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## Component 1 : portfolio of speculative communication explorations

### Part 1 : identity and digital communication, networked selfhood, algorithmic curation and the speculative synthetic avatar

This is because human identity is no longer perceived as unchanging or as being the only one shaped by physical existence. In today's society, identity is increasingly being formed through digital communication, social media and networked environments. Individuals present themselves, interact with others, and communicate through digital profiles, photos, videos, comments, and others online. Consequently, identity is an ongoing and enacting phenomenon wherein people choose to be seen by others in various ways. However, the idea of the “networked self” is especially relevant to this change as it exposes how people build and manage their identities through interactions with digital networks.

Social media sites offer users many tools to build their online persona. Users are able to choose pictures to include in their profile, write their biography, pick a username, edit pictures, add visual filters and determine what aspects of their life they wish to share publicly. These options enable people to make versions of themselves which can be dissimilar to their real lives. A person might seem self-assured, trendy, successful or adventurous and seem like this in the online world, even if it is not always the case in their real life. Digital communication thus provides individuals with more control over self presentation as they can choose what information the other users see.Online identity construction, however, is not completely individual. The architecture of the platform and algorithmic systems also shape how users behave and present themselves. Social media algorithms decide which information is more visible, which posts are engaged with and which types of communication are suggested to users. High attention content tends to be highly spread and people begin to understand what type of content is deemed successful in a given platform. This establishes a link between users and algorithms, whereby the users tune their online behaviour based on what they think will be addressed.

This can be seen as a continuous negotiation between technology and human expression. Because users have learned what works in an algorithmic environment, they can change how they take pictures of themselves, how they write captions, what topics they choose, etc., and how they communicate with others. In this regard, algorithms are not just about distributing content; they can shape or shape their construction. A user can start to create content around hobbies or interests, but as time goes on, they may be influenced by the expectation of the platform that they will create content that belongs to that.This progress is particularly remarkable with the advent of speculative communication technologies based on generative AI and virtual avatars. The future communication environments may not just be given a profile picture and able to edit content manually, but will be represented digitally, which can communicate on behalf of users. A synthetic avatar might be able to mimic a person's voice, facial expressions, gestures and speech. Rather than displaying a picture of a person, the avatars could serve as a proxy communicator in virtual environments.

A potential advancement is to use an “avatar talking” head. Generative AI could provide a virtual counterpart that interacts with speech, mimics facial gestures and expressions and responds to dialogue. This avatar can be used in professional meetings, educational settings, customer communication or social settings. This might be convenient since a person wouldn't necessarily have to be in the building where communication is taking place. Meanwhile, it poses the question of whether communication using an AI-generated representation would remain true to their original message.One more thing is the greater fluidity and anonymity. Synthetic avatars could help demystify the connection between identity and geography, as well as physical traits. People might have multiple avatars to the various virtual worlds, exploring identities that they may not be able to explore or feel comfortable in the physical world. This might give opportunities for experimenting and expressing oneself, especially those who may wish to communicate without an immediate disclosure of physical identity.

But there's a risk in having more freedom of digital identity. There's a worry about algorithmic homogenisation. Digital identities may become more standardised over time if AI systems use the same datasets and aesthetic preferences to create avatars. Automated systems could promote convergence rather than diversity in terms of their appearance, communication style and behaviour. Digital platforms, therefore, may not be as individualistic as they seem, since the technologies creating these identities could restrict the individuality that this platform is supposed to offer. But with the increasing capacity to create and control digital representations, comes the problem of authenticity and trust. When the avatar looks and sounds like a person, it might be hard to tell if it's real or not. The differences between human and machine mediated communication may become more and more blurred. There is a need for more robust trust, verification and responsible representation in future communications systems.

Finally, individuals have more control than ever in how they communicate themselves but not without the influence of technology. Therefore, identity will likely continue to be an ongoing process of negotiation involving individual expression, social norms, algorithmic systems and new technologies. The future of digital identity can offer greater freedom and creativity, but will also demand individuals to ponder on what it means to be authentic in a world where intelligent systems can produce and manipulate digital representations.

**Part 2 : Media, information and influence**

Media systems have an important impact on structuring, distributing and interpreting information in society. Traditionally, one might think the audience as a recipient of information shared by newspapers, television, radio and other traditional media. This relationship has been transformed by digital communication. Audiences are now active participants who create, share, respond to and modify information. Consequently, communication has become continuous with a data-driven feedback loop where 'users' program the information that they receive and their behaviour produces data for algorithmic systems. Algorithmic curation plays a key role in this shift. Data gathered through digital platforms can include viewing history, search queries, what

users click on, what users share and view, and how users interact with content. These signals can then be used to show which content to show to individual users. This process is frequently linked to the phenomenon of attention and engagement. The content that is new, engaging and/or likely to be interacted with in some way will thus be seen more prominently than information that is merely important or editorially valuable.

This results in a great transformation of the relationship between media and audiences. Rather than being presented with similar information and news as others in the society, people are increasingly presented with personalised information environments. Users on the same platform can see different content based on their past activities and interests. This results in what can be called content fragments, local feedback loops and individualised content ecosystems.There are many benefits of personalised media. Users can find information that is relevant to them and not have to wade through a lot of irrelevant information. For a student who is interested in the field of communication, it is not long before he/she comes across articles, videos and conversations about digital media. Likewise, viewers can be notified about the topics that they are interested in, almost instantly. Personalisation can also, however, restrict access to information that challenges current thinking.

It may increasingly be the case that individuals live in information worlds which reinforce their own prejudices in a hyper-personalised media landscape. If users keep seeing the same kinds of content suggested to them, they might not get to see different perspectives. This may reduce the amount of shared experiences and common information sources, which can impact on public discussion. In a society in which everyone experiences a different reality, group sense making can become more challenging.This trend might be even exacerbated by speculative communication technologies. Future generative systems could be able to produce information dynamically based on the individual cognitive profile, interests and background knowledge of each user. A system may be able to create a new version of an article or video for a specific person, as opposed to just pointing to an existing one. News, marketing and public relations messages might then be very adaptive.

A potential future could be hyper-personalised streams of content. In contrast to regular newspapers, magazines or radio and television programmes, in the future, media could dynamically generate and customise content based on each user's preferences. An explanation from a user on a complex issue may be sent to the user in a manner corresponding to their past instruction and interests and preferred mode of communication. This may help to make information more accessible and understandable.

Simultaneously, hyper-personalisation is problematic in terms of manipulation. Communication systems can elicit a person's attention and make extremely persuasive messages. Marketing and public relations may become more and more powerful, as messages might be tailored as they are used, based on engagement indicators and other behavioural data. It may be hard to differentiate useful personalisation and manipulation, then.The synthetic verification issue is another big challenge. The distinction between authentic information and synthetic information may grow increasingly difficult as the capabilities of generative technologies to produce realistic

sounds, images and written content continue to rise. The issue isn't restricted to inaccurate information. However, even if the information in a message is accurate, it may be conveyed by artificial content, making it more difficult for consumers to recognize the origin of the message and whether it has been edited.

There is a big transfer of responsibility. In traditional media world, editorial institutions would play an important role in transmitting information from the source to the destination. Technical systems, platforms and users might increasingly be used in speculative digital environments for verification. People might have to be more discerning about information in digital media, especially when information looks very realistic, but is generated algorithmically.In the future, the impact of the media is likely to be more complicated. Communication will not just be one-way from one person or organisation to another. Rather, systems can continually analyze behavior, send messages, record responses, and adjust subsequent communication. This establishes the strong user-algorithm-media producers feedback loop.

Public discourse might have some repercussions. When every individual's information environment is continuously personalised, shared references in the culture and the society can diminish. There can be a lack of consensus as to what is important, as people are influenced by different priorities and interpretations. Personalised media can help to promote convenience and relevance, but can also challenge the more collective understanding.Thus, the future media system must be judged not only on the basis of the efficiency with which information is conveyed. They need to be considered in the context of their impact on trust, diversity in views, public discussion and individual autonomy. The challenge will be to create communication spaces that will benefit from personalisation without letting algorithms and generative systems take over what people see, believe and discuss.

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**Part 3: Culture, creativity and meaning**

Culture, values and creative practices serve as important tools for the communication and meaning making of societies. People rely on language, symbols, rituals, art, music, architecture and other creative expressions to communicate cultural values and to maintain collective memory. These are not just art objects but are also imbued with histories, beliefs and meanings that have been created over generations. The communication revolution is still bringing together societies across geographical areas and cultural expression is being digitalized by means of digital platforms and new technologies.

There are greater opportunities for the dissemination of cultural ideas across communities as a result of digital globalisation. The traditional art style can now be enjoyed by audiences globally virtually at a moment's notice. This gives opportunities for cultural exchange and awareness on different traditions. But global digital platforms can also alter the meaning of cultural expressions by setting them in new contexts. A culture trait can be detached from the community that originally used it and offered as a piece of art or as a product to be sold.

This illustrates that meaning is not necessarily enduring. Through creative products moving across countries, languages, communities and communication platforms, cultural meaning can change. A symbol can be meaningful in one community and have a different meaning to another. Digital communication facilitates that because cultural material can be copied, remixed and share-d d throughout the world.The possibilities of generative artificial intelligence, neural interfaces and spatial computing, among other speculative technologies, would further alter cultural creativity. These technologies should not be considered a substitute for human imagination. Instead, they can be considered tools or substrates that change the ways people create, experience and communicate meaning. Humans can continue to be the protagonists of their own creativity, and technology can offer opportunities for experimentation.

One of the key examples is the algorithmic co-creation and generative heritage. Historical works of art, oral histories, architecture, and other cultural artifacts could be used to train future generative systems. These systems could be a way for communities to consider new interpretations of their heritage, yet still remain connected to historical references. A system could be developed to create new visual forms based on traditional art forms, and communities could be given the opportunity to try out working with how heritage can be manifested in modern environments.This could be a useful method for cultural conservation. Digital systems might be able to preserve historical materials and ensure that they are available to younger generations. Interactive environments provide an opportunity for people to be present to their cultural history rather than just reading about it. The traditional story, architectural environment and artistic form may be converted into interactive digital experiences, which can facilitate increased engagement with heritage.

But cultural heritage preservation with technology should be taken in a cautious manner. Cultural heritage is not just a set of visual patterns or a set of data. Older traditions may have social, historical and spiritual significance that is not reflected in the data that is fed into a generative system. A representation of a cultural practice by technology may turn into superficial if the technology does not understand the context of the practice. Brain-computer interfaces and immersive environments may be other ways to communicate. Future communication technologies might be able to convey emotional or conceptual information by means of digital representations rather than using verbal or written means. It might respect new paradigms of empathetic and intercultural communication, enabling people to feel into another person's emotions or viewpoint.

Some of these technologies have the potential of lowering some of these barriers in language. Language barriers may no longer pose a significant problem if emotions and concepts can be expressed by other means, such as through an immersive or symbol system. But, there really no way to divorce cultural meaning from language and context. Technology can't always ensure common ground, as emotional experiences are also shaped by cultural expectations.

There are also ethical issues with the development of computational culture. Cultural appropriation is a significant worry. Generative AI systems could also be a source for the exploitation of cultural heritage in situations where traditional cultural images are reproduced

without permission and without meaningful participation of the communities that produced them. Producing an image based on a given tradition does not give ethical permission to use that tradition. The issue of authorship is another one that is important. Thus, if a generative system produces a new cultural product based on past resources, it can be challenging to decide who deserves to be credited. The contribution of the various parties, including the original artists, cultural communities, system developers and users, can be indirect. This questions the notion of ownership and authorship of the creative act.

More than ever before sacred cultural practices are given special consideration. Certain symbols, stories, ceremonies and imagery forms may not be reproduced or commercialized without permission. When such material is produced by a technological system, with little sense of context, it can become a superficial aesthetic product, rather than something culturally meaningful. This may negatively impact the ties between cultural expression and the communities that uphold it. Thus it is necessary to consider technological innovation along with ethical responsibility. Cultural materials should be collected, represented and transformed in a way that is meaningful for communities. Technology should promote cultural diversity, not all cultures should be made to be digital in appearance.

In the end, culture and creative expression are still significant means by which humans make sense. The speculative communication technologies could have impacts on enhancing creativity, saving heritage and new cross-cultural communication. But there are benefits to responsible development and use. The aim is not to replace culture with technology, but to utilize technology to augment human creativity and to ensure cultural meaning, diversity, authorship, and community ownership.

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