Locking in a virtual world

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Abstract

In our digitally interconnected world, the internet plays a pivotal role in daily life, including with a large proportion of education and the arts. This paper delves into street dance education, specifically focusing on the effectiveness of online learning compared to traditional, in-person, one-on-one mentoring. Utilizing a netnographic approach, we investigate the archive of locking tutorials available on YouTube, exploring how these platforms connect a global community of street dance practitioners.

Keywords: Hip hop, locking, netnography, virtual learning, dance teaching.

Locking in a Virtual World.

Our world is dependent on the internet, playing a major role in our day-to-day activities, living and studies, connecting our world into a direct line of global communication. For my project, I am using the internet to connect to the locking scene using archival footage and tutorials available in informal archive on YouTube, Instagram, Tik-Toc, Facebook and data collected through comments accompanying each video. I will examine various research topics to discover how effective online learning is comparable to in-person, one-on-one mentoring in street dance. Using the method of netnography (1995) based on the work of netnographer, Kozinets (2010, 2020).

> Netnography encompasses interviews, data scraping, archival work, online observations, and active engagement with new forms of data collection, visualization, thematic analysis, and field- level rhetorical representation. This edition intensifies the focus on technique but maintains a strong grounding in social scientific theory that seeks, more than ever, to bridge fields such as communication, computer science, cultural studies, anthropology, and psychology. (Kozinets, 2020, page 5).

As a dance professional and teacher, I have always been fascinated with the movement and technique of all forms of dance genres that can be found in street, cultural and concert dance. While growing up in rural Saskatchewan in the 1990’s to 2009, accessibility to street dance was limited. Most of my street dance training was through cultural exchanges from music videos shown on Much Music, dance events, VHS/DVD tutorials purchased from dance conventions and the start of social media through MySpace, Facebook and YouTube until I was able to locate a street dance crew that opened a dance studio in a major city near my hometown. Especially engaging my interest was locking and the movement technique started when my interest in the material I was teaching in my hip hop classes was disappearing; I wanted to reach back into my past training to rekindle my passion. The few classes available in Toronto did

not work with my training and teaching schedule, so I found resources and tutorials on YouTube.

Dance teachers and artists gain students and an audience by uploading their work onto YouTube and other social media applications. Asia Kibona Clark states in The Role of New and Social Media in Tanzanian Hip Hop Production, 'Social media creates an environment where participants communicate, exchange and share. This environment empowers artists and content creators and allows for direct engagement with participants' (Clark, 2014, p. 1131). Locking has been showcased historically through virtual technology. Before the movement was seen on YouTube, it was presented on the television show Soul Train (1971-2006). The show received consistently good television ratings and focused on hip hop dance and culture. Dancers, most notably from the West Coast, were accustomed to funk styles of dance, such as locking and popping, that were seen on the show. Soul Train covered soul and disco music, dance and everything else under the umbrella of funk. Dancers showcased their movement ability and allowed viewers exposure to learning these movements from the television screen.

While looking at locking history and tutorials online, I discovered variations similar in execution and knowledge from one location to the next. This is due to the global nature of the hip hop community. At the end of the 20th century, global communities were created as the internet became more accessible. For example, DJ Kool Herc stated in his essay "Keeping it Right" (2005), featured in Chang's Can't Stop, Won't Stop (2005).

> 'To me, hip hop says, "Come as you are." We are a family. It ain't about security. It ain't about bling-bling. It ain't about how much your gun can shoot. It ain't about $200 sneakers. It is not about me being better than you or you being better than me. It's about you and me, connecting one to one. That's why it has universal appeal. It has given young people a way to understand their world, whether they are from the suburbs or the city or wherever' (Chang, 2005, p. 8).

The emergence of hip hop in any individual's life is about discovering oneself regardless of where they are in society.

Literature review

Hip hop culture transcended its original birthplace on the East Coast in New York City from Black, Latino and other racial groups to youth pressing against poverty and injustice internationally[i]. Marcyliena Morgan and Dionne Bennett wrote, 'Hip Hop and the Global Imprint of a Black Cultural Form' (2011) aligned their article with the tenets of hip hop wherein hip hop is not meant for one race, one nation or one group. Instead, hip hop has leaped and grown into its language and body of knowledge representing different races, ages and economic standing. 'Global hip hop has emerged as a culture that encourages and integrates innovative practices of artistic expression, knowledge production, social identification and political mobilization. In these respects, it transcends and contests conventional constructions of identity, race, nation, community, aesthetics and knowledge' (Morgan and Bennet, 2011, p. 177).

Traditionally in a Western context, dance is taught through the epistemological tradition of constructivism/interpretivism and objectivism/behaviourism. Being in the room or studio as a dancer with a teacher/mentor, gaining knowledge through interaction and experience. Dancers enter the room and take on the information that is instructed in real time and embodied. 'Behaviourism and cognitivism view knowledge as external to the learner and the learning process as the act of internalizing knowledge' (Siemens, 2004, p. 2). My research on learning locking online came from the informal library of locking tutorials on YouTube uploaded by locking and street dance practitioners. This living archive is constantly updated with new variations and information. Hilderbrand's article YouTube: Where Cultural Memory and Copyright Converge (2007).

> "Viewers and academics have quickly come to treat the site as an informal archive of television texts" (48). YouTube was referred to as a source of cultural renaissance, and its influence, particularly on Western culture, is celebrated. The acceptance of YouTube and the evolving applications the website offers continues to progress. Content is continually uploaded or displayed in real-time and Hilderbrand states, "... YouTube the medium of its moment..." (Hilderbrand, 2007 p. 48).

Different types of videos are constantly uploaded to YouTube. The content created by Youtubers includes individuals, brands, corporations, influencers and vloggers (video bloggers). Content varies and is categorized into personal topics, marketing videos and popular categories such as culture, education or trending. The categories organized through hashtags create a library of cultural memories as defined by Hilderbrand: 'A concept that suggests the idiosyncratic ways that personal experience, popular culture, and historical narratives intersect' (2007, p. 50). He notes the importance of cultural memory by explaining how YouTube is used as an archive. This archive feeds scholarly and nostalgic uses. YouTube circulates information while being a resource for searching for content.

A question that comes to mind is: how can YouTube be both social media and be considered an archival resource? Researcher Dijck answers this question in his article 'YouTube Beyond Technology and Cultural Form' (2013), saying, '...Homecasting systems are social media platforms, here the technological features are provided by the website ... allow users to form communities and connect to each other on the bases of connective algorithms' (Dijck, page 149). When videos are uploaded, they are distributed through a series of tags. This results in an informal archive representing cultures and communities, allowing users to interact with each other based on preferences. These are channels, comments, featured videos and virtual likes in the form of thumbs up or down. YouTube's social media application is through video-sharing, and the activity on YouTube is best described as a container label (Dijck 150-152). This accurately describes the sharing on other social media applications, such as Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Tik-Tok and many more. These platforms are considered self-broadcasting mediums shared through links that connect to or appear on YouTube. This connection provides a link between private information and public staging.

YouTube works as an archive because of how the resources are uploaded and described. When learning movement, we depend on the teacher to give information and

read our bodies for more in-depth instruction and corrections. Unfortunately, social cues in online dance video tutorials are one-sided, showing only the teacher. The watcher absorbs information, but the teacher does not receive the watcher's feedback. The lack of social cues and not being able to interact with the instructor in real time can leave the individual frustrated with the online learning experience.

There are advantages and disadvantages to online learning. Ya Ni's article 'Comparing the Effectiveness of Classroom and Online Learning: Teaching Research Methods' (2013) examined two learning trends. First, the learning trend of the online class versus the classroom learning environment. In live session classes, there is a community and relationships are built. A class done online in isolation can have negative associations; as Ya Ni states, 'Online classes are often viewed as easier to drift away from or sever ties with' (2013, p. 203). Ya Ni's research studied six online classes and three live sessions. The study results showed that online participation had a higher failure rate. Ten percent of students who took part in online classes failed, compared to in-person sessions, where only four percent failed (2013, p. 206). There are differences in success rate depending on a student's generation. Students raised in a generation of internet users had a higher comfort rate in participating in virtual classes. 'Virtual space has been an integral part of their daily life. Face-to-face classes may exploit this venue to accommodate students who feel intimidated about participating in the classroom' (Ya Ni, 2013, p. 212). Using online tutorials can help build confidence for beginner dancers before entering the studio. Locking tutorials are an entry point of knowledge that allows a beginner locker to explore the movement in their bodies.

Technology brings more accessibility for the learner. A viewer can scroll or 'drag' the time toggle of these videos forward or backward to the exact moment they want to view. This tool allows students learning through online tutorials easy access to the movement. Finding new teachers and dancers to follow is accomplished through automatic play by the algorithm, allowing new content to be discovered. 'Amateur content is discovered along the way, through the suggested links, alternate search results...' (Hilderbrand, 2007, p. 50). Suggestions and autoplay enhance the chances of viewership by an audience that would otherwise not have searched for these videos.

Youtubers create content; users interact with it and post new content themselves through comments, memes and duets. The works uploaded and viewed online are considered texts. Engaging actions of commenting, virtual 'likes,' and shares are the para-texts other participating users make that accompany the original text. The internet carries traces of participants' thoughts, which are visible publicly in the comments beneath the posting. Virtual 'likes,' reposts and other practices of marking out passages through online material also become apparent. The action of participants engaging with the works posted creates physical evidence of each thought. 'The mutability inherent to all texts becoming literally visible in their specific environment' (Thomas, 2009, p. 289). The texts are visible for the creator to experience and for other participants to interact with each other. Interactions between participants share like-minded or opposing statements on videos or comments posted.

Para-texts can be created through proxy without ever viewing the original text or post. The text can only be experienced if attached to the original experience first-hand, as

seen via the original work. For example, para-texts can be created and distributed by reading comments, watching parodies or through references in social circles. Gerard Genette coined the term para-texts in 1997, and Thomas states, 'Genette claims that conversely, para-texts can exist without the texts they refer to, thus, it is possible to claim to know Single Ladies though rumours, reviews, and comment without having seen the video' (Thomas, 2014, p. 290).

Methodology

My research focuses on the strategy of learning locking virtually and the physical execution and explanation of locking as taught through YouTube tutorials. YouTube is by far the most popular forum and archival source for information. Most, if not all, the information regarding locking presented is from practitioners of the form, relaying their information and personal style to the viewer. Nearly all the information is presented much like expected in a dance studio or one-on-one mentorship. Using YouTube as a designated platform for learning new dance movements has gained popularity. This happens for various reasons, including economics, social disparities or time conflicts. It could also happen, as in my personal experience, because of living in a different geological location to the practitioner one wants to learn from or living in a rural area with limited in-person dance class options. Typically, movement is learned during a class at a fixed location. Many people can be shy, especially when put into a new situation with people they do not know to learn a new skill. Individuals may prefer to learn as much as possible before attending a class to avoid appearing like a beginner or an amateur.

Is learning locking through YouTube equivalent to learning in a structured in-person environment? I approach the work by using a device connected to the internet through YouTube while noting what I see and practice. The central theoretical concept I use in my research is Kozinets use of centralities (2010) and applying the theories to dance. Each centrality represented a motive in either presenting the movement vocabulary, advancing hip hop knowledge or gaining more views.

There are four different forms of centrality regarding netnography described by Kozinets (2010). These are degree centrality, eigenvector centrality, betweenness centrality and closeness centrality (2010, p. 52-53). For this research, only the first three categories were used. The fourth category of closeness centrality was not used as it is considered with 'reach and reachability instead of popularity' (Kozinets, 2010, p. 53). Therefore, I felt it was inconsistent to categorize videos based on suggested recommendations instead of my search.

Degree centrality

Degree centrality is the popular active actors in a network. The focus is on how many other actors one has direct contact with through the number of video uploads and contacts they have with their subscribers. YouTube subscribers range from hundreds to millions of followers who are constant viewers and interact with an actor. Each video can be viewed multiple times, increasing the chances that the actor will gain more audience members. For locking tutorials, the video uploader is not considered a master

of the work. Instead, those considered masters have a channel or are YouTuber that have many tutorial videos. These videos can also be elaborate and includes entertaining choreography that generated a large following.

Eigenvector centrality

Eigenvector centrality measures how much a node, described as a line of directions, intersects, or branches off from one another. A node is connected to others that are connected to others in a continuous chain. These actors are concerned with power and influence rather than popularity. Eigenvector centrality is related to the high number of shares and comments the uploaded video receives.

Betweenness centrality

Betweenness centrality measures an actor's social influence. The more influence an actor has over the information, the more power they have. A common practice on YouTube is that an actor has a channel dedicated to a range of information, with a motive to gain many views. This may include YouTube channels not directly related to locking or hip hop culture but those that share tutorial dance videos.

Kozinets (2010) uses social network analysis described as a network filled with ‘actors connected by a set of relational ties’ (2010, p. 49). Actors are defined as a group, individual or concept. A tie is used to describe the link between the actors, and this can be the sharing of information in tutorials and choreography. A tie is part of a dyad, a segment of two parts. Regarding netnography, the dyad is formed between two actors (Kozinets 49). The relationship between the dyad and the actor in my research relates to YouTube as a source of information. The tie is the information about locking shared by the online community. Kozinets describes the relationship between the dyad and the actors. ‘Relations refer to the resources that are exchanged, and these relations can be characterized by their content, their directions, and their strength’ (2010, p.52). For locking, content includes online tutorials shared along hip hop community social networks.

There are various descripted approaches to social network analysis. I use the “Second Descripted Approach" (Kozinets, 2010, p. 51) for my research, separate from the centralities used to categorize the data.

> ... An entire social network based on some particular research definition of the boundaries of that network. For example, in a netnography, the boundary of a social network might be the online site where the cultural activity was found, or where the community defined itself... (Kozinets, 2010, p. 51).

Using the archival video library offered on YouTube, I searched locking tutorial videos and choreography using locking movement and keywords in my search, for example, ‘locking tutorial,’ ‘locking choreography,’ and ‘hip hop locking.’

Dance tutorial videos designed for YouTube last three to five minutes on average and follow what I call the YouTube Tutorial Formula (YTF). In this formula, videos are broken down into five phases. The first phase starts with a title page listing the channel and the name or photo of the dancer leading the tutorial, with music in the background.

This is quickly followed by a transition to the dancer standing in a centre frame for the second phase, the introduction. This introduction is replicated in speech or movement at the top of every video in the series. Following is the third phase, which is the initial breakdown of the movement. The fourth phase is the dancer improvising or performing choreographed routines highlighting the movement described in the tutorial. The last phase is the three p's -- promote, promote, promote. Each video finishes with ‘Like,’ ‘Share,’ and ‘Comment.’ Through contributing to the para-text, these three ways of interacting with the text remind the viewer to participate in these three promotion types. This allows the YouTuber to gain higher views, longer viewing hours, and more subscribers, all, in turn, creating revenue.

Conclusion

In conclusion, my research on virtual locking gave way to categorizing locking tutorials, laying the groundwork for in-depth analysis of the movement. Applying Kozinet’s criteria of centralities, the primary videos I used served as benchmarks for comparing locking tutorials across different channels and the eigenvector centrality. YouTube channels dedicated to hip hop culture dance form were placed under degree centrality, and betweenness centrality focuses on practitioners creating content for various YouTube channels.

After I built a library of dance tutorials and organized individual tutorials and channels into categories, I started to learn each movement and place it on my body; this led to the movement glossary of twenty-five movements, sourced from ninety videos, four music videos, and twelve movies.

During my process, I found success in the movement. However, the effectiveness of the tutorial videos varied—my prior experience with locking provided me with familiarity in executing movements and understanding the movement quality. I noticed discrepancies on the names of each movement depending on the teacher in each tutorial. This discrepancy was not only evident through my own experiences but also through comments from other viewers on YouTube, who pointed out varying terminology used for the movements with the different instructors. There were ongoing debates with the commenters regarding the execution of the movements, flow and grooves that make the movement. Such debates are not unique to online tutorials and do occur in live settings, and whether in a studio or other online applications, each teacher will teach what they have learned.

It is important to note there is no governing body overseeing the teaching of locking, and the locking style is spread through participation. Consequently, the effectiveness of movement hinges on the learner. In this self-guided approach to learning, there is no mentor to provide guidance, assess progress, or ensure correctness. It is possible to gain proficiency in locking through YouTube tutorials, but the efficiency, theoretical understanding and execution may be in question.

In summary, using YouTube as an archival resource for locking tutorials is feasible, but the effectiveness and depth of learning may be enhanced through mentorship and interactive online tool.

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Biography

Turner Norman is a dancer, educator, choreographer, and researcher based in Toronto, Ontario and Palmerston, Ontario, where he is the Artistic and Operations Director. As a graduate of The School of Toronto Dance Theatre and receiving is B.F.A. in Dance and M.A. in Dance Studies from York University; Norman focuses his dance practice and research on how street and concert dance technique is applied to the body.