

SOCIAL MEDIAPSYCHOLOGICAL DRIVES BEYOND THE WALLS, EXPRESSIONS AND OUTCOMES

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Abstract: Should we go back in time yet take with us all that progress brought along, then we should very well quote TS Eliot when we refer to one of the tools that triggered so much change in our lives in the 21st century- social media. In his views, we are "distracted from distraction by distraction" and even though this was contextualized in a different time, we can very well use it now, since "you are what you share" (C. Leadbeater,2009) Nonetheless, a more inquisitive mind would go beyond the "walls" of all those social postings generate and try to see this slice of virtual world in a different light. Although a plethora of papers have been written already covering the topic, it is never enough when we try to understand the mechanisms beyond in a search to make people aware of the dangers lying there, covered by so-called personal benefits. The present paper is trying to transcend the postings and see, through the semiotics of the lexis and image how people communicate themselves, what their fears and desires are, which are the keys to all these and how can each of us look at social media in a less encrypted way.

Keywords: social media, psychology, semiotics, language, image, communication

Introduction

In a world where bridges are no longer stone made and the walls are there no more, where arches across the oceans and time and mentalities are perpetual but yet they are immaterial, the virtual space is a parallel universe, accessible "on demand", with no clear space-time coordinates, It is a world for which the more you give the more it asks back, in a hunger for information that is unprecedented. It asks for information, for friends, for veiled dangers but also unexpected opportunities. This is the world offered by the internet, by social media, with the sole aim to bring unity, to lead, to endanger or to level up everything. These versatile instruments can very well be your friend but also your foe, depending on the power you decide to invest them with.

The role of New Media

New media has been turning into an ever present companion to all those whose technological support is a tool at hand, and it is so skilled at being versatile- new media helps people buy or just get information on what they need, it allows people draw and paint, sing, write, share ideas or even be happy or supportive of each other simultaneously. New Media reveals old memories or brings to life relationships old forgotten because New Media is everywhere and can do anything. Due to the new media complexity and the inordinate possibilities it offers for exploration, we will solely focus on the most visible and richest application (in terms of users' preferences), an application that has the largest appeal ever, for individuals from 6 to

65 years old – Mark Zuckerberg’s application, the most controversial Facebook, along with its similar companions- Whatsup, Google Plus, Instagram.

The interconnectivity generated by the connection to social networks and the interest taken in sketching up a social personality of our own to be present in the virtual world make thus public our information on age, gender, occupation, socio-professional belonging and positioning, social-cultural preferences, or social interaction. Relationships built and developed in this way as a result of access and exchange of such information are kept alive with all the above mentioned apps and represent the social component of what New Media has come to be, starting with Web 1.0, Web 2.0 and coming to present. Relationships built virtually are various and have various aims.

Building ties in Social Media

To what extent these virtually built relationships are either favorable or detrimental to the individuals or to the group they all belong to has become a research topic of interest for those focusing on the field. In this context one speaks of strong and weak ties (Granovetter, 1973) : strong ties are the relationships built with people one trusts and with those whose social group is similar with yours to a great extent, usually people that are very similar to you. The young people that have a higher education background and live in metropolitan areas tend to have a number of strong ties networks. They build their network on an awareness strategy that let them make connections with a benefit either at work or in social life. Educated users are target oriented based on social status or character. Educated users are interested in the information their counterparts post from the fields they work in or from the fields they are interested in. Therefore, creating strong bonding with well positioned people access to information, chance and opportunities is facilitated. More than that, educated connections are able to offer various kinds of help when needed- support in sensitive issues or intellectual ones. Strong connections are built among family and friends, among people we know well. Weak ties on the other hand, are made up of acquaintances, when one gets connected with someone whom he or she barely knows in reality. The weak ties offer access to the new information which otherwise is not visible in the strong ties networks. Loose acquaintances, known as weak ties, can help someone you know get inspirational ideas (Burt , 2004) or get a new job (Granovetter, 1974) . Here we must specify that the strength of a tie as Granovetter saw it (1973) is a “ combination of the amount of time, the emotional intensity, the intimacy (mutual confiding), and the reciprocal services which characterize the tie” To mention just a few of the characteristics of these ties, we will just

bring up the following:

- a) Strong ties act upon the emotional disturbances. Consider for example the situation of the people in the massive fire in *Colectiv* club, when more than 60 young people died, or the situations when people loose family members. Those affected get support online, they get sympathy in the form of soothing words or sensitive postings as pictures.
- b) Weak ties are built upon a small number of common media- it may be either just Facebook, or just Google +, whereas the strong ties get their strength exactly from a higher number of media in common- same users have various accounts but same connections on Facebook, Google +. Instagram and Whatsup (Haythornthwaite, 2002)

constant with gender. Thus one can easily notice how conversations on things they do or fear, on things they plan or rank as very important show up as similar to the same group age: topics on school and fun are common for teenagers while subjects on independence and university years are for the young adults. Moving forward young adults are preoccupied with getting a job and a house, with socializing and making money, to later move on to topics on starting a family, issues on personal inner freedom or questions on the philosophy of life. This leads us to conclude that people share the same problems and find happiness in similar things, depending on contexts that can be patterned through language and visual communication made public on social media.

Common ground theory (Clark, 1993) would suggest that strong ties can communicate very efficiently because of their shared understanding, so apart from getting information on the type of personality, researchers rate these words seen as common on the analyzed subjects' walls as clusters of topical lexis for certain social strata, for individuals with certain fields of interest, in that the common core vocabulary shows common topics for discussion.

Building identities online

On the other hand, if we approach social media as an observer but take the side of the user, then it should be said that identity is sketched by individual's representation in virtual interactions. This representation is provided by the user's profile, while the images in his profile offer the visual perception of alterity. Online representation contains more and more visual elements, allowing for an individual's online presence even when the latter one is offline (the others can still interact with him, they can still send him messages or they can post pictures which the receiver will see the moment he gets online again) Identity is thus slowly built, with a series of visual elements (Boyd, 2004) Thus, the virtual interaction no longer takes place between people but between imagistic identities, the dialogue unfolds between postings or images, quotes or statuses. The question now is why do social media users interact if all the dialogue is not between them as persons but between the materials they make use of? Well, they do so because they need social acceptance. They look for acceptance presenting themselves in the best way possible considers Higgins (1987) and Siibak (2009) as continuation to Mead (1936) who speaks about *generalized alterity*, which is actually a pattern designed to anticipate the others' reactions based on the attributes of desired self-image. Moreover, our online identity tends to be exaggerated as a compensation for the lack of non verbal communication or visual contact (Geidner et al, 2007), context in which we do our best to become the best member of the group (Campbell,2006) Simple images or simple phrases show clear belonging to certain groups. In this respect one can mention Strano (2008) and Young (2008) who discovered -in their long termed research- that sociability, attractiveness, sport and humor are the key topics used in online postings, especially on Facebook. Moreover, the perfect key for best influential appeal on Facebook is the careful selection of pictures (Siibak, 2009) By tagging, commenting and labeling, the pictures are then grouped on categories and some of them become profile pictures raising their importance along with visibility (the profile is public, while the other photo postings are visible as set, to friends only) By means of these procedures and maybe others which we do not focus on in this current paper, the users actually perform an impression management (Siibak, 2009; Strano, 2008; Young, 2008) in the sense that they choose what to post or what words to use in status, simultaneously anticipating or expecting a certain type of reactions from the other users, which confirms the hypothesis that individual social media users are in great and constant need for social acceptance and confirmation of belonging to one or more social groups,

aiming actually at building themselves a certain identity which reality refused to offer for various reasons or which is more difficult to achieve due to lack of some natural factors or environmental gaps.

Conclusions

People will connect more and more and if possible they will start with younger and younger ages. A high degree of interconnectivity means spreading ideas, ties and scientific discoveries. However, since online communities supply individual development and culture spreading they will soon become part of the cultural phenomena. Should there be any impediments then they should be sought in the idea of aggressing the private space and lack of trust in others that hinder people to connect or to judge ties *cum grano salis*. The last redoute to be conquered is the confidentiality problem and the ability to comply with the right to personal safety and private life by building ourselves a social capital of individuals who share the same interests.

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