

Tarzan in New York: the quirks of online communication

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„Oops... I'm sorry... Hehehe“

- Freedom unlimited!?
- Nobody watches, no?
- “Assumption is the mother of all fuckups” - Travis Dane (the Bad Guy) @ “Under Siege 2”
- Lack of context ==> TROUBLE

Wanted the best, came out as usual

- "A flying saucer creature named Zog arrived on Earth to explain how wars could be prevented and how cancer could be cured. He brought the information from Margo, a planet where the natives conversed by means of farts and tap dancing.

Zog landed at night in Connecticut. He had no sooner touched down than he saw a house on fire. He rushed into the house, farting and tap dancing, warning the people about the terrible danger they were in. The head of the house brained Zog with a golfclub."

- *Breakfast of Champions* by Kurt Vonnegut

The N+1 sides of communication



participant <==> channel <==> participant

Example 1: from jokes to scandal (or war?)

- The sentence: “Dude, you really are a moron“...
- ...is used...
 - ...in a sauna, among old friends, after half a sixpack
 - ...in a phone conversation between the same friends
 - ...in a text chat between the same friends
 - ...in an e-mail message
 - ...as a faxed official company form with a letterhead
 - ...in the official form of the Rep. of Estonia, signed by the President and sent to a certain gentleman somewhat to the East
- => the same message, but a drastically different result!

Differences in channels

- Time / speed
- Direction (one-way/two-way; one-to-one, one-to-many etc)
- Capacity / throughput (the diameter of the pipe)
- Filtering (what gets through and what does not)

Right to fight (is not absolute)

- Freedom of expression throughout the history
- Censorship has been actively resisted (until quite recently, when it started to change somewhat)
- A new human right: right to fight...
- ... and as a counterbalance, another right to demand “Take it outside“

Example 2: pot, kettle...

- An excerpt from an online chat:
 - A: „Had a great BBQ yesterday. Ham, sausages, stuff.... Yummy!“
 - B: „Bah, you eat that shit??!“
 - A: „???? !!!!! #1&%%α##\$½%# !“
 - (things go nuts)
- Why? A was from Tennessee, B from Middle East
- The only known cure: a) stay polite, b) express yourself clearly

Not that easy

- The emerging online communities developed rules – but many of them remained unwritten (and at the same time, closely followed)
- Nowadays it has sometimes turned around – written rules are very detailed, almost nobody cares (EULA anyone?)
- Anonymity is easy to get, yet hard to depend on
- Can be anonymous or pseudonymous, yet the greatest ones are known under their real names

Excursus: the gamers

- ..Richard Bartle, a creator of the first MUD in the late 70s proposed four main types of gamers:
- ♦ Achievers
- ♠ Explorers
- ♥ Socializers
- ♣ Killers

Behaving in-character

- Nick Yee and Jeremy Bailenson (Stanford, 2007) proposed the Proteus Effect:
 - the avatar that people use online reflects their behavioural habits, and
 - changing the avatar (e.g. by an admin) results in changes of the person's behaviour

Case study: MUME

- *Multi-User Middle-earth*, one of the largest and oldest MUDs still active
- A Tolkien world – Men, Elves and Dwarves are good and Orcs, Trolls and Black Númenóreans evil races
- In practice, it often comes out upside down – ‘darkies’ often behave better than ‘whities’ due to:
 - Lesser numbers => need to cooperate
 - Inherent maluses => more strategy needed
 - Free to punish anyone for anything => politeness enforced

Different people

- People are different – but for some, it is hard to grasp...
- Many groups of people face nasty stereotypes
- The Net allows to overcome them – if we remain honest!
- *"On the Internet, height, weight, race, and gender may be unknown. Beauty doesn't impress us, nor does ugliness appall. We become our messages, purely and simply."*
(Barrett & Wallace 1994)

...

- Difference can be frightening
- Internet has been *different* from day 1
- Filters stuff (prejudices included)
- First impression: visual ==> verbal!
- Can be someone else... or not

Cyberdating

- An important motive online
- Some stay online. Most will not
- Contact amplifier and hiding behind the screen
- Main points: HONESTY, POLITENESS, CLARITY
 - BS => disappointment and negative surprise
 - Honesty => soft landing and amplification
- DARK SIDE: no quarter, no remorse

Case study: Mella a.k.a. Meelis Luks

- An Estonian guy (middle-aged by now)
- Born with a profound disability (CP; outwards comparable to Stephen Hawking in his middle years), unable to speak, dress or eat independently
- Was lucky to have a supporting home, yet was only allowed to obtain basic education (in the USSR, the “workers’ paradise”, people with disabilities did not officially exist until 1980s)
- For until recently, lived in the middle of nowhere (~50 km from Tallinn in rural Raplamaa)
- Started to use his foot to work (better control!), including drawing and typing (+ typewriter graphics)

Some pics



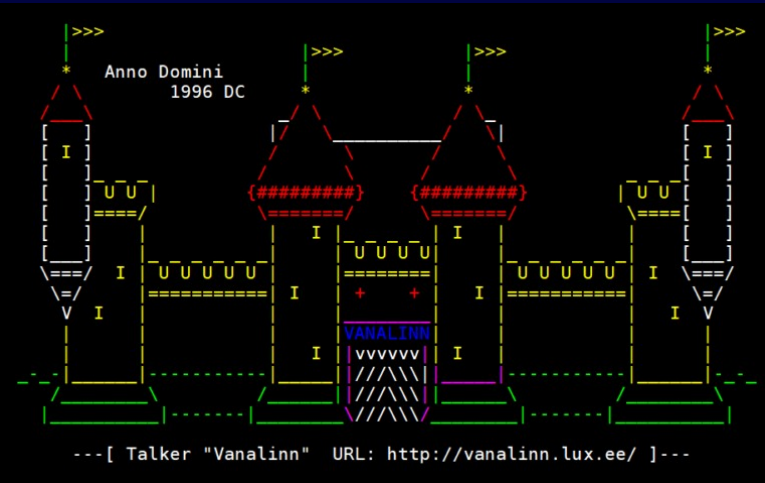
Source: www.mella.ee



...

- Received his first computer in 1993 (the Estonian weirdo called Juku, a 8bit CP/M machine), learned to program
- Got online in 1995, in 1996 became the 'God' (boss) of a popular talker/chatroom at our university
- Result: lots of friends, almost weekly meetings/parties at his home (still in the middle of nowhere)
- For a long time, communicated by writing letters on the ground with his foot - later started to use speech synthesis to talk
- For several years (around 2010), came to IT College to hold guest lectures to Technical Communication students

More pics



Source: www.mella.ee, Kaido Kikkas

...

- In early 2015, met a young lady from the Philippines online
- After tons of paperwork, she landed in Tallinn in 2016
- Got married in April 2016
- Moved to Tallinn in 2018, works (from home) for Swedbank
- Had their first son in 2019
- ...

Even more pics



Source: www.mella.ee

Online courtesy: netiquette

- Net + etiquette = netiquette
- Started with mailing lists and Usenet
- Smileys (emoticons) >8- [])
- „When in Rome, do as Romans do“ - but who are the Romans..?
- Some quite universal points do exist

10 commandments from an ancient book... no, not that one

- *Netiquette* by Virginia Shea (Albion 1995):
 - 1. Remember the human
 - 2. Adhere to the same standards of behavior online that you follow in real life
 - 3. Know where you are in cyberspace
 - 4. Respect other people's time and bandwidth
 - 5. Make yourself look good online



- 6. Share expert knowledge
- 7. Help keep flame wars under control
- 8. Respect other people's privacy
- 9. Don't abuse your power
- 10. Be forgiving on other people's mistakes

Some (old) points from Usenet

- Read before posting
- Keep in topic
- Do not cross-post
- No full quotes to say „Me too!“
- Know top-post vs bottom-post
- No advertising except in specific places

- A cautionary tale: *The September That Never Ended* (1993)

Some more recommendations

- Do not attach MS Word (or similar) files with trivial content
- After receiving a nasty e-mail, go to coffee/tea – if you plan to answer, take time. But not more than till evening!
- Use e-mail to communicate with irritating people
- Write properly (language, caps, decorations etc)
- Giant signatures are rude
- Questions are OK, except a) trivial ones (RTFM, STFW, GYIF), b) blatantly misdirected ones (“Who's that moron?”).
<http://www.catb.org/~esr/faqs/smart-questions.html>
- Do not e-mail stuff unfit for a newspaper cover story

The (quite recent) return of visuals

- Various compensatory communication models spread during the COVID-19 era (a silver lining of the pandemic...)
- Many channels, a lot of them are provided by companies (potential privacy risk!)
- Direct audio and video + text chat + computer functions (screen sharing) – good combining and managing skills needed
- Telepresence robots would add (limited) physical autonomy – and also some new issues
- Reliance on technological infrastructure increases!

Some more recommendations for the Zoom era

- Check your appearance (and to be sure, not just the top!), position and distance from screen
- Decide on background (including whether to obfuscate or not)
- There are switches for mic and cam (sneezing and coughing into the discussion is not nice)
- There is also a switch to 'raise hand' (talking into other people's conversation is impolite and disturbs others in a larger chat)
- Check what you share on screen
- Saving the session is good to agree upon beforehand

Title here

- Adds to the previous points:
 - Physical space etiquette: distance, directions of sight and movement, movement speed, voice volume...
 - Virtual space etiquette: showing or hiding one's face and/or screen, taking pictures and recording
 - Human-to-robot vs robot-to-robot communication
 - 1-to-1, 1-to-many, many-to-many...
 - See also <https://cm.taltech.ee/>!



Dr Janika Leoste with a Double 3 TPR (photo by KK)

To sum it up

- Thinking before saying helps
- Sorting out much later is much more difficult
- Stay yourself
- Learn to play out your strong cards
- When in Rome do as Romans do – but do not rush to run with wolves
- Know the game you are playing
- HONESTY, POLITENESS, CLARITY

For further study

- *The Psychology of Cyberspace* by John Suler
- *Netiquette* by Virginia Shea
- *Designing Virtual Worlds* by Richard Bartle
- *The Proteus Effect: The Effect of Transformed Self Representation on Behavior* by Nick Yee and Jeremy Bailenson
- *Alone Together* by Sherry Turkle
- Documentaries: *Second Skin*, *Life 2.0*, *Login2Life*, *Strangers in Paradise* a.o.

Thanks