Proceedings Paper:

Performing information: exploring conceptualisations of embodied information

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Abstract

__Introduction.__ Embodied information researchers have described bodies as performative. The body forms an important information source for leisure pursuits such as running but bodies remain under-theorised as sources of information. This paper explores how performance theories can contribute new conceptualisations of embodied information practices.
__Method__. A review of information science literature was conducted to identity use of Goffman's dramaturgical model or descriptions of bodies as performing.
__Analysis__. Embodied information is conceptualised through analysis of performance theory literature, focusing Goffman's dramaturgical model. The strengths and limitations of Goffman's dramaturgy are discussed using examples from embodied information literature.
__Results__. Dramaturgical metaphors, such frontstage and backstage, can explain how individuals perform identity in everyday interactions. Dramaturgical principles can deepen understanding of how bodies create and share embodied information.
__Conclusions__. Goffman's dramaturgical model can be used to address gaps in understanding about how embodied information is created and shared. The complex theoretical underpinnings of performance should be further examined to develop new conceptualisations of embodied information practices.

Keywords: Embodied information; information behaviour; performance theory

Introduction

This paper examines performance theory as a potential theoretical framework for embodied information. Goffman's (1959/1990) dramaturgical model of performance in everyday life, also known as self-presentation, is evaluated as a theory to conceptualise embodied information. For this paper, I will use the term dramaturgical model, rather than self-presentation. Embodied information has become of increasing interest for information behaviour research. In experiential activities, like running, emphasis is on the body performing an activity, and bodies have a key role as an information source (Mansourian, 2020). Research by Gorichanaz (2015, 2017a, 2018) demonstrates how embodied information plays a critical role in the practice of running. Running is a sport '*ripe with information processes*' including monitoring the body (Gorichanaz, 2017a, p.715). Researchers have described bodies as performing when discussing embodied information. Lloyd (2010) theorises bodies as performative information sites. Descriptions of bodies performing information, sparks questions about embodied information practices; how is embodied information produced and shared through performance? I outline conceptualisations of embodied information before discussing performance theories. I review information behaviour literature to identify examples of performance concepts. Goffman's dramaturgical model is used to consider the benefits of performance theories for understanding how embodied information is created and shared.

Bodies performing information

Language and terminology relating to performance has been used to describe embodied information practices (Huttunen et al., 2019; Lloyd, 2010; Lloyd and Olsson, 2019b; Mansourian, 2020; Olsson, 2016). Lloyd (2010) describes the body as a performative site of information; practices are inscribed on bodies and read as '*information sources by co-participants who actively interrogate the bodies of others in practice to gain access to embodied knowledge*' (2010, Introduction, para 3.). Lloyd's work positions bodies as integral to demonstrating and sharing practical knowledge. Bodies are conceptualised as information sources (Lloyd, 2010). Information for ourselves, and information for

other people. Bodies are a way of knowing and disseminating information (Cox et al., 2017). Mansourian (2020) explains information behaviour using performance terminology. Participants in experiential activities, like running, are categorised as performers. Bodies are an important information source, but further engagement with new theoretical approaches is required (Cox et al., 2017). Performance theories may contribute to understanding of how bodies are performative and how information is performed. A more in-depth consideration of performance theories could generate greater understanding. But performance is used by social scientists without acknowledging the underpinning roots of theory (Gratch and Gratch, 2022). Deeper engagement with performance theories would counter these concerns.

Embodied information

The body has become one important focus of leisure information research. Bodies are increasingly visible in information behaviour research. Researchers have considered various leisure practices where the body has a central role, for example: car restoration (Lloyd and Olsson, 2019a, 2019b), martial arts (Olsson and Hansson, 2019), and ultrarunning (Gorichanaz, 2015, 2017a, 2017b). These studies consider how bodies are used as an information source. Running is information-rich and embodied information sources play an important role (Gorichanaz, 2017a) . Knowledge is tacit, relating to specific bodily actions, senses, or techniques (Mansourian, 2020). Embodied information plays an integral role in running; bodies are a primary information source for runners. Gorichanaz (2015, 2018) discusses how runners create and use embodied information during a run. This includes using visual information about what runners see whilst navigating the terrain. Sensory information from the body such as the pain of aching muscles, sounds, and the environment (Cox et al., 2017; Hockey, 2006, 2013). In some contexts, bodies hold as much value and authority as codified knowledge (Lloyd, 2007, 2009; Lloyd and Olsson, 2019b). Recorded information also has value in running, combined with information from the body. (Gorichanaz, 2015, 2018). Gorichanaz (2015) highlights the role of the runners' own body as a primary information source for decision making during the event. In the context of running, research about embodied information has tended to focus on how people use embodied information from their own bodies. Later research by Gorichanaz (2018) finds the bodies of others to act as information sources in running. Runners learn from observing the bodies of others. But more work is needed on the ways people engage with information from the bodies of other people.

Bodies have been notably absent from the main theories of information behaviour (Cox et al, 2017). This is despite the growing interest in bodies as information sources. Practice theory has been used to develop conceptualisations of the body in information science (Cox, 2012; Lloyd, 2010). Bodies, objects, and situations are important sources for making sense of lived experience (Godbold, 2013). The practice turn has led to understanding ways of knowing as enacted by social, material, and discursive elements (Lloyd, 2010). Actions of bodies are a way of sharing knowledge; embodied knowledge accumulates through practice, and is performed in actions (Lloyd and Olsson, 2019b). The body is a performative site, allowing embodied knowledge to be shared. Although research to date begins to explain how information is performed, a gap remains in understanding how people read and share information from bodies. A turn to theories of performance offers new ways to think about how embodied information practices. New ways to explain how bodies create and disseminate information. Performance provides framework for explaining how other people read embodied information. Theories from performance studies, alongside practice theory and theories of embodiment, could help deepen understanding of how bodies produce and share information.

Defining performance

Goffman's (1959/1990) dramaturgical model views everyday interactions are performances. Various theories of performance have developed, across many disciplines, including linguistics, anthropology, and sociology (Carlson, 2004). This results in a theoretical landscape of contested and complex threads of theory (Loxley, 2007). The idea of everyday action as performance is put forward by

Schechner who states, *'Any action that is framed, enacted, presented, highlighted or displayed is a performance'* (2013, p. 2). Information behaviour can be framed as performance based on Schechner's definition. Actions such as sharing information by telling a story, having a conversation, or demonstrating a skill, are both ways of sharing information and performing. Performance is the practice of bodies communicating (Gratch and Gratch 2022; Schechner, 2020). The idea of performance as practices and behaviours has synergies with embodied information. Other definitions focus on performance as communication (Strathern and Stewart, 2021). Bauman (1992) defines performance as a behaviour and a communicative event. But only when communication has particular aesthetic qualities. Whilst not all everyday behaviour is performance, communicative actions can be performances. However, communication must possess specific aesthetic qualities to be a performance (Gratch and Gratch, 2022). Information sharing has characteristics of performance when framed as communication. For example, storytelling or social media use might have the aesthetic qualities required to be framed as performance.

Goffman's dramaturgical model

Goffman's (1959/1990) dramaturgical model considers how individuals perform identity in everyday interactions. Goffman's dramaturgical model is only one of many complex threads of performance theory. But it has been influential across the social sciences, making a significant contribution to the *'dramaturgical understanding of social life'* (Edgley, 2013, p. 2). Goffman's dramaturgical model proposes that people perform in the social roles of life. A metaphor of theatrical performance is used to explain how people manage the impression they give to others in interactions:

> *the way in which the individual in ordinary work situations presents himself and his activity to others, the ways in which he guides and controls the impression they form of him, and the kinds of things he may and may not do while sustaining his performance before them* (Goffman, 1959/1990, p. 8)

Goffman defines a performance as *'all the activity of a given participant on a given occasion which serves to influence in any way any of the other participants'* (Goffman, 1959/1990, p.7). Everyday life is viewed as like a staged performance. Dramaturgical metaphors such as settings, props, appearances, and a frontstage and backstage are employed. These metaphors frame behaviour as performance. Frontstage is defined by Goffman as public behaviours; appearance and manner are controlled for the audience and signposted during interactions. Backstage is used to describe private behaviours which are not controlled for an audience, where an individual can be out of character and not need to conceal mistakes. Information is either consciously or unconsciously performed in social interactions; it is given off through impressive and expressive bodily dynamics (Waskul and Vannini, 2013). Performances make use of these sign vehicles to convey information. Waskul and Vannini discuss these sign vehicles, explaining how bodies have ascribed and elastic characteristics. Ascribed characteristics are part of the body (e.g., height, body shape) whilst elastic characteristics which can be put on (e.g., make-up, clothing). These ideas have implications for the study of embodied information. Information given off and possessed by bodies forms part of the system of dramaturgical devices or sign vehicles.

Goffman's dramaturgical model is central to understanding embodied approaches to the self. Howson (2013) suggests it can explain how people create impressions of the self in social interactions. The dramaturgical model offers a useful framework for understanding embodiment (Waskul and Vannini, 2006; 2013). According to Waskul and Vannini, the *'body is always performed, staged, and presented; the theaters of the body are the raw materials by which the ritual dramas of our everyday embodied life are produced.'* (2006, p. 8). Bodies are active rather than passive. Bodies do something rather than be something, and performance is the active process where meaning is created.

The dramaturgical model and information behaviour

Relevant papers citing Goffman, dramaturgy or self-presentation were identified in a literature search undertaken using Library and Information Science Abstracts. Papers which were not relevant to embodied information or information practice were excluded by sifting the results. Further searches were undertaken to identify information behaviour papers discussing performance or performativity. The application of Goffman's work is wide-ranging. Goffman's dramaturgical model of self-presentation has been used in the study of information. Andersson (2017) uses frontstage and backstage to explain information activities. Although this research does not discuss embodied information, it provides an example of self-presentation and information behaviour. Goffman's self-presentation is often cited in social media research to discuss impression management. Research often focuses on the use of language and text, for example, self-disclosure of information online (e.g., Bronstein, 2013). Goffman is more widely cited in research about online behaviour and social media without specifically addressing the role of the body (e.g., Bullingham and Vasconcelos, 2013; Hicks, 2020).

A small number of researchers have drawn on the ideas of Goffman to discuss how bodies convey information. Lloyd (2010) refers to Goffman's idea of the body, as having a central role in generating meaning to facilitate embodied information through visual clues. Olsson (2010) draws on Goffman's self-presentation to inform analysis of the embodied knowledge of theatre actors. Another example of using Goffman's dramaturgy in information behaviour work comes from research by Guzik (2018). Guzik highlights the importance of ascribed and elastic characteristics in conveying embodied information. Others allude to ideas from Goffman's work. Cox et al (2017) suggest bodies act as sign vehicles; bodies may deliberately give off information or unintentionally convey information as signs. Although not cited, Goffman's idea of front stage and backstage is evident in this interpretation of bodies conveying information.

Contribution of Goffman's dramaturgical model for embodied information

Guzik (2018) considers embodied information sharing practices in the context of converting to Islam. Embodied information is conveyed through bodily adornment, in the clothing and objects worn by people. Guzik's work is the most notable application of Goffman's dramaturgical model to research about embodied information. The findings of Guzik resonate with the idea of bodies as *'fashioned, crafted, negotiated, manipulated and largely in ritualized social and cultural conventions'* (Waskul and Vannini, 2006, p.6). Dramaturgical conventions are apparent in how clothing and bodily adornment give off information about people. The use of Goffman's dramaturgical devices in this research sparks questions about information sharing; how is information consciously and unconsciously shared through ascribed and elastic embodied characteristics?

Social performances involve people showing parts of identity or keeping parts hidden to construct identity (Gratch and Gratch, 2022). Although not researching information behaviour, Kurtoglu-Hooton (2021) draws on Goffman's work. Kurtoglu-Hooton uses self-presentation to analyse runner's online communications. People are found to deliberately give off information using conscious management of behaviour and language. However, information is unconsciously given off as well. Intentional and managed bodily performances allow people to share embodied information. In the context of running this might be information about techniques for downhill running, shared demonstration of the action. In this example embodied information is consciously managed by the person sharing information. But the information would also be unconsciously given off by bodies as well. Unconscious information presents a problem. Frontstage and backstage information could become indistinguishable and hard to differentiate. Goffman identified this problem commenting that *'all the world is not, of course, a stage, but the crucial ways in which it isn't are not easy to specify'* (1959/1990, p.72). Waskul and Vannini explain how distinguishing between frontstage, and backstage is a challenge; *'the performative body always entails the active ways by which people utilize both ascribed and elastic "sign vehicles" for bodily expressions and impressions given and given-off.'* (2013, p.201). This presents challenges for conceptualising the sharing of embodied information. Questions emerge regarding the management of actions and choices establishing the performance.

Embodied information is formed of habits, rituals and behaviours inscribed on the body, making frontstage and backstage difficult to identify in other people. Embodied information can be given off unconsciously, as well as through managed choices. This ambiguity generates questions about how to interpret performances of information, and the importance of distinguishing between types of performance.

Limitations of Goffman's dramaturgical model for embodied information

Goffman's dramaturgical model implies people have conscious choice, even when a performer is unaware of the performance (Carlson, 2004). Conscious choice in performances conflicts with the idea that people can read bodies and obtain information without being information being consciously performed. Does information sharing always involve consciousness or awareness? If bodies are not always consciously performing, the dramaturgical model has limitations for understanding the body as a performative site of embodied information. Schechner (2003) suggests some performers conceal performances and others are unaware of performances. A person may not be aware their body is producing information in situations where their body is giving off information or being read by other people for information. Using running as an example, information might be experienced by observing other runners training. To control information given off performances may be deliberately concealed. A runner trying to hide pain or discomfort from competitors during a race would be deliberately concealing the performance of embodied information to create a specific impression for an audience. The issues raised by Schechner about choice and concealment in performances, lead to questions about the authenticity of embodied information.

There are other limitations to using Goffman's dramaturgy to explain information practices. Limitations are identified relating to the construction of information through social forces. Goffman is concerned with individual choice and neglect of power structures (Giddens, 2009). Savolainen (2021) suggests information practices are formed of and accessed through language, material objects and embodied practices. Practices are shaped through people but also other non-human elements such as materials, signs, and environments. Social, material, and corporeal elements play a role in constituting embodied information practices (Lloyd and Olsson, 2019b). Goffman's dramaturgical perspective does not readily attend to the complexity of practices. Therefore, theorisation of embodied information using performance must account for social, material, and corporeal elements. Discursive and material influences are overlooked by Goffman's dramaturgical model (O'Leary and Murphy, 2019). Similarly, Sparkes (2017) argues that Goffman's dramaturgical model is limited by the idea that bodies are passive rather than active. Bodies do things as they are active and lively, messy and fleshy. Therefore, bodies cannot be reduced to abstract and objectified theorisations. We must recognise this messy and fleshy dimension to embodied information. Information practices are composed of discursive practices inscribed on bodies and constituted materially. A theory of performance for information must account for these influences.

Conclusion

Performance theories contribute to understanding of how bodies create, produce, and share information. Goffman's dramaturgical devices can frame embodied information practices as communication behaviour. Dramaturgy emphasises embodiment; this emphasis suggests a valid contribution as a theory for embodied information. A deeper understanding of how bodies produce and share information can be obtained. Previous research has asked how individuals use embodied information from their bodies but less is known about how information from the bodies of others is used. Turning to performance theories could bridge this gap. Consideration of Goffman's dramaturgical model results in questions about how embodied information can be given off and consciously managed. There are limits to the contribution of the dramaturgical model in explaining embodied information practices because material and social influences are not fully explored.

Synergies exist between performance and theories of information practice. Both attend to embodiment and the senses. Performance attends to matters of doings and actions rather than being (Schechner, 2020). This echoes the central ideas of practice theory, where practices are sayings and doings (Schatzki, 2001). The idea of bodies doing something is also central to the definition of embodied information practices. Performance theories can bridge gaps in knowledge about bodies as sites of information. Future work might explore the application of performance theories in conjunction with practice theory to help explain how embodied information is shared.

Researchers in the social sciences have turned to performance. But the terminology is applied in uncritical ways (Gratch and Gratch, 2022). We cannot state bodies perform information, without taking a deeper look at the theoretical underpinnings of these concepts. Deeper exploration of performance theories could address theoretical gaps concerning embodied information practice. Looking at Goffman's work beyond the dramaturgical model could lead to a better understanding of communication, information sharing and embodiment. As Gratch and Gratch (2022) remind us, performance has value as a tool for understanding communication. Performance theories can further understanding about how embodied information is created and shared. But using performance theories with considered focus is essential to recognise the complex theoretical threads of performance.

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