University of Art and Design Linz, Austria

Department of Media

Artistic anti-fraud activism against online advance fee fraud

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Doctoral Thesis

to achieve the academic grade

Doctor of Philosophy

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Approved: .....

Linz, May 2016

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Declaration

I declare that the work described in this thesis is original work undertaken by me for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the University of Art and Design Linz, Austria. No part of the material described in this thesis has been submitted for any award of any other degree or qualification in this or at any other University or college or advanced education institute. This thesis is written by me and produced in LaTeX.

Mag.art. Andreas Zingerle

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Abstract

This dissertation investigates the role of vigilante online communities of scambaiters in their endeavours against Internet fraud. By analysing online forums I identified different types of scambaiters, and I tested their strategies and tools in artistic case studies and workshops. This research is motivated by two main research questions: (1) Based on the scambaiters' actions and motives, should they be considered Internet activists or digital vigilantes?; and (2) How can their strategies be translated into a practice of creative activism? In order to work on these questions, my research investigated how storytelling, social engineering, data security and communication technologies are used by these groups. The workshops served as an opportunity to experiment with new tools and discuss their moral implications, while in the artistic case studies I tested the strategies for their activist potential. Previous research on the scambainting communities have focused on the virally shared photos that portray scammers in humiliating postures. The findings of my research show that the scambaiting communities are far more diverse than previously assumed. Therefore the most important contribution of this thesis was to show that scambaiters also use various activist tactics. Hence certain scambaiter communities can be defined as anti-fraud activists who serve the Internet community. In the scope of this dissertation I further discuss the results of the artistic case studies, implications for the perception of scambaiting communities, and I also bring forth areas of future research.

Acknowledgements

I would like to address special thanks to my advisor Univ. Prof. Mag. Brigitte Vasicek for her advice during the work on my thesis. I particularly want to thank my wife Linda Kronman for her artistic collaboration in the case studies and her critical feedback throughout the years. I would also like to express my gratitude to my Erasmus+ Teaching mobility hosts Tonguc Ibrahim Sezen from the Department of Communication and Management at the Bilgi university, Istanbul (Turkey), and Jill and Scott Rettberg from the Digital Cultures Research Group at the University of Bergen (Norway). Special thanks also go to members of the Interactive Digital Storytelling conference Steering commitee and I want to thank especially Hartmut Koenitz and Alex Mitchell for their inspiration and feedback. I want to thank Us(c)hi Reiter from servus.at for the collaboration on the 'Behind the Smart World' Artlab, the process development for the publication and the possibility to curate the exhibition during the 'Art meets radical openness' Festival 2016. I want to thank the 'esc - medien kunst labor' and especially Reni Hofmüller for making the exhibition, workshop and artist talk possible during the Steirischer Herbst 2015. I also want to thank Tim and Tina from Time's up for their invitation to the 'PARN - Narrative Strategies' symposium in Madeira in 2013. I want to thank Gerhard Funk for the opportunity to teach a '419-fiction' lecture at the Webscience Masters program. Last but not least I want to thank the proofreaders Chinmoyi Patel, Rusha Shukla and especially Aileen Derieg for proofreading my papers and the thesis.