Yikking the Yak

how anonymous social media posts may assist with the identification of student support needs

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-cHB3Rbz1OI
Yik Yak?

- Launched November 2013
- Social medium which allows anonymous posting
- User names may be hidden
- Location based
- Aimed at university students


https://www.yikyak.com/home
Allows feedback

- Yakarama
- Upvote/downvote
- Peek
- New/Hot
- My Herd
- Filters offensive material/images
What and where

- A selected university (‘herd’ can be set to anywhere in the world)
- A twelve month period, collated by weeks
- Screen shots of current yaks at random times of day and night once in 24 hours
- Correlated with information from student support services at chosen university
Ethical considerations

• Berry (2004) argues that the internet is in a state of constant flux and as such ethical considerations will struggle to keep up with the changes. He argues that there is need for a certain flexibility in the so called ‘golden rule’ concerning human subjects that one should ‘do no harm’.
• The British Sociological Association (2002) talk about consent ‘as far as possible’
• Actors are not being manipulated in that they are freely publishing their comments. The researcher is be observing rather than questioning.
• Caveat: where harm may come to an individual it is stipulated that the researcher MUST intervene with an advisory yak
Break it down

• Shock – A yak intended to provoke a reaction
• Joke – sometimes dubious, often recycled
• Emote – “I feel....”
• Question – usually serious, replies vary!

Northcut (2015)

Initial Review

No real surprises in:-

• Sex (much and varied)
• Drugs (predominantly alcohol)
• Rock ‘n’ roll (parties/nights on the town)

Also high on the list:-

• Lectures – bored/hungover/high in
• Assignments/workload – too much/too late
• Staff – loved/loathed
Initial Review

• Students are (usually) helpful to each other
• Bullying is happening but infrequently and usually ‘policed’ by other students
• A significant number of students:
  - hate late night noise
  - feel lonely
  - are waiting for ‘the one’
Initial review

• ‘Blue Monday’, 3rd Monday in January – increased suicide threats
• Exam periods – increased anxiety but not as high as may be expected
• Bullying – individuals targeted/identified
• Holiday periods – drop in number of yaks, comments about boredom
Incidents and Accidents

• In a four month period staff recorded various incidents:
  - Antisocial Behaviour
  - Support needed
  - Violations of fire safety
  - Violence/aggression

• Incidents involving ASB double the next on the list
What do the Yaks say about this?

• Students hate noisy neighbours
• Certain staff identified as being the ‘one to go to’ for support
• Drunk cooking/in room smoking causes ‘fire’ incidents
• Violence seldom mentioned, raises questions as to whether it has become ‘normalised’
Is it useful?

• Support staff (particularly those on night patrol) can find the noisy parties more easily

• Staff monitoring the app can inform decisions about the availability of advice and what is foregrounded

• The ability to respond with accurate and factual information without alerting students to the fact that it is a staff member (more likely to be taken on board)
Other universities....?

• Lets take a ‘peek’..........
References

• NORTHCUT, K.M. (2015) Dark side or insight? Yik Yak and culture on campus Professional Communication Conference 2015 IEEE International