site. Thus, this article will analyze self-help books written by experts on MySpace with the goal of examining the rhetoric that is used in discussions of particular social protocols and the cultures on MySpace.

Learning to implement internet-based «social protocols» has been previously conceived as a form of immaterial, affective, and free labor (Suhr, 2009). Thus, the analysis of tips and recommendations will also shed light on the nature of the work involved in generating popularity on MySpace. As a whole, I argue that MySpace's popularity has given rise to contrived efforts to network and communicate with others. Eventually this will have a regressive effect on the future of MySpace as well as the careers of its users.

2. MySpace Musicians

MySpace's popularity is an extremely desirable goal for both unsigned musicians and musicians signed to major record labels. Colbie Caillat is a prime exam-

ple of an unknown artist becoming extremely popular. Whitney Self (2009) notes that after Caillat posted a few songs on MySpace, within eight months, she was the number one unsigned artist on MySpace; this eventually led to her contract with Universal Republic Records and her debut album, Coco, in 2007 (this charted at Number Five in Billboard).

Many mainstream musicians also utilize MySpace and Youtube as an important source of marketing. For example, singer-songwriter James Blunt, who is signed to Warner Brothers Records, released his album on MySpace (Contactmusic, 2007). Anyone can download his album for $9.99, and in addition to downloading, the purchaser also receives a CD album in the mail. However, it is important to note the cases in which artists who are signed to major record labels are transformed into indie artists by signing with the MySpace Record label. Concepcison (2008) reports in Billboard that Christina Millian, whose recording contract with Def Jam Record terminated in 2006, will sign a new deal with MySpace Records. In addition to signing with MySpace Records, artists who are already signed to major record labels, such as Lily Allen, utilize MySpace as another source of marketing new albums by performing in MySpace's «Secret Show Series» (Ayers, 2009). Allen is also reported to have performed in Tokyo for another of MySpace's «Secret Show Series».

As revealed in the above examples, MySpace does not just cater to independent artists, since it clearly embraces and aids mainstream artists who are signed to major record labels.

3. Labor on Social Networking Sites

According to John Banks and Sal Humphreys, «understanding media consumption as a labour practice is not entirely new» (Banks & Humphreys, 2008: 403). Banks and Humphrey explore the emergence of labor practices by drawing from the work of scholars such as Andrew Ross. Referring to Ross's argument, they argue that «the implications of social, peer production for the livelihoods and working conditions of creative workers have been ignored» (Banks & Humphreys, 2008: 405). This particular concept of labor intersects with the type of labor that the commercial industry pursues to gain financial rewards.

Banks and Humphrey also note weaknesses in Ross's arguments: «Ross does not come to terms with the emerging shape of social network markets in which the flows and extraction of value are very different from a simple displacement of traditional labour by unpaid creative labour» (Banks & Humphreys, 2008:

405). This point is crucial to this study's task of analyzing the relationship between value and labor.

On social networking sites, even though financial gain may result from laboring practices, the type of labor pursued differs from traditional labor forms in that laboring is often done on an immaterial and affective basis[1]. Banks and Humphrey further point out that labor becomes more complex when it is transformed into free labor: «this free labour has not been appropriated but voluntarily given. The relationships are much more nuanced and complex than the language of incorporation, appropriation or exploitation suggests» (Banks & Humphreys, 2008: 407). This article will strive to examine the social protocols that take place on MySpace as a form of labor. Analysis of experts' recommendations will clearly reveal the differences between this form of labor and traditional interpretations of work.

4. Laboring Tips from the Experts

Various books have been published to aid musicians in gaining more fans on MySpace (Vincent, 2007; Jag, 2007; Weber, 2007). This is an action which is viewed as a ticket to greater success and to the launching of professional careers in music. Thus in this section, I will be examining a recently published book specifically written for online music promotion called MySpace music profit monster: Proven online marketing strategies for getting more fans fast! by Nicky Kalliongis (2008). According to the back cover of the book, the author is «a veteran music industry professional that's worked with the likes of the legendary Clive Davis and L. A. Reid and with artists as diverse as Aretha Franklin, Arvil Lavigne, Outcast, Pink and Prince». After establishing the author's credentials as an «expert», the book explains how the author can help you to 1) make the most of your MySpace page; 2) utilize MySpace, Youtube, Facebook and Squidoo in concert for maximum online presence; 3) get people to visit your site and listen to your music; 4) increase traffic to your site; 4) write and circulate an effective press release; and 5) attract media, radio stations, record labels and fans and much more. The book also received a four and a half-star rating on Amazon.com from 21 customer reviews (although this rating should not simply be taken at its face value, in general, this publication has been positively received).

While the book promises to provide various tips on the topics stated above, what constitutes the author's actual advice? The whole point of examining the recommendations of the author is not to necessarily imply that the professional's advice is legitimate and true; however, in closely reading the tips and suggestions by the author, it becomes clear that becoming famous on MySpace requires serious work. Most importantly, labor on this website pertains to the immaterial and affective dimension. Examples of affective labor are evident when the author emphasizes tapping into the «caring» dimension. Kalliongis (2008) makes it clear that there are two issues that relate directly to increasing the number of friends and fans: «Use the invite system to create personalized invitations. Most people appreciate an email that means something ins-

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tead of a generic email that everyone receives. While this will take more time, it is worth doing in order to cultivate an invested friends list. You're not simply trying to amass the most friends, you're building your audience one fan at a time». (Kalliongis, 2008: 48)

As can be seen from this statement, there is an element of «affective labor» in the effort made by a musician to befriend the audience members and to then turn them into fans. Although fans actually support the artist, not all friends become active fans.

Kalliongis also emphasizes that the goal is to find a way to quickly capture the user's attention in very short time span: «your MySpace profile is your window to the world. It might only receive a fleeting glance from the passers-by, so grabbing their attention is important» (Kalliongis, 2008: 48). Kalliongis's tip is to first focus on the headline: «Headline: Your headline is important. It's one of the first things the user will notice, as it's positioned directly next to your picture. Your

headline can serve several purposes. Promotion of a new album or tour (e.g. our new single – out March 30th!). Use the headline to promote your upcoming work. If you're planning on releasing a single for download, mark it up in your Headline with a release date. This will instantly let the reader know what you're up to» (Kalliongis, 2008: 49).

Next the author focuses on the significance of slogans: «A catchy slogan that fits in with the genre that you're appealing to. If you can think of a catchy slogan, it's useful marketing mechanism. Having a catchphrase or gimmick can help establish your brand. The punk bands of the '70s and '80s made a lot of money using slogans and t-shirt-friendly phrases. It was part of their appeal, and people like to buy into something that seems cool. 1) A simple description of the band and its

• Link your MySpace page to your web site and vice versa. This will help increase your web exposure. Include keywords into your link which will also be picked up by search engines.

• Add high PR rating Google profile pages to your friends list in order to improve your own web ranking. Google's PR rating represents how important the page is on the web. It assumes that if one page links to another, it is giving an endorsement and a vote from the other site. This can be done by searching for the highest ranking profiles using the advanced search feature on Google. Enter the search term «MySpace profiles» and for the domain, enter «MySpace.com» so it will narrow your search to only those profiles on MySpace with the highest ranking. Simply do a friend request and when approved send them a comment. This is a very advantageous strategy! (Kalliongis, 2008: 56-57).

As some of these tips suggest, trying to attract users' attention on MySpace is a tedious task. What is particularly noteworthy about these recommendations is that all of these tactics are geared towards the building of one's persona as an active, important, and desired artist through concentration on interpersonal and interactive elements.

On a related note, the labor of adding «friends» is also highly emphasized by Kalliongis. He teaches how to accrue friends manually: «If you want to add more names to your friends list, placing an «Add me» button in a comment on a popular profile with a large friends list is a powerful way to get a large amount of new friends. You can use any picture you want to draw attention, and when a new friend clicks on it they will be asked to accept you as a friend. Podcasting from your blog or MySpace page is a good way to increase your fan base. A podcast is exactly the same as a blog, but with audio as well. To create a podcast, you need to upload your songs or other audio content to your web site or you can host your podcast to your MySpace blog or page by pasting your podcast (Kalliongis, 2008: 57).

> As a discrete group of users, musicians have long argued that popularity generated on MySpace can help launch or enhance their professional careers. Thus, there has been an increase in the various services that assist musicians in quickly attaining popularity. Despite attempts to cater to musicians and to stay relevant in the current cultural climate, there are numerous indications that MySpace may be turning into a less popular and trendy social networking site.

sound; 2) Bio: This field allows you to write a short history of your band or act. MySpace users have a short attention span. If you blitz them with an essay, they'll avoid it completely. Limit your bio to a couple of paragraphs of short and snappy text. Leave a link to an extended version if you must, but don't let it clog up your page» (Kalliongis, 2008: 49-50).

Kalliongis provides a few additional helpful tips about improving one's MySpace page to attract more attention:

• Using a picture that is taller rather than wider will make your profile stand out more when you are added to a friends list.

• Changing your URL on your profile page is helpful for a few reasons. Choosing a name that is easy to remember will help fans and others find your page. Adding a keyword or two will help search engines find your profile, which will result in higher rankings.

• Adding a logo is a good way to create name recognition on MySpace.

It is important to note that the laboring tips recommended in this quotation are very time-consuming and require a mastery of certain techniques. A successful user of this advice must be able to converge various media outlets and be savvy with all kinds of customi-

zing tools. Although learning and adapting to techno-logy is important in one's labor, Kalliongis highlights the more interpersonal aspect of labor, which is the art of social networking.

In addition to dedicating time to making one's pro-file appear more attractive, Kalliongis focuses on the social protocols of MySpace. The interactive dimen-sion is very important, as MySpace's central function is social networking. Work must be put into being so-cially pro-active on the website. Kalliongis mentions the exact same point: «Now that you have a complete MySpace profile, it's time to look at how to interact on the MySpace network. This is very important because the amount of time you spend marketing your music will determine how popular you become on My-Space. MySpace marketing is all about getting your name out there and making «friends». While you shouldn't expect this to extend to real life, a «MySpace friend» is a friend to appreciate. Every user you can get on your friend list will show others that your page is worth exploring (Kalliongis, 2008: 69).

This aspect is extremely important and resonates with other social networking sites as well. The social networking tips given by Kalliongis should be exa-mined further in order to understand the types of key components he is addressing, since some of them seem contradictory. For example, he states that while it is important to befriend others in a real, manual manner, «you shouldn't be concerned with the personalities of the people on your friend's list. A friend is a friend and in the world of MySpace, the more you have the bet-ter you'll be received» (Kalliongis, 2008: 69). The implication of this advice extends further than its obvious emphasis on the equation between the num-ber of friends and perceived popularity and value. In essence, Kalliongis seems to be saying that the specific people who consume one's music are not all that important, a perspective that completely ignores and dismisses the quality of audience members.

Hardt and Negri's understanding of immaterial and affective labor highlights the promising aspects of cooperation and social interaction: «the only configu-rations of capital able to thrive in the new world will be those that adapt to and govern the new immaterial, cooperative, communicative, and affective composi-tion of labor power» (Hardt & Negri, 2000: 27). In general, their outlook on immaterial and affective labor has been viewed as «benign» (Thompson, 2005: 85). However, these laboring processes may not only result in positive outcomes.

Some scholars, such as Gill and Pratt, are dissatis-fied with the notion of affective labor, since all work possesses affective dimensions and challenges: «if all work has affective dimensions then what does it mean to say that any particular job involves affective labour» (Gill & Pratt, 2008: 15). For these scholars, the puzz-ling aspect about affective labor is rooted in the con-ceptualization of the affect itself: «affect appears lar-gely in its more pleasant guises –solidarity, sociality, cooperativeness, desire– and, importantly, as (largely) always-already transgressive» (Gill & Pratt, 2008: 15). Gill and Pratt argue that the implications of the empha-sis on affirmative feelings are troublesome, especially taking into account contemporary capitalism that does not acknowledge the existence of other types of emo-tions such as «fatigue, exhaustions and frustration… fear, competitiveness, the experience of socializing not simply as pleasurable potential, but as compulsory means of securing future work» (Gill & Pratt, 2008: 15).

As the earlier examples of MySpace indicate, the affective dimension is, to some extent, deceptive; Ka-lliongis seems to recognize this, since he clearly disre-gards the quality and emphasizes the quantity of friends. Even if one proactively projects a positive image and sends out invitations, at the end of the day, the labor is only productive insofar as it fulfills one's goal of gaining popularity. Moreover, Kalliongis does not address how this type of affective labor of befrien-ding others may result in rejection and failure. Al-though one may extend invitations to numerous users, there may be many accounts of people disregarding the messages. Perhaps in an effort to prevent this type of outcome, MySpace's communicative mechanism includes various devices that encourage users to not ignore such messages. However, despite developing a way to encourage MySpace community members to acknowledge one another's messages and thus impro-ve the networking process, there are also ways in which one can reject all messages and friend requests from specific users by putting one's profile setting into a default mode.

While there are positive and affirmative aspects to affective labor on MySpace, it is also important to re-cognize that negative emotions can happen in the midst of one's labor. Thus, as Gill and Pratt assert, «these (unpleasant) affective experiences - as well as the pleasures of the work – need to be theorized to furnish a full understanding of the experience of cultu-ral work» (Gill & Pratt, 2008: 16). Similarly Hesmon-dhalgh and Baker (2008) contend that immaterial and affective labor is problematic, especially in the context of the creative industries. They also criticize Hardt and Negri for failing to specifically address the imma-

terial and affective labor that takes place in the cultural sector: «at some point in an account of the labour undertaken in a particular sector, such as the cultural industries, it will also be necessary to consider what is specific to that sector. At no point do Hardt and Negri offer even a hint of assistance in this respect. (Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2008: 99-100)

After pointing out Hardt and Negri's shortcoming, Hesmondhalgh and Baker turn their attention to a particular case study from the creative industries: the reality television programs related to talent competitions. In examining the talent program «Show us your talent», Hesmondhalgh and Baker explain that much of what is involved in this competition is emotional labor: «managing the emotional responses of others… is also integral in talent shows.

This applies not only to the performance itself but also to the contributor's walk on to the stage (trepidation, nervousness, excitement) and the post-performance chat in the green room (joy, disappointment, frustration, anger) (Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2008: 108). What this suggests is that the affective labor described by Hardt and Negri is not all-encompassing in the sense that not only affirmative and positive emotions are linked to such endeavors. Hesmondhalgh and Baker reveal how, in the creative industries and especially in talent shows, the pressure to win the show can often be emotionally draining and overwhelming; this can undermine the fun and happy times that often actually happen on such occasions (Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2008: 112).

From this study, we can locate MySpace within the larger landscape of the culture industries, where the focus is on one's talent and the methods for displaying one's talent in such a manner that people become fans. The following recommendations by Kalliongis (2008) underscore the pressure and delicacy of dealing with social networking issues: «I'd like to point that over-dressing your email can leave the user under the distinct impression that they're a recipient of a mass-marketing campaign, so make sure you «personalize» your correspondence in some small way… Be sure to add a little humor and self-deprecation. It loosens their guard and makes them slightly more willing to give your work a listen. Nobody likes an ego, so make sure the message isn't only about you. Focus on other topics in order to keep people interested in what you have to say. Remember that you're asking for a favor. You can sugar coat the message all you want, but at the end of the day, you're still bargaining for the cooperation of the user. Always remember to thank them, whether or not they decide to give their attention to your work. It's

a good idea to add a small disclaimer apologizing in the event that you've wasted any of their time. Once again, this example of good online etiquette is absolutely critical. You ARE looking for friends after all (Kalliongis, 2008: 75-76).

However when all else does fail, and one ends up being unsuccessful with online social networking or if one does not have the time to gather many friends, there is an alternative. One can purchase a MySpace profile, which are sold for prices up to $25,000 (Kalliongis, 2008: 69).

The similarities between television talent shows and MySpace are that both require a toughness to overcome personal emotions and a need to ingratiate oneself with others. On the television shows, one must learn to control one's anger and frustration, and to put on a cheery face at all times to convince program producers and staff members that one is cut out for the competition (Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2008). On MySpace, one must learn to deal with negative experiences, even if one is not getting the type of attention that one desires to receive, and one must become accustomed to soliciting others' support: «The idea of disguising yourself as a friend so that users open your mail without the pretences of spam and manufactured words is good as long as you let people know who you are» (Kalliongis, 2008: 75). This process of befriending others could potentially be draining, as one makes an effort to make as many friends as one can, only for the sake of becoming popular online. In the next section, I will explore the potential future directions of MySpace. What could be the ramifications of this labor? In general, will this type of labor promote or hinder MySpace's future success?

5. Social Protocols and the Future of MySpace

MySpace may still be considered worthwhile by some users, but is it already entering a state of decline? The last part of this article will explore a few indicators about the future trajectory of MySpace's prominence. In the article, «Rumors of the decline of MySpace are exaggerated», Duncan Riley (2007) discussed the controversial rumors about the decline of MySpace in reaction to the rising popularity of Facebook. At that time, Riley argued that MySpace was not being threatened.

Two years later in an article titled «MySpace shrinks as Facebook, Twitter and Bebo grab its users», David Smith (2009) reports that «MySpace had 124 million monthly unique visitors last month, a decline of 2%, according to the marketing research company comScore. Facebook, by contrast, racked up 276 mi-

llion unique visitors, an increase of 16.6%» (para. 5). Smith further explains that the reasons for MySpace's decline were linked to the increasing number of employee resignations at MySpace. According to Ryan Nakashima (2009) in Time, MySpace reportedly cut 30% of its staff in order to increase efficiency and to more closely resemble the make-up of the Facebook staff. MySpace is definitely aware of its rival Facebook as revealed by the hiring of former Facebook executive Owen Van Natta by News Corp. as its new chief executive. It is no exaggeration to say that MySpace is in need of new ideas for success, especially from someone who has experience creating success on Facebook.

Although MySpace's diminished popularity did not occur overnight, it is important to note that this development was neither sudden nor unforeseen. Over the six years since its founding in 2003, MySpace has experienced a gradual decline in membership, resulting in a loss in popularity, and a devaluation in the eyes of its users and others. As a discrete group of users, musicians have long argued that popularity generated on MySpace can help launch or enhance their professional careers. Thus, there has been an increase in the various services that assist musicians in quickly attaining popularity. Despite attempts to cater to musicians and to stay relevant in the current cultural climate, there are numerous indications that MySpace may be turning into a less popular and trendy social networking site.

In addition to the results from an informal survey of random users' views on MySpace and a collection of various news reports, my personal profile e-mail account is currently filled with countless spam and advertising messages. In the month of April 2009, a random review of the e-mail subject lines included the following announcements: «Last call for tickets to detour: NYC's premiere Film Noir & Arts Festival @ Galapagos in Dumbo Brkyn, Thurs April @ 7:30 pm»; «Hey I'm playing a show in New York»; «Bride has new stuff»; «Tania Stavreva Piano Recital at Yamaha Artists Services, Inc 05/08/09»; «Discover Sound- Join our online community»; «Download the new silent disorder EP now»; «Sin.sex.art. detour: NYC's premiere Film Noir & Arts Festival»; «booking: live shows,

photo shoots, and more». As the titles of these MySpace messages clearly indicate, almost none of the emails filling my mailbox are for non-promotional purposes. Contrary to the experts' recommendations on effective means for social networking on MySpace, the striving for popularity mitigates interactivity on the website, and this in return impacts individual artists' efforts to promote themselves. Although MySpace's gradual decline cannot be blamed solely on the experts' tips, I argue that when everyone starts adopting the recommended techniques and social protocols, MySpace will become a place where very few genuine connections and interactions will occur. However, this is not to say that criticism should only be placed on the musicians. According to Anthony Bruno (2009) on Billboard.com.

While the majority of the tips are useful to a certain degree, in the end, the merits of these recommendations can only last for a relatively short period of time. With the continual decline of MySpace's popularity, musicians may need different types of tips to maximize their use of MySpace. Perhaps instead of «dressing up» one's site or «spamming» others' accounts, a renewed focus on one's craft and music may once again redeem the value of MySpace and impede its drift into irrelevance.

«Trent Reznor is taking a break from social networking. As one of the more prolific users of Twitter, blogs and other social networking constructs, Reznor, in his latest post laments the degradation of the experience by spammers and trollers. Social networking certainly allows artists to get closer to fans, but Reznor writes, that's not always a positive thing.

As suggested by this statement, the artist-fan interaction is not the only thing that has become somewhat stale and contrived. Reznor has received numerous messages from fans claiming that the entire experience of social networking is also rather unpleasant at this point.

Although these messages actually pertain to another networking site, the same criticism could be applied to MySpace. Here the fully open connection between artists and fans could result in potentially manipulative or exploitive relationships.

6. Conclusion

In this article, tips and recommendations have been examined as a series of social protocols. Because standing out from the crowd is important for those involved with the social networking sites, many tips focus on how to outshine the other site members. It is important to understand that each individual tip given by the various writers is not as significant as the collective influence of the recommendations when they are adopted and then applied to the network. As time passes, the social protocols become norms on the social networking sites. These norms eventually influence and interact with each other, and can possibly become stale and formulaic. In short, once the protocols become standard practices, they may have a degenerative impact or an adverse consequence. As indicated numerous times in this article, gaining popularity requires paying attention to a large number of details. Affective labor is essential to this endeavor. Without a «personal touch, musicians» advertisements for their CDs and shows would be lost in the hundreds and thousands of emails generated by users of the various websites. Because so much information and marketing are created on the social networking sites, standing out as an artist required an intricate mastery of social protocols.

Yet, the irony is that there are also features on the social networking sites, specifically MySpace, that can result in the rejection of a band's or musician's profile all together (but only when the profile is left in the default setting mode). Another feature on MySpace requires approval in one's comments section before allowing songs to be posted on other users' profiles. In addition, as more and more people vie for attention in the network, users' attention span for each profile may decrease and produce a negative outcome. Thus, once a certain social networking site becomes widely popular, as is the case with MySpace, the danger develops that it could lose its vast appeal. This is the paradox that the givers of advice may not realize.

At the height of its popularity, MySpace was undoubtedly the most cutting-edge and pioneering of the social networking sites for independent as well as mainstream musicians. This article has explored the current state of MySpace in light of the tips and recommendations on «how to succeed on MySpace». While MySpace may be losing its appeal among users, one wonders about the value of the sites tips and recommendations — to what extent can these tips impact a musician's career? While the majority of the tips are useful to a certain degree, in the end, the merits of these recommendations can only last for a relatively short period of time. With the continual decline of MySpace's popularity, musicians may need different types of tips to maximize their use of MySpace. Perhaps instead of «dressing up» one's site or «spamming» others' accounts, a renewed focus on one's craft and music may once again redeem the value of MySpace and impede its drift into irrelevance.

Footnotes

[1] See (Suhr, 2009) for further reading. Lazzarato (1996) provides an informative discussion of the context of immaterial labor as a form of non-manual labor. Hardt and Negri (2000) focus on the benefits of affective labor (the emotional, sensorial, and caring dimension of work) in their publication, «Empire».

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