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# Collaborative Poetry on the Facebook Social Network

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## ABSTRACT

Previous research has identified many characteristics of social networks that can support creative collaboration. To examine the possibilities and issues involved, we created a collaborative poetry project on the popular social network Facebook. Nineteen participating poets from five cities contributed to a multimedia poem written in two languages.

## Categories and Subject Descriptors

J.5 [Arts and Humanities]: Literature – *collaborative poetry, hypertext*.

## General Terms

Design, Human Factors

## Keywords

Collaboration, Social Networks, Creativity, Facebook

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Recent statistics show the unprecedented growth of the popularity of social networks. Facebook, the most famous social network, is the second most visited website on the Internet [1]. Previous research has identified many characteristics of social networks that can support creative collaboration. These studies have argued that not only these networks provide members with control over timing and content of their contributions, but also they provide ease of communication over a wide geographical area and the possibility of engaging with a diverse group of people with minimal cost, effort and risk [5] [8]. Additionally, many social networks support multimedia content through the sharing of various media such as images, video and audio.

In this project, we created a multimedia poetry project, “Our Digital Tapestry”, in order to investigate the possibilities as well as limitations involved in engaging in creative collaboration on the popular social network, Facebook. Another motivation for this project was to examine how using such a medium can affect the form and content of the contributions.

## 2. SOCIAL NETWORKS AND CREATIVE COLLABORATION

Many factors identified as important for the immense success of social networks are relevant to online creative collaboration as well. By transcending geographical and social boundaries, these

networks provide members with the opportunity to socially engage with a diverse group of people with minimal cost and risk. While being a member of a social network provides access to a community that can provide technical and emotional support, it does not directly impose requirements on the level of involvement for each member. Thus, members have flexibility and control over the content and timing of their engagement with other members. Furthermore, the medium can be more “democratic”, in the sense that the lack of social status cues helps the development of relationships that might be prevented by offline social barriers [9].

Social networks have been used to facilitate collaboration in the business environment [2]. Also, it has been observed that many artist groups use Facebook as a tool to publish information about their activities and projects and to communicate with fans. However, professional artists tend to prefer other means of collaboration and use social networks mainly for promotional activity [7].

## 3. “OUR DIGITAL TAPESTRY”

In order to examine the possibilities and issues of initiating and conducting a creative collaboration project on a social network first hand, we created “Our Digital Tapestry”. Over a period of four weeks, nineteen participating poets from five cities collaborated on the project. The result of the collaboration is a multimedia poem written in two languages, English and Farsi. The poem included hyperlinks to videos and images. The poem along with information about the collaborating poets is maintained on a separate website [6].

Each week an original short poem was posted on the “status” field of the researcher’s Facebook profile. In Facebook, “status” refers to a short public text message that each user can associate with his or her profile. Members typically use this field to share news, opinions or other forms of immediate information, such as travel destinations, in a public manner. For the duration of the week, collaborators participated by adding their own poetry or posting links to multimedia content outside the social network website. The participating poets as well as the audience were all members of the social network of the researcher. The participating poets were recruited through a Facebook message that explained the project. In this way, the researcher was involved in the project not only as an initiator and collaborator but also as the main social link between all the participants. In previous research, it is stressed that assuming the role of artist-researcher can provide insight into the creative process that might not be possible otherwise [4].

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Figure 1. An excerpt from "Our Digital Tapestry"

Figure 1 shows an excerpt from "Our Digital Tapestry". Each contribution is marked by a timestamp as well as a thumbnail of the profile picture of the participant. This is convenient because anybody visiting the page could identify which section of the poem was written by whom and directly could contact the poet if desired. As can be seen, three scripts are used to write this section of the poem: English, Farsi and "Penglish", which is Farsi written using English letters.

During the project, we observed that the poem often took the form of a dialogue between different participating poets. This resembled, in form, the messages regularly sent in Facebook via the "status" field. The main difference was in the language used. By consciously engaging in a poetry project, the users were expressing themselves in a poetic form on a public space. Since

the researcher was also the initiator and a collaborating poet in the project, many of the submitted poems were written in response to his original posts.

## 4. CONCLUSION AND FUTURE WORK

We have presented "Our Digital Tapestry", a collaborative poetry project on Facebook. In this project, nineteen poets were able to use the social network to collaborate on a multimedia poem. In future work, we plan to use autoethnography to identify and examine the factors that were encountered in the creative process by the artist-researcher [3].

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