
//The Influence View of Content.

Version 0.1 << work in progress needing your critical feedback.

Philip Sheldrake (@sheldrake). 14th Nov 2011. Blog post: http://mnwh.li/influence_view_of_content

Précis.

Categorising media as Paid, Owned and Earned isn't particularly useful. In fact, it simply appears to reinforce increasingly irrelevant functional silos.

The Influence View of Content aims to establish something more useful. It's a perspective that seeks to help influence professionals think about how influence goes around and comes around in line with the [Influence Scorecard framework](#)¹.

Definition: Influence – you have been influenced when you think something you wouldn't otherwise have thought or do something you wouldn't otherwise have done.

Definition: The Influence Scorecard – serves as both the methodology for defining influence strategy and the tool for executing it.



Paid Owned Earned.

With the proliferation of what used to be known as “new media”, it was natural to attempt some sort of descriptive taxonomy:

Paid

Pay others to have your message on their media.

Owned

This media is (actually or effectively) mine. I can publish what I like.

Earned

Media relations, stakeholder conversations and user-generated content.



History.

This taxonomy evolved from a traditional regard for media. From what I can tell, Nokia was an early pioneer of this taxonomy, albeit expressing it as [Owned, Bought and Earned](#)².

A [Forrester blog post by Sean Corcoran](#)³ summed up the situation at the end of 2009 and [Forrester published research](#)⁴ defining each of the three media types and providing interactive marketers with prescriptive advice on how to best apply them.

Edelman's Dave Fleet proposed extending Corcoran's model with a fourth category, becoming [Paid, Owned, Earned and Social Media](#)⁵. This doesn't work for me simply because it's increasingly difficult to find any media without a social component.

McKinsey proposed two other categories: [Paid, Owned, Earned, Sold and Hijacked](#)⁶. I couldn't see the basis for Sold as it's just Paid viewed from the other side of the contract. And hijacked is earned – you earned it, just not in the way you'd envisaged!



Most recently, Brian Solis has attempted an extension: [Paid, Owned, Earned, Promoted and Shared](#)⁷. However (and perhaps I'm just anal when it comes to my expectations of a rational taxonomy) I consider Promoted to be a form of Paid, and Shared a hybrid of Owned and Earned.

Relevance.

I can't be the only one wondering however if there's any value in this taxonomy. When did you last hear of a marketing and PR strategy that was lent significant value by this taxonomy? Compared to approaches prior to the taxonomy's existence? Infrequently, or perhaps not once?

Whilst I appreciate McLuhan's "[the medium is the message](#)"⁸, the content of course is also the message, and I believe it's appropriate to move away from this limited taxonomy of media and try to develop a more useful Influence View of Content.



The Influence View of Content.

This is a work in progress and its validity will rest on the level of interest, application and collaboration it stimulates; ie, the influence it has.

Definition: **Content – published information.**

For the purposes here, I consider a social sharing action to be (re)publishing in so much as the act raises the content to others' attention.

In forming the Influence View of Content I consider two questions:

- Q1. What might influence the creation of content?
- Q2. Is the intent to exert influence central to the creation of every single piece of content?



Q1. What might influence the creation of content?

Candidate primary (supertype) influences:

Emotion – I want to express my feelings

Pursuit of organisational objective – eg, I think creating the content could have commercial benefit to my for-profit organisation

Professional interest – related to what I do for a living (but not necessarily in direct pursuit of an organisational objective)

Personal interest – but not necessarily emotional

Self-identity – content to reinforce how I'd like others to see me

Status information – eg, the flight is boarding at Gate 42

Public information – eg, anti-smoking health advice leaflet

Education – the content serves an educative purpose

Artistic – artistic expression

Boredom – content for self-stimulation



Machined – content that is automatically discovered, presented and published by machines for humans (ie, making sense of ‘big data’ for us).

Rational?

These influences are not mutually exclusive. Emotion could be a subtype of personal interest for example, but then not every emotional impetus could be described in terms of being of personal or professional interest. And George Orwell would have it that “all art is propaganda” of course.

Ultimately, each supertype influence must stand alone in at least one context of content creation.

A bit about emotion and personal happiness

Aristotle argued that it was in our interest, given our deeply social nature, to participate in civic life in order to fulfil ourselves. Jefferson followed this through when he wrote the American constitution and interpreted it as the ‘pursuit of happiness’. Is this pursuit a subtype of Emotion or Personal Interest?



A bit about self-identity

[Elizabeth Shove and Alan Warde](#)⁹ note that social theorists maintain “people define themselves through the messages they transmit to others through the goods and practices that they possess and display. They manipulate and manage appearances and thereby create and sustain a ‘self-identity’.”

But does influence on others have to be exerted to accomplish the purpose of creating a self-identity, or is it sufficient for the content creator to simply believe others have been influenced accordingly? Does self-identity simply require self-influence?

A bit about boredom

Shove et al note some social-psychological accounts of consumption explain that people seek new products and new pleasures because they need stimulation. Playing new games, trying out new items, exploring new material objects, and learning new tastes are ways of averting boredom, as is creating content in the process. The facilities of the many apps and widgets people try are testament to this need.



A bit about machined media

Machined media is related to the definition of the [Semantic Web](#)¹⁰, when the Web becomes a universal medium for the exchange of data, information and knowledge. While some initial human direction is needed, the [intelligent agent](#)¹¹ undertaking the discovery and content creation is then essentially autonomous. The degree of autonomy will indicate whether machined media is a supertype influence, or servant subtype.

Other candidates

I have identified the following but consider them to be subtypes of the supertype influences above:

Payment – eg, payment in pursuit of organisational objectives

Collaboration – to work together; but why?

Association – eg, brand association; but why?

For a “cause” – eg, environmentalism; personal or professional interest?

News worthiness – too generic to be useful imho.



Q2. Is the intent to exert influence central to the creation of every single piece of content?

Or in other words, when might you create content that seeks no influence? And in such circumstances, what then is the purpose of its creation?

If we take it that whenever content is intended *for* others it must be seeking to affect the other – to influence them to think or feel or do something – then perhaps the only time content is created without influence in mind is when the content is created for one’s personal needs or desires alone?

Importantly for our application here, the instances of content creation not seeking influence appear few.

Art

George Orwell’s assertion aside, perhaps some art is simply personally satisfying; content created simply for no other reason than it can be created.



Ideas in progress

One might argue that content in private draft format – as embryonic ideas, as works in progress – is not designed to influence others. But then this is just one step removed in terms of influence; it's building up to it.

In conclusion.

The Influence View of Content has been in my head as a work in progress, and following conversations with those thanked below it is now a work in progress seeking influence, created for reasons of personal interest and the pursuit of organisational objectives. I hope it might prove useful before we might ever call it finished.

The ease and effectiveness with which we manage and learn from influence flows is integral to the ways all stakeholders interact with organizations to broker mutually valuable, beneficial relationships¹². As most content exerts influence, every influence professional must seek to understand what influenced the creation of relevant content, and might then influence it in future.



Thanks.

David Phillips, Jay O'Connor, Gabbi Cahane, Andrew Bruce Smith, Mark Pinsent.



Endnotes.

¹ <http://mnwh.li/influenceprofessional>

² <http://mnwh.li/danielgoodall>

³ http://mnwh.li/forrester_earned_owned_paid

⁴ http://mnwh.li/forrester_no_media_should_stand_alone

⁵ http://mnwh.li/davefleet_evolution_social_media

⁶ http://mnwh.li/mckinsey_beyond_paid_media

⁷ <http://mnwh.li/thebrandsphere>

⁸ http://mnwh.li/the_medium_is_the_message

⁹ Inconspicuous consumption: the sociology of consumption and the environment, Elizabeth Shove and Alan Warde, published by the Department of Sociology, Lancaster University, 1998 – http://mnwh.li/inconspicuous_consumption

¹⁰ http://mnwh.li/wikipedia_semantic_web

¹¹ http://mnwh.li/wikipedia_intelligent_agent

¹² The Business of Influence, Sheldrake, Wiley, April 2011

