Special Issue: Tracking Narratives Shaping the World
'Popular' Stories Affect Individual and Community Behavior.
Improve Decision-Making by Addressing What People Feel is Vital.

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Introduction

This special issue focuses on some topical global issues that are affecting society as the world begins to pivot and look forward after more than two years of volatility and transformation in daily lives caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic has clearly demonstrated the increasing interconnectedness and interdependency of modern living. The response to, and consequences of, the pandemic have varied by nations, but it has raised the issues of health, transparency, and sustainability in the broadest sense to the top of the agenda. COVID-19 has amplified the standing of technology and science invention to create valuable innovation to help create a new and sustainable society.

Technology transformation is affecting many industries at a very fundamental level. Nowhere is this globally, locally, and topically, truer than in the way people can connect, communicate, and obtain information; it is facilitating new ways of thinking and communicating. The world is truly interconnected, with ideas coming from anywhere. We can now leverage big data, AI, and analytics to understand and track narratives as well as improve engagement and understand change. The pandemic has also illustrated that any communications must be inclusive and understood and embraced by multiple constituencies to have a coherent effect. These are complex issues that are prioritized in

different ways, by groups with differing agendas and discussions are increasingly influenced by, and need, to take account of ethics and culture if the necessary transformational change is to regenerate societies around the world. This special issue investigates some of the key narratives in this context and probes what people think is important and the nature of their engagement to effect behavioural change.

In helping to shape policy and transform, especially given the lessons of COVID-19, leaders in the public and private sector must be consistently vigilant of changing values, attitudes, and behaviour, to demonstrate their understanding and empathy. The analyses in this special issue demonstrates how, in effectively real-time, it is possible to track the stories that are affecting individual and community behaviour. Social entrepreneurism and the diffusion of new ideas is greatly enhanced by the almost ubiquitous participation in social.

Transformation and connection are the essence of life itself and, as humans, we manifest our transformations through changes in our lifestyles and what is important to us. We share ideas and truths, experiences, and beliefs through our conversations, which have been materially enhanced and affected by social media in recent years. By doing so we can experience transformation in a positive way, with personal growth and

evolution. That said, transformation brings uncertainty and, for many, instability. Innovation has driven growth, but it also leads to greater instability and can be viewed as 'disruption by design' where previous standards have been disrupted by new norms. It is therefore not surprising that people are increasingly more concerned about who to trust. In times of crisis and uncertainty people often turn to brands and businesses they trust.

The pandemic has both magnified and accelerated this trend. Although greater data and information is readily available, people do not feel better informed, rather there is an increasing concern about what information is correct. Edelman's [1] annual research refers to the time of pandemic as being characterised by an "epidemic of misinformation...... in an environment of information bankruptcy". In 2022 [2] the situation has worsened as "government and media fuel a cycle of distrust." People now look for other voices to stimulate action. They expect businesses to play a bigger role to help society, communities, environments in dire need of support, and rebuilding. Generally, how they can make a material difference to their communities, and how their products and services can have a less detrimental effect on the world. Most cogently stated by Polman & Winston's [3] 'Net Positive' rallying call for sustainable capitalism; "improves well-being for everyone it impacts and at all scales—every product, every operation, every region and country, and for every stakeholder, including employees, suppliers, communities, customers, and even future generations and the planet itself."

During such volatile times with uncertainty heightened regarding the key narratives of health, peace, economics and the planet, people are increasingly concerned with who to trust. Since June 2019 we have been tracking what people feel is important to them, as part of The University of Tokyo's, Lifestyle by Design initiative. LifeStyle by Design proposes to leverage online media to ensure the effective and efficient delivery of the appropriate narratives, in context, to different constituencies. It is anticipated that this will help create Community Value. During a period of such unprecedented and immediate change in daily lives we have been able to track the narratives that are helping to shape our world; both BC and DC [before- and during-COVID-19 pandemic] [4].

Engaging with Engagement

The internet is built of connected minds exhibiting behaviors in response to stimulus. Our world is online. Narratives and social media are now integral parts of today's connected world. They provide echo chambers/media bubbles that show a lens to understanding (changing) values and behavior. identify and characterize narratives, their key opinion drivers, and the most significant content, and engagement wherever it is: whether websites, traditional media, blogs, or social media. In 'Narrative

Economics', Shiller [5] demonstrates how the stories we tell ourselves about the world drive our behavior, and thus the world itself if enough people buy into them.

We utilize AI to leverage the internet as a 'huge and authentic behavioral test' to gauge the importance of specific content (topics, triggers, media channels...) linked to behavior. Thus, unlike traditional social listening, our focus is to identify what is significant in driving past and future outcomes and see past media bubbles. Specifically, it provides, close to real time, emotional analysis in terms of affect; the psychological impact of what drives future behavior, not just volumes of sentiment. Such analyses have been referred to a Virtual Living Lab [6]. We identify and characterize narratives, their key opinion drivers, and the most significant content, and engagement wherever it is: whether websites, traditional media, blogs, or social media. Those narratives that have utility are characterized as either Timeless or Transformative, whilst most internet exchanges have no/low engagement and are Transient.

Our Virtual Living Lab typically tracks and compares narratives in the UK and Japan [Q2; 2022]. In these short reports we consider:

1. Sustainability (持続可能性) and Governance (ガバナンス).

2. Regeneration (再生) and Social Innovation (ソーシャルイノベーション).

3. Ikigai (生きがい).

4. Politics (政治).

5. Social Networks (ソーシャルネットワーク).

6. ESG and SDGs.

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