Introduction

Apple introduced a new product called iPad in 2010. This “tablet computer” is a platform that can utilise the Internet as well as a host of other types media and communication technologies. The device has a multitouch display and no traditional keypad at all. Its size and shape seem to place it between smartphones and laptop computers. The iPad, already in its second generation, has been a corporate success apparently aiming to define a whole new category of mobile devices. Many brands are now developing and marketing their own tablet computers in order to further solidify (and capitalize) this new category of devices.

This phenomenon warrants careful sociological study as the cultural processes set forth by this new category of design cannot be understood without exploring the co-existence with other devices. Domestication of the iPad is a process in which the user has an active role in the outcome of the technology and in challenging the traditional notions of designer and user. The meanings of different media and technology and the legitimate uses of those are challenged and renegotiated with the arrival of new technology.

The concept of domestication originates from anthropology and consumption studies and has been developed particularly by cultural media researchers interested in the role of information and communication technologies (ICTs) in the household (Morley and Silverstone 1990, Silverstone 1994, Silverstone and Hirsch 1992, Silverstone et al. 1991). This framework stresses that domestication involves more than simply bringing new machines or software home. Rather, in this process not only the technology is being evaluated and negotiated but also the users and social practises are being challenged and shaped by the technology.
In the process of introducing technologies into everyday life people utilise their knowledge about the “biography of things” (Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton 1981, Haddon 2003: 46, Kopytoff 1986). That is, the way products are enmeshed as a part of the routines, rituals and practices of everyday life is evaluated in connection to all other technologies and devices that people are aware of. Hence, the iPad does not enter the everyday life in isolation but, rather, it is “born” in a network of relations between, say, the Kindle, print media, desktop computers, television, Internet, Macbooks and mini-PC:s.

This article deals with two aspects of the iPad domestication process. First, it is explored what existing technologies people invoke in their accounts as they “make sense” of the iPad, its place in the technology landscape and its possibilities and legitimacy. Mary Douglas (Douglas 2002) has studied how a novel cultural object is perceived as possibly a powerful thing or a real danger when people encounter an object which does not fit neatly into classifications that already exist. Sometimes the dangers are emphasized, sometimes the power of the novelty. An object which seems to exist between different categories is actively tried to force into one category, but this activity itself produces contradictions people have to live with. Thus, trying to fit a novel object into one single category may raise negotiations of how to redefine those features of the object and related subject positions that do not neatly fit into that one category.

Second, this article takes into account the discursive work through which people position themselves as they talk about the uses of the iPad. The users may speak from various positions such as a “techno-geek”, a book lover, a businessman or a woman, a parent and so forth. Various positions afford different critiques and possibilities to endorse the new technology. Hence, it is interesting to see what kinds of positions the iPad activates and to which effect: not only is the iPad given various roles and objectives but also users are being shaped and placed into various contexts. As people account about these issues they at the same time premise their accounts with cultural values and references. These descriptions in fact negotiate and intervene with the shared ideas about cultural stability, change and future opportunities as well as threats.

Clearly, the novel design concept introduced in the form of the iPad is only completed through the process of domestication. The designer has obviously wanted to create a functional and pleasing device, but this device must also prove itself by finding and defining the users and uses in the context of everyday life. Silverstone and Haddon (Silverstone and Haddon 1996) propose a model they call design/domestication interface to explicate how design and domestication form the two sides of the coin of innovation. Domestication is always anticipated in the design and the design is completed only when people domesticate the design. Certainly, there are several economic, cultural and political processes that constrain and enable the possibilities of users to define the meanings of a specific technology but Silverstone and Haddon propose the model to highlight the activities of the users as agents who complete and rekindle the design. Domestication of technologies also involves various things that people do just to show to other users that they are active agents who participate in completing the innovation and design. This can be recognized in the ways people in our data actively position
themselves as competent agents and construct views of the place of the iPad among other technologies and media forms. The users comment on the device, defining and discovering the boundaries of the attractive and legitimate uses, completing the design in the process of domestication (Bakardjieva 2005, Katz and Sugiyama 2005, Lie and Sørensen 1996).

By drawing on qualitative data gathered from public online discussions in which people account for their ideas about the iPad’s relevance, the paper addresses the question how the meanings of the device are constructed and negotiated. These discussions are motivated by the need to understand the new piece of technology and to grasp its uses and legitimacy. The paper discusses these empirical findings within the framework of domestication of media technology. The data illustrate how people relate their accounts to prevalent cultural values and existing devices. Thus, they are negotiating the cultural place of the new device and in iPad’s case, a design concept. iPad in particular is interesting because it defined a whole new category of technology design interfering with the traditional technological landscape.

The paper is organised as follows. Data and methodology as well as domestication studies are discussed in their respective chapters. Empirical analysis is then presented with subsections on 1) placing the iPad in the technology landscape and 2) positioning of the users via discursive means. Finally, the conclusions are presented.

Data and methodology

The data is obtained by means of Internet Ethnography. Public online discussions related to the topic are analysed. These data have been found simply by doing Internet searches using iPad as a keyword. The data are not restricted to a certain country or region but, rather, International discussion forums have been utilised. No directly individually recognizable information is published and possible names and nicknames have been changed in order to preserve anonymity as well as possible. On the other hand, the discussions have been posted to public domain and the topic is not overly sensitive.

Social constructionist approach to understanding the data will be adopted and discourse analysis used as the method. The results contribute to our understanding of the domestication and design of new and emerging technology.

The word discourse has been used in many ways and in its most open sense it can be understood as encompassing all kinds of spoken interaction as well as written texts (Potter and Wetherell 1987). One way of describing the outcomes of language is to study systems of language that construct an issue in a certain way. Systems like this are referred to as interpretative repertoires (Potter and Wetherell 1987). These systems have various functions and marked plurality. According to Potter and Wetherell interpretative repertoires are systems of language used recurrently to describe various social and other phenomena. Within these language systems things and actions are evaluated and
characterized, and through their recurrent use, they renew, reformulate and maintain meanings regarding things and actions of the socially constructed world.

Such language systems can also be referred to as discourses and in this research the word discourse is used to refer to such a language system. Ian Parker provides a compact definition for discourses: “definition of a discourse should be that it is a system of statements which constructs an object” (Parker 1992). Thus, even if a person were to heavily criticize the iPad and perhaps later say that he or she is rather fond of it or finds it very important, the researcher does not need to wonder whether this person should be put into the slot of iPad “haters” or “enthusiastic users”. Rather than trying to categorise people the analytic emphasis is on elucidating the ways it is sensible to account for the uses and roles of the iPad, what premises these accounts are based on and what sort of positions are accomplished and given to the device and also other users.

Thus, the focus is not on the individual but on culturally sound ways of accounting for the technology. The approach is to study context-bound language use and in particular the discursive means that people utilise to make themselves understood in each context (Luomanen 2010). Elucidating the logic and function of these means allows for seeing the plurality of roles which the iPad may have in everyday life. Whenever the taken-for-granted nature of the device is questioned during the interviews it creates talk where the iPad is accounted for in a manner that is sensible in the context. Language use not only enables people to construct objects in a certain manner, often in contradictory ways, but also to manage their position and alignment with culturally shared values. In a sense, it is like going through Garfinkel’s experiments again and again (Alasuutari 2004).

In discourse analysis it is maintained that a self-sustaining and coherent self or an identity is an illusion insofar as context-bound repertoires produced by people are often internally contradictory (Alasuutari 2004). One of the social constructionist assumptions that plays an important role in discourse analysis is the notion of anti-essentialism. As the world is available to humans as socially constructed, individuals’ identities cannot be seen simply as self-sustaining and “natural” entities (Burr 2003). Instead, people continuously construct their identities in social interaction with various repertoires which, depending on the context, might be contradictory with each other (Alasuutari 2004, Burr 2003, Jokinen et al. 1999, Potter and Wetherell 1987, Suoninen 1992). The construction of identity can also be seen as heavily contextual, as in various discourses or social repertoires people may produce different kind of identities. In this respect, language use is directly linked with the construction of the identity as it affords individuals with various subject positions (Alasuutari 2004, Jokinen et al. 1999).

These positions are discursively produced through social interaction:

An individual emerges through the processes of social interaction, not as a relatively fixed end product but as one who is constituted and reconstituted through the various discursive practices in which they participate (Davies & Harré 1999, 35)
Hence, these positions are created, accomplished and assigned to others through various discursive practices that people utilise in social interaction. Instead of having “roles” people manage their positions, making them available with discursive means. The focus of the analysis is on the ways in which speakers and hearers are constituted with these practices (Luomanen 2010). The iPad, its uses and the related moral judgements depend on the way they are accounted for and what kinds of positions are available to the speakers. Individuals do not necessarily produce a continuous “image” of themselves but, rather, a multiplicity of positions in various contexts. The positions are not necessarily non-contradictory, but fragments in the discursive production of personhood (Davies and Harré 1990).

Technology domestication processes

Whether and why a technological device or service does or does not become popular is not an easy question to answer. Donald A. Norman provides thoughts about the “success” of technology products in his book The Invisible Computer (Norman 1999). Norman set out to understand the ways in which technology is adopted and why it is that some products are successful while others fail regardless of how “good” they might be. He was particularly interested in the personal computer and how it has fared on its way to becoming a mundane household commodity. He notes that every technology has a life cycle and as they “progress from birth, through troubled adolescence, and on to maturity, their characteristics change” (Norman 1999). Such transformations in the way we understand a certain technology can likewise be studied.

Until the last decade or so research on the ways in which technologies become a part of the everyday life was relatively scarce (Lie & Sørensen 1996, 2). It is true, following Norman’s thinking, that as technologies age and mature, their characteristics change – as technologies become commonplace, people become increasingly familiar with their presence and various routines and habits develop. As technologies are adapted they are both shaped and shaping as they form a multiplicity of relationships in the culture, manifested in the practices of individuals and institutions (Silverstone et al. 1992). The users of technology likewise change; technology in use can be understood in multiple ways as people accumulate experiences with it and share them in social interaction.

It follows that products of technology can change everyday practices but a product such as an iPad is never adopted as such – people never use it quite the same way the designer intended it to be used (Lie and Sørensen 1996, 8-10). Usually people refuse to use some of the product’s features, which the designer views as sophisticated, or they find innovative ways to use it differently, perhaps in a thoroughly unexpected manner. Products, then, are socially shaped but we must also remember that the “social” is itself shaped by the products.

It has been acknowledged that product and technology development should properly understand the everyday practices of users and the ways users adopt new products
(Miettinen et al. 2003). To be able to introduce technologies and products into everyday life one must have knowledge of the “biography of things” (Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton 1981, Haddon 2003: 46, Kopytoff 1986); how products live their lives as part of the routines, rituals and practices of everyday life. This article will acknowledge the importance of analysing the social contexts of the use of technological artefacts.

In domestication studies it is emphasised that adopting a technology is a process rather than a single event. Using and consuming various products is, in itself, a production of meanings and culture instead of just mirroring the meanings and significance already inscribed into products and technologies. (Haddon 2003, Haddon 2007). Domestication can also be seen in connection with cultural media studies where e.g. television has been studied as part of social practices and family relations (Peteri 2006). According to Peteri the idea of domestication might suggest that technologies are domesticated once, after which they simply exist, resisting change over time. However, the role of technologies, for example in the context of home, is constantly evolving, and even familiar technologies may assume new characteristics. Thus, Peteri (2006) notes that domestication is not a process with a clear-cut beginning and end. This is easy to understand, particularly in the case of information and communication technology such as the iPad, which has multiple uses and is connected to various spheres of social interaction.

Domestication has to do with concrete artefacts, devices and practices that enable negotiations regarding home, family and everyday life (Jokinen 2005). Furthermore, through their uses they contribute to our understanding of private and public, gendered division of labour and work, family and private life. Media technologies are an elementary part of everyday experience and it is virtually impossible to avoid this element of everyday life (Peteri 2006, 381-382). According to Lie & Sørensen (1996, 3) the routines and functions of everyday life signify stability and reproduction of social patterns. They note that introducing technology into this context necessitates a review of the notions of both everyday life and technology: everyday life is not so stable and technology is not so revolutionary after all. New technology such as the iPad may provide a stimulus for change but it may also serve to further consolidate the routinised actions of everyday living.

A key point is that in the introduction of technology into people’s lives, the categories of the designer and the user need to be understood and explored in broader terms than rigid a priori facts. Studying the role of technology in everyday life reveals how human actions shape socio-technical relations and how people make technology meaningful in their lives. Instead of studying the “impact” the focus shifts to understanding the innovation occurring after the technology leaves the drawing board. This is a central idea in the constructivist turn of technology studies roughly since the late 1980’s. Thus, “taming” new technologies, domesticating them and their capabilities is seen as a process in which the user, the consumer of technologies, has an active role that contributes to the outcome and the role of technologies in the context of everyday life, thus challenging the traditional conceptions of designer and user. (Lie & Sørensen 1996, 4-9).
In addition to this, Katz & Sugiyama (2005, 79) present some important observations on how people act as co-creators when they innovate various uses for their mobile phones. As Lie & Sørensen point out, consumption of technology leaves considerable room for action at the user’s end instead of making the user adapt to whatever properties technology may have. Bakardjieva (2005, 25-26) too notes that the term consumption could be replaced with the term use as it “subsumes consumption of both technology and content, but it also encompasses a wide set of significant practices that remain invisible from the perspective of the standard production-consumption dualism”. A “common analytical split” (Lie & Sørensen 1996, 9-10) has been identified between production and consumption: in the protestant spirit of contemporary culture of many societies’ production is associated with work and value, consumption with enjoyment and a distraction from the accumulation of wealth. In this thinking, production can be seen as active and creative while consumption would fall into the category of passive and adaptive.

**Taming the iPad – in search for legitimacy**

**iPad and the technology landscape**

The iPad is compared to existing devices and technologies in order to make sense of its capabilities. As a result, the iPad is “born” in relation to other, competing products and, as a novel concept, other product categories such as laptops. Consider the following example:

**Data sample 1**

Many people are still trying to figure out what niche the iPad fits into, that being said:

The more detailed reviews seem to be pretty clear that that it easily beats out most existing netbooks, but can’t quite compete with laptops (for power) or smartphones (for communication).

Most of the reviewers agree that it’s great for viewing videos, photos, and browsing the web. It makes an okay (but not great) ereader. Otherwise, the first generation of apps has done a really good job of taking advantage of the screen real estate.

The characteristics of the device are weighed against its competitors in order to make sense of it. In the technological ecosystem where various gadgets are available any device must prove to be worthy in order to present a viable option to consumers: it would be
silly to buy an inferior product. Since the iPad can do so many things, it is being compared to a wide range of competing products.

The above sample also invokes the concept of developing software as an integral part of the iPad. The following sample further illustrates this point.

**Data sample 2**

It's only been out a few weeks so new software is eking out. People like the above poster who rails against the iPad will likely find iPad clones to be just that, clones with worse support and less available software, the software needs to be different to take advantage of the simple interface.

It is not a replacement for a computer, it is a new type of device its potential is yet to be discovered. The best is yet to come.

The argument is constructed around the claim that iPad is so new that we cannot yet criticize it as the potential is still in the future. As the innovativeness of the device is emphasized, it follows that the device is “untouchable” by other categories of technologies, since the users cannot yet define the boundaries for the abilities of the iPad. Consider the following sample for further illustration:

**Data sample 3**

Quite simply because this is a new category of product people don’t quite know what to make of it yet. Instead they waste their time comparing it to the other things either side of the spectrum. The computer/laptop and the smartphone. It is neither and was never intended to be.

Here, the iPad is again produced as a revolutionary product that does not have a clear continuity to competing products, thus rendering any critical comparisons useless. The iPad is constructed as an unknown entity to some extent, thus its abilities should be seen as a tabula rasa that the users can actually fill to their liking. Furthermore, the person behind the comment concludes that Apple never meant the device to be a replacement of a laptop or a smartphone. This is a good example how the users anticipate and evaluate designer’s intentions, thus participating in the design process, completing it on their part.

**Data sample 4**

iPad is aimed as a 'content' consumption device, a device which could potentially replace a full PC in many households, a device which will challenge the laptop for certain knowledge workers (including this one), a travelling entertainment device,
something to amuse the kids on long journeys, a digital picture frame, a portable email client, a web browser sans compare.

The commentator utilizes the notion of Apple’s design process in order to place the iPad in the technology landscape. By referring to the aim of the designer without any hesitation the argument gains authority. The “content consumption device” is a recurring notion in the accounts where the iPad is depicted as a revolutionary novelty.

**Positioning of the users via discursive means**

When producing descriptions about various issues and objects, people may assume various positions such as an expert, enthusiast, novice and so forth. These positions are accomplished and assigned to others through discursive work. As users of technology, people can accomplish various positions that can for example gain them legitimacy. On the other hand, some positions can be uninviting and thus rejected as is illustrated in the next sample.

**Data sample 5**

I am not an Apple "fanboy", I don't possess any Apple devices thus far, not even an Iphone. But I have to admit this device has me drooling. All the negativity about what the Ipad can't do, is centered around the fact it's being compared to a laptop. Those who have watched Steve Job's keynote speech will know that this was not the intention. The Ipad was intended to fill the (most definite) void between laptops and smartphones that has certainly not been filled by netbooks.

People can't make a mistake in their perception of a product. They're the ones to buy it, they're the ones to review it, and they're the ones to use it.

The commentator refuses the position of a ”fanboy” in order to ward off any accusations of being overly biased towards Apple products. To solidify this, he states that he has no Apple products of his own, thus rendering him an objective reviewer. Against this positioning work he gains legitimacy when he says that this device has him drooling. Furthermore, he accounts for the users as being incapable of being wrong about their own judgement. In essence, this account beautifully illustrates the co-creation process of technology design. In the following sample another example of this is given.

**Data sample 6**
No two iPads are alike or used the same by its owners; therefore, it’s a bit foolish (as we are seeing all the time in online forums and elsewhere) to try to determine how one will like/use or not use an iPad, from how others use or not use one. The whole purpose of an iPad, is to select the type apps you need for your enjoyment/work/travel/hobbies or other needs. One neighbor of mine, has hers full of all sorts of cook books/recipes, designed specifically for use on the iPad, gardening and culinary herbs apps., free video-podcasts she subscribes to on wine, and she's now a very happy camper.

This argumentative logic of this comment builds on the fact that the customization possibilities and individual uses are practically endless, thus making every iPad and every user individual. Therefore, the legitimacy of the device or the uses cannot be challenged. An example is given about a woman who has found many gratifying everyday uses for her iPad. Recipes, gardening and podcasts on wine are in a sense quite far away from the activities of a techno-geek, which give legitimacy to the uses: the device has not been bought simply because it is an Apple and cool to own as an artefact.

Wine hobby can still be seen as a cultured pastime activity in contrast to techno enthusiasm. Similarly, books represent another traditionally appreciated form of culture. In the next sample books and iPads are discussed.

Data sample 7

I hope it didn't come off as too arrogant. I'm trying to help us define in clear and rational language what kind of physical books will survive this digital transition. If you want to make cheap paperbacks — by all means do so. I just don't think anyone will buy them. The rest of us will be reading those on our iPads and Kindles.

So instead of creating this romantic delusion about saving all forms of printed matter, I hope to energize us book lovers around the forms that *do* have worth as objects in the context of digital publishing. The landscape of books (newspapers, magazines, etc) is changing. Our energy should go into supporting narrative forms that have futures.

The co-creation process is illustrated in the above sample as the commentator seeks to motivate his fellow book lovers to appreciate the changing landscape of printed products. He positions his “fellow booklovers” as active agents who have the power to define and promote the kinds of futures they wish to see. To balance this account, the commentator refers to a “romantic delusion”, thus positioning himself as a person who is open to technological development instead of being a Luddite. Hence, this account displays competence in both the worlds of technology and literature.
Conclusions

In this article draft we have begun to examine how the iPad is being discursively produced in the data. In an earlier study we have explored the materiality of the media and technology landscape (Alasuutari et al. forthcoming). In this work we hope to continue to analyse the significance of the iPad in a similar manner. Thus, through these data we aim to draw a discursive understanding of the ways in which people relate to the new device. We hope this understanding can contribute to the knowledge of technology design, co-creation and domestication.

We have examined what conceptual resources people use to make sense of the iPad and whether they consider its characteristics legitimate or debatable. In this way the analysis will shed light on what forms people’s iPad use is likely to assume and why. (Alasuutari et al. forthcoming).

As was stated in the introduction, the domestication of the iPad is a process in which the user has an active role in the outcome of the technology and in challenging the traditional notions of designer and user. This is supported by the data: clearly, people recognize their position in the development process of a technological artefact.

The data include not only isolated descriptions of the new device but, rather, discursive work that actually contributes to and produces the new device. The innovation is not an innovation unless it is recognized as one. For example, one way of producing this innovation is to call iPad as a “mobile content consumption device” which underlines the multiplicity of contents and possibilities related to the device. Based on the data, due to iPad’s presence in the technology landscape people have begun to describe more traditional media and devices as somewhat restricted in their nature: they lack mobility, usability, variety of contents or customizability. Should this discourse of the mobile content consumption device become hegemonized, it will threaten and challenge the other media and devices based on their “stagnant” and “restricted” nature.

Another way of defining the iPad as a distinct innovation is to place its true potential into the future. As it is developing and a “revolutionary” product, not all of its capabilities can yet be known. Thus, within the argumentative logic of the accounts it cannot be criticized due to this future potential. Similarly, as every iPad and every user are accounted as individuals, the users’ experience cannot be questioned. These are typical ways of countering iPad criticism about it being just a useless gadget.

As this talk about the technology landscape is being produced, people position themselves, others and the devices in various ways. Central to this positioning work is to exhibit awareness not only about the technological world and its trends but also about the more traditional cultural values.
References:


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