
Using the recent (January 2015) viral story regarding the “zombie cat” as an example, explicate Jan Fernback’s ideas in her article, “Legends on the Net: An Examination of Computer-minded Communication as a Locus of Oral Culture.”

1. How does the story regarding the “zombie cat” exemplify CMC?
(Give at least three examples.)

**Stephanie:** The story “zombie cat” exemplifies Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) by its large presence on the internet. It is on many news websites including CNN and Huffington Post. By having news and videos about “zombie cat,” the story is able to reach numerous audiences spanning over different countries. By having information and articles about “zombie cat” readily available online, an individual could share this information with other potential readers or friends by talking about his or her opinion regarding “zombie cat” and could include access to the link as a means of asking for others’ opinions.

**Hannah & Megan:** The definition of CMC is “the urban legends newsgroups on the internet appropriate the wired world into a vehicle for popular culture transmission. Here, oral culture retains its symbolic salience within American culture. The dimensions of orality online, evident in communal interaction in chatrooms, bulletin boards, and text-based virtual environments, can promote the exchange of oral folklore through feelings of ‘being there’ among participants” (Fernback 31). The zombie-cat exemplifies CMC because it is a story that was popularized by the internet, through the internet it transitioned from being considered an urban-legend to becoming part of American culture, and the popularity increased due to the fact that the American culture is likely to believe what they see on the internet.

2. According to Fernback, how would Levine (1992) and Ben-Amos (1992) characterize the “zombie cat” story in terms of legends, folktales, and popular culture?

**Stephanie:** According to Fernback, Levine (1992) would characterize “zombie cat” as a form of popular culture that ties in with folk culture because “…oral tradition, which has played a crucial role in the generation and transmission of folk culture” (1992), meaning that Levine believes popular culture to be similar to folk culture in its means of spreading information through oral tradition. Although much of zombie cat is being shared via online means of communication, Levine argues that the internet as a medium of communication allows for many people to communicate at such a fast pace that it mimics face-to-face communication. Fernback would note that Ben-Amos would claim that “zombie cat” exemplified
legends and folktales which, “are stories that ‘people tell to themselves about themselves’” (1993) because when a reader finds out about “zombie cat,” he or she would think about what he or she would put themselves in the shoes of the “zombie cat” owner and consider how one would respond to the events. It would lead to the audience to look at our current society and culture and wonder if maybe more resources are needed to assist animals in need and the thought that while this incident appears to be an accident, there are probably many instances of animal cruelty does exist.

**Hannah & Megan:** Levine (1992) argues “that popular culture cannot be separated from folk culture in industrial society, '[W]e need to break through the rigid compartmentalization that automatically and rigorously separates popular culture from the oral tradition, which has played a crucial role in the generation and transmission of folk culture’” (1992:1378). Therefore, he would most likely believe that zombie cat became popular from an urban legend to an internet sensation due to the public’s inability to distinguish between urban legends and popular culture. While Ben-Amos (1992), claims “that they reflect the culture and history of a given people because they are stories that ‘people tell to themselves about themselves’” (1992:114), so he believes that the zombie- cat is part of American culture.

3. According to Fernback, how might Wyckoff (1993) characterize the “zombie cat” story? How does the story “symbolically encode the social ambiguities that underlie [community crisis]?”

**Stephanie:** According to Fernback, Wyckoff would characterize “zombie cat’s” spread as a collective response to the act of someone accidentally burying his cat that appeared to be dead. This story “symbolically encode[s] the social ambiguities that underlie [community crisis],” (1993) in that it draws attention to the crisis of animal cruelty (although this incident appears to be accidental since the owner thought his cat was dead). The fact that animal cruelty exists and is a problem, is what draws readers to wanting to read about whether this incident was an act of animal cruelty and if not how such an incident could happen.

**Hannah & Megan:** Wyckoff (1993) asserts “that urban legends travel through communities as reflections of a collective response to some form of community crisis, ‘even as they symbolically encode the social ambiguities that underlie that concern’” (1992:2). He most likely suggests that the zombie-cat is reflecting a current American community issue. This story “symbolically encode[s] the social ambiguities that underlie [community crisis]” because it is uncertain if the cat was actually dead or not when it was buried.
4. According to Fernback, how might Degh (1994) argue that CMC ‘liberates’ the “zombie cat” story from low culture?

**Eva & Amanda:** Degh would argue that CMC allows for the story to be legitimatized. It makes it appear as an actual new story, giving it importance. He argues that cyberspace, unlike low culture, gives an “air of authority” and the “zombie cat” story is easily found on the internet.

**Kyle E.:** The mediated transmission of oral folklore lends it an authoritative character as the authentic voice of all human kind. Stems from putting low culture in an electronic format like a webpage to make it high culture.

**Lucas & Wesley:** The proliferation of stories like "zombie cat" on the web through professional news journal sites lends credibility to the story. It elevates the story from the level of local hearsay to a narrative that is worth reading and discussing. Essentially, the widespread coverage on the web serves to provide these stories with legitimacy in the eyes of the readers.

5. What would Fernback have to say about the “zombie cat” story as a manifestation of contemporary oral culture?

**Eva & Amanda:** It easily gained popularity within contemporary oral culture throughout cyberspace. It allows for the retelling of the story, drawing interest to the story.

**Kyle E.:** She would say that a low/oral culture that started from gossip can become contemporary oral culture simply by getting more and more popular. As more people hear about it and become interested, the story becomes recognizable. Every time the story is mentioned, the audience may get sparked with excitement for knowing about it.

**Lucas & Wesley:** Contemporary oral culture, in the age of the internet, often takes the form of a widespread meme. The fact that people around the world can hear the "zombie cat" story - from Tampa Bay, Florida - instantaneously, is the manifestation of modern oral culture. Essentially, modern oral culture has become not a local, but a global one.

6. What would Fernback have to say about the “zombie cat” story as an example of how cyberspace serves as a site for oral culture?

**Eva & Amanda:** Fernback would say that although the title could lead to a false understanding of the phenomenon that occurred, people still believe the claims of the story and its title. She would say that cyberspace allows as another form for mass sharing the urban legends.
Kyle E.: She would confirm that once a story becomes a part of cyberspace, it gets sense of popularity and therefore authenticity.

Lucas & Wesley: Cyberspace emphasizes oral culture in a way that is entirely new to the information age. Within 0.2 seconds of typing "zombie cat" into the search bar, you can get more information than you can read in a lifetime. Fernback explains: "Real-time writing in cyberspace allows us to communicate rapidly with one another in speeds commensurate with thought and with oral storytelling". We live in an age where local hearsay can explode into a global phenomenon, which can give rise to entire camps of opinions regarding the subject.

B) Ian Inglis, “Sex and Drugs and ‘Rock’n’Roll’: Urban Legends and Popular Music.”

Referencing Ian Inglis’ historical analysis and characterizations of popular legends found in popular music, address the following:

1. Give a recent (within the past 12 months) example of how a new popular music legend is “laden with details” and contrast this with an urban legend that is not detail-laden. Why does this matter in Inglis’ analysis of popular music legends?

   Judy & Hank: Our recent example is the David Bowie and Mick Jagger scandal. Supposedly they have been in a relationship dating back to their younger days. This article is filled with many people (even close friends of them) stating that they literally saw these two growing in their relationship. The 'not detail-laden' urban legend of Johnny Cash is that his family is cursed. This matters because details are seen as pseudo proof and would be seen as something more than gossip.

2. How does the recent example (from #1 above) transmit “perceived excesses of the rock and roll lifestyle?” According to Inglis, why should this matter?

   Judy & Hank: It captures the rock and roll lifestyle by describing the crazy lives of these artists. Their lives are filled with orgy's [sic], drugs, or other sexual antics. They are all tied together in this concept of wild rock and roll singers.

3. How does the example (from #1 above) demonstrate plausibility, and why (according to Inglis) is this significant?

   Judy & Hank: Through the details and specific quotes and references, the article demonstrates plausibility. These would be seen as evidence and proof, creating a believable incident and not just mere gossip. People believe more detailed stories because it gives a sense of legitimacy.
4. Using Inglis’ criteria, identify a recent (within the past 12 months) example of a new popular music legend, then use Inglis’ taxonomy to describe a “believer” in the story. Identify a “cynic,” as defined by Inglis.

**Thea & Isabel C.:** Miley Cyrus supposedly died of an overdose

Believer[s]: fans writing their messages of condolences

Cynic: The panic in my sister’s voice when she read something about Miley Cyrus being dead. I had to explain about Internet “jokes”.

#godblessher

5. Use Inglis’ taxonomy to describe an “entertainer” in the story used as an example in #4 above. Identify an “expert”,” as defined by Inglis.

**Thea & Isabel C.:**

Expert: A Facebook page labeled “R.I.P. Miley Cyrus” claimed that “about 11 a.m. ET on Monday (February 2, 2015, our beloved actress Miley Cyrus passed away… Please show your sympathy and condolences by commenting on and liking this page.”

Entertainer: Hollywood Life reporting it.

6. What role would Inglis say each of the storytellers (from #4 and 5 above) plays in the dynamic perpetuation of the recent popular music legend? How do they interact with each other?

**Thea & Isabel C.:** They all fuel each other, because whatever attention this false data gets is still attention nonetheless. This hoax is empowered with ever tweet, Facebook post, and comment.

7. Using Inglis’ criteria, identify a recent (within the past 12 months) example of a new popular music legend. How would Inglis explain the new legend’s ability to “assist in the establishment and maintenance of social relationships?”

**Donna:** According to ESPN’s story “# beliebitornot” there is a story circulating of Blake Griffin slapping Justin Bieber in a Starbucks after Bieber walks in shirtless and acts overly entitled. The article denies the truth of it, but argues that the story is relevant none the less.

**Augie:** There was a circulating story that occurred about a year involving a shirtless Justin Bieber being slapped in the face by Blake Griffin in a Starbucks in Los Angeles. Although it was deemed to be untrue by many refutable sources, the myth still lives on, as many people hoped that Justin Bieber would in fact be beat by Blake Griffin. This clear example of gossip is explained by Inglis: “In this sense, the urban legends discussed above
tend to be, in the main, examples of gossip. Although individual storytellers may vociferously defend or attack the reliability of the accounts they present, ultimately any attempts to ‘prove’ or ‘disprove’ the allegations are irrelevant, since their “truth” or “untruth” is relatively unimportant.” Although it came out as fact that this event never occurred, the desire for it to occur gave the legend life, regardless of its factuality.

**Angela:** There was a rumor going around that Chris Brown had died after being hospitalized for a seizure. This rumor assists in in the establishment of social relationships by giving people who share the story something to talk about. Sharing gossip creates bonds between people because they find something interesting to share and discuss.

8. Using the example in #7 above, how would Inglis say that the popular music legend “can be seen as [a] modern variant[] of the deeper, often religious, myths about legendary places, people, and texts?”

**Donna:** The details of the story—Bieber refusing to abide by the “no shirt, no shoes, no service” rules, his calling of his body guard to intervene on his behalf, and even his drink of a carmel macciato serve to support the image of Bieber as conforming to what Inglis refers to as the “excesses of the Rock and Roll lifestyle.” In other words Bieber is above the social rules and expectations that govern our society.

**Augie:** In his article about popular music legends, Inglis references Campbell’s paper quoting, “It will be always the one, shape-shifting, yet marvelously constant story that we find, together with a challengingly persistent suggestion of more remaining to be experienced than will ever be known or told”. This legend about Bieber, dubbed #beliebnot(ESPN) changed meaning multiple times, as I heard multiple variants of the story in just the 2 weeks that it was aired across ESPN, when a very small number of people actually experienced what happened in that Starbucks.

**Angela:** Inglis would say this is a variant of other myths about legendary people because it shared the common theme that successful people often get caught up with drug use and then die as a result of it.

9. Using the example in #7 above, how would Inglis say that the popular music legend “allow[] for members of the public to engage in vicarious identification with the named protagonists and elements of their lifestyle?”

**Donna:** The location of this story is key to allowing the audience to engage with Bieber and his lifestyle. Because this takes place at everyday location, a Starbucks rather than an exclusive location, it makes the audience believe that they too have the chance to watch Bieber’s get slapped to the ground while they
wait for their latte. But over all this story serves as a release because the audience is unable to identify vicariously with Bieber. Bieber gets punished for not abiding by social norms and living this “excessive” lifestyle. Blake Griffin literally tries to beat some sense into Bieber.

**Augie**: Based upon the amount of disdain that many people have towards Justin Bieber as well as Blake Griffin for their high attention grabbing lifestyles, Inglis would argue “It may be more likely that these tales evoke a sense of envy for an unconventional and permissive lifestyle that is beyond scarcity and in which such behaviors are tolerated, even celebrated.” In a normal sense, someone being beat down in a Starbucks would be a very bad thing, not celebrated by anyone, but given that Bieber attracts so much negative attention, a simple altercation in a Starbucks could lead to a wildly inaccurate story created out of envy towards the lifestyle that Bieber undertakes.

**Angela**: The Chris Brown rumor would allow people to further associate Chris Brown with drug use because he was hospitalized. It also reaffirms people’s beliefs that successful musicians do drugs.