

# Foreword

When Carl Adam Petri, the father of Petri Nets, entitled his PhD Thesis “Communication with Automata” in 1962, almost no one understood that the computer was on its way to become a new medium. This title had two interpretations: interaction with computers can be understood as a special form of communication: human-computer communication. This view has influenced my professional life when becoming a specialist in usability. The other interpretation is: people communicate via computers. In 1962 a bold vision. But the technical basis for this view was already on its way: the concept for a computer network was published in the same year by Joseph C. R. Licklider (the author of “Man-Computer Symbiosis”—the first interpretation) and others. This work on packet-switched networks led to the ARPA-Net and finally to the Internet. Scientists used this network since 1970. Networked computers became the norm. The topic of computer-supported cooperative work with new problems of usability emerged. This became my second field of interest. A leading question was: how can we design computer applications in such a way that users can understand and use them easily?

The publicly available Internet is now with us for 25 years, often considered identical with the World Wide Web (WWW). Since Tim Berners-Lee published the first web browser in 1992, the WWW evolved into a complete new medium used by everybody. The overwhelming mass of information asked for new ways of accessing. Search engines like Google were the answer 16 years ago. Meanwhile it has become normal to “google” an answer for any kind of question. In many cases very successfully.

The Internet enabled not only the distribution of information provided by specialists, it allowed to implement new services which were called Web 2.0, services which enable anyone to be author and reader. New platforms emerged which are called social media: blogs, forums, media sharing platforms, social networks, etc. The daily reality of many people is governed by Google, Facebook, Twitter, and the like. These platforms provide an unbelievable amount of user-generated content to the public. Surprisingly, there are almost no tools to exploit the richness of this information. Current search engines are not adequate, since their basic unit of search is a web page while social media have a different granularity. For collecting and ranking user-generated content across social media platforms there was no solution before Claudia Wyrwoll started her PhD-work three years ago.

The publication of her results shows that this difficult problem can be solved exploiting the meta-data provided by social media. I am convinced that her concept can be the basis for a new generation of user-adequate tools for the exploitation of the richness of information contained and provided in social media.

Hamburg

Prof. Dr. Horst Oberquelle

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Wyrwoll, C.

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