Referee Report

of the PhD. Thesis by Michail Tsikerdekis

Social Interaction Design for Social Media:
The Case of Groupthink and Agression

The present Report is prepared at the request of the dean of the Faculty of Informatics of Masaryk University, Brno, prof. RNDr. Michal Kozoubek, PhD., announced by his letter dated December 4, 2012.

The reviewed dissertation consists of eight numbered chapters (including the References forming the part of the last, the eight Chapter entitled Conclusion). The report ends with the author’s peer reviewed publications (five items), and the list of his lectures and presentations (three items are mentioned, however no item on profesionally considerable international scientific events appears).

The first Chapter introduces the whole topic of the study. Some necessary notions are described or defined in it, useful examples are given in order to make some of the definitions clearer, and the main aims of the study are itemized. The main goal of the study is specified as “… not only establish how software affects social behavior online but establish a framework through which this information can be used by software engineers in order to produce quality software that will allow for more efficient social interactions.” (cited from p. 14 of the reviewed study). The main contribution of the study is to help to “… improve collaboration in online communities and groups providing empirical evidence for inhibiting groupthink and aggression when adapting software features and as such demonstrating methods for future investigation of similar features” (citation from the same page).

Chapter 2 (Web 2.0 and Social Media History) in its first part focuses on a historical overview of the topic with emphasis put on the social media services proces, and the progress in the field of the information and communication technology. The Chapter is well written and comprehensive.

Chapter 3 deals in more details with goupthinking emphasizing and giving some examples of the role of groupthinking in social media endangering. Similarly as in the previous Chapters, the matter of discussion is supported by number of suitable references also in this Chapter. Similarly as in the case of the previous Chapter, this Chapter ends with a short but comprehensive summarizing list of main aspects, which seem to be importat for the rest of the refereed study.

Chapter 4 presents the possibility for research of individual features for groupthink in social media. This Chapter starts with presentation of the author’s own ideas and research results, supported with deep knowledge of the related works and important contributions to the subject. The Chapter focuses on the analysis and findings for the social media features in relation to groupthinking. It presents a relative deep analysis of the formulated questions and
answers, and is based mainly on author’s own results which seem to be professionally correct and interesting, supported with correct experiments. The Chapter ends with some recommendations attached to the presented results as an outline for further research.

Chapter 5 introduces the phenomenon of the aggression into the discussion of the thesis. The topic is, as in the previous cases, specified first, and then divided into different types. The list of features that are exposed in the following chapters of the study are specified, too. The analysis seems comprehensive and complete enough, and proves according to my opinion the author’s good and deep enough familiarity with this part of the topic.

The research of the individual features of aggression in social media is overviewed in Chapter 6 of the thesis together with author’s own results on the topic. His analysis contains also the formulation of several new hypotheses, which become the subject of his study, esp. the problem of the so called re-evaluation. The re-evaluation is studied then in more details (the hypotheses can be found in p. 84, 90, and 97 of the thesis).

Chapter 7 provides the social interaction design framework. Based on the results described in the previous chapters author argues that social behavior is not only affected by interfaces but that it enables proactive design interfaces for engineering of the behavior. This leads the author to the new definition of the social interaction design, which is based on social experience and the appropriate framework, enabling design and development of appropriate software tools.

Chapter 8 contains the conclusions of the thesis and the list of referenced resources.

Going through the thesis several questions appears in the reader’s mind. The most important from my point of view seems the question of different (from technical to the moral) aspects of the effort to engineer the human activities in the frame of the social networks. In the thesis there are few places devoted to the social responsibility in connection with the implantation of technological innovations into the psychology of our decision making activities. So, what are the dangers which may follow from or are connected with the introduction of the proposed approaches into practice? If any, then how do we become aware of them and how do we act in confrontation with them? I suppose that the author has some professionally founded answer(s), and I am curious to know it (them).

I consider the study as well elaborated, providing number of new results and views, and contributing significantly to the understanding of the studied phenomena. The provided results are well supported by provided experiments, are professionally interesting and actual, and new, and may contribute to the application of our present day technology to social interactions. Because of these reasons I am confirming the reviewed study as a successful PhD. thesis in the field of informatics, and after the successful defense of the thesis I propose the award of the scientific degree philosophiae doctor (PhD.) to Mr. Michail Tsikerdekis.

December 24, 2012, Opava

(Jozef Kelemen)