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SOCIAL NETWORKS AND INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION

Theoretical
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Abstract

Social networks visible influence people's ability to interact and communicate. Extending social circles by establishing virtual links involves a number of positive aspects such as: instant access to options for interaction, sharing of information to large communities of people, intensification of acts of communication, high levels of feedback and trust with people with whom we communicate. On the other hand, social networks adversely affects communication by decreasing the interaction face to face, by imposing superficial communications experiences, grammatical and spelling erosion of the language.

Therefore, the study aims to capture the spread of social networks, their use and impact on interpersonal communication. More specifically, they look for the answer to the question: what is the nature of interpersonal communication that is found on social networking sites: personal, emotional, private or shared, informal, and public?

The system of mass communication has been transformed by new communication technologies. In various stages of social development „media has played a dominant role, reflecting the level of technological development and social expectations” (Vartanova, 2014, p. 98). In mass culture, written language and press gradually lost their importance, their role of mediatization of reality being taken over by audiovisual and finally by virtual environment.

This change of perspective from the conventional means of mass communication to modern ones implies the positive aspects of interpersonal communication, but can be seen as a sign of communication crisis.

The accessibility of information, interactivity, globality and connectivity at personally, socially and economically level have transformed the Internet into an important means of global communication. Its specific forms of communication such as email, instant messages via messenger, blogs, social networking, sites to spread the pictures and videos, turn to their own way of understanding the world, to structure the time, to present events and connect people.

Instead, the predominant use of the Internet involves increased risks associated to the information (fragility of communication infrastructure), decrease of face-to-face interaction, social isolation and atomization. In addition, as sociologist asset, “Internet exceeds limits of domestic life as the borders between work and home blur: many employees continue to work at home after work, by checking emails or finishing tasks that they cannot carry out the during day” (Giddens, 2010, p. 568).

Globally, the Internet is constantly changing and evolving. According to data provided by the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), a specialized agency of the United Nations Organization for Information and Communication Technologies, in late 2014, will be about 3 billion internet users. However, there are 4 billion people that are still not using the Internet and not more than 90% are in developing countries.

Thus, as it is shown in Figure 1, by the end of 2014 it will be notices an 35% increase in the number of people using the Internet, from 15.8% in 2005 to 40.4% in 2014. However, Internet access is unbalanced. Most internet users belong to developed countries (78%), while 32% are in developing countries. Over a period of about 10 years, the number of users has grown steadily, with more than 27%, both in developed countries and in developing countries.

In developing countries, the number of users has doubled in the past five years, from 974 million in 2009 to 2 billion in 2014. As seen in Figure 2, since 2005 there is an increase of over 1.5 billion users. On the other hand, in the developed

countries the number of users increased by 63% from 616 million in 2005 to 918 millions in 2014.

The data provided by Statistic Portal, as noticed in Figure 3, indicates that in Asia-Pacific the largest share of Internet users worldwide is concentrated (44%), being followed by Europe (24%), Middle East and Africa (19%), North America (13%) and Latin America (10%).

In the top of countries with the highest number of people who navigate online are China (618 million), followed by the USA (263 million), India (154 million), Japan (101 million) and Brazil (100 million). The first five places are occupied by countries with more than 100 million Internet users, three of them belonging to Asia-Pacific region.

Today, digital media has become one of the most important means of communication, an effective means to quickly inform one, to share feelings, ideas and projects to a wide audience. The emergence of the socialized networks facilitated the use of the Internet, by using this platform people can relate to family and friends from different parts of the world, they can make connections, explore and view not only their own network of friends, but networks of friends of close persons.

Due to their popularity, accessing social networking sites has increased, now reaching millions of users. As sketched in Table 1, in November 2014, according eBizMBA, Facebook is the dominant social network, with a total of 900 million monthly visitors. However a significant number of users have been accumulated and other social platform like Twitter with 310 million and LinkedIn with 255 million. In addition, other social sites are highlighted, that accumulate followers.

In this context, it raises fundamental questions: What is the impact of social media on interpersonal communication? The increasing of the use of social networks contributes to an improvement of the communication or it is a means by which people lose the ability to communicate? We are more connected or disconnect than before?

A number of studies present evidence that online networks can have significant negative effects on communication.

While social media gives you the option to send the same message to a large group of people, they have a negative influence on the dynamics of the relationship. Assault by large amount of information, users are reluctant to provide feedback. Therefore, the high degree of non-response reduces the level of interaction and the individual can become aloof or emotionally affected (Goessl, 2010).

Communicational crisis results from the reduction of human contact, with a significant impact on human welfare. Spending more time communicating virtually, people are forced to

devote less time to family and friends, which affects personal relationships.

In the study "Multipurpose Survey on Households" conducted by Fabio Sabatini from Sapienza University of Rome and Francesco Sarracino at STATEC, Luxembourg, in 2010-2011, it is sought whether to establish if use of the social media reduce subjective welfare and if so, in what way. The research was applied to an annual survey conducted by the National Institute of Statistics on approximately 24,000 Italian households corresponding to 50,000 personnel.

The results of the survey indicate a strong correlation between high welfare of individuals and the high levels of trust and face-to-face interaction. The two researchers highlight how "online networks play a positive role in subjective well-being through its impact on physical interactions, while using social networking sites is associated with lower social trust" ("Evidence Grows That", 2014).

According to the "spiral of silence", the theory issued by Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann in 1974, a person is more willing to reveal in public opinion when it is similar to prevailing public opinion. If their view is not widespread, it is the individual tendency to remain silent on the subject. Therefore, the literature studies say, virtual environments of communication do not give an alternative platform for discussion for those who are not willing to publicly support their opinion. On the contrary, social networks cause a high degree of awareness of the user and it "pushes" to adopt the opinion of others, causing him to avoid engaging in debate. In addition, if people believe that friends on socializing networks do not share the view, it becomes less likely for them to express their opinion in other contexts such as meetings with family, friends, neighbours or colleagues service.

In this sense, the study of Social Media and the Spiral of Silence was to investigate how social networks facilitate exposure of minority viewpoints. The survey consisted in the application of a questionnaire on a sample of 1801 adults, having as starting point a major public issue: Edward Snowden's statements in 2013 on government surveillance of email and telephone records of Americans.

The conclusion of the study emphasizes the lower availability of people to address this topic in social networks than in face-to-face communication. Over 85% of Americans say they prefer to have a direct conversation about the surveillance program, while only 42% of Facebook and Twitter users are willing to post about this issue on online social platforms (Hampton, Rainie, Lu, Dwyer, Shin, & Purcell, 2014, p. 3).

It was also noted that Facebook users are most likely to share their opinions, provided the opinion coincides with that of their virtual friends.

If people included in their Facebook network support the view, are about twice as likely to join a virtual discussion on the issue addressed. The authors of the study attributed the low involvement of users with minority views in debates of fear to disappoint their friends, to confront virtual isolation or intimidation.

A negative effect of the use of social networks is the loss or change of identity. To be accepted by the group and win a large number of friends or followers, users are using social networks to build an ideal image. With the text and pictures posted on social networks, people are able to project an illusion, making everyone to want to be in the public eye. Paradoxically, virtual social networking platforms tend to make us less social by providing a surrogate for the real thing.

In general, there is certainty about the identity of persons with whom they communicate: "There is a famous internet drawing depicting a dog that stands in front of a computer. The text that can be read is as follows: the greatest achievement of the Internet is that no one knows you're a dog" (Giddens, 2010, p. 567).

According to researchers, social networking establishes superficial connections, lacking the intensity and commitment. While communicating online, the individual feels less connected and involved than in a face-to-face communication. Social connections are vulnerable precisely because they do not tend to deepen social relationships (Keller, 2013). Communication through virtual space establishes a relationship less satisfactory than those where people can really see, hear and touch each other.

Although social networks have broken the barriers of space-time, allowing the human to interact more frequently and faster, the communication has encountered new barriers and threats. With 93% of dispossessed communication contexts, people are pushed to build relationships and make decisions based on short phrases, abbreviations of words and emoticons (Tardanico, 2013).

In addition, researchers argue that the Internet is causing a multitude of social and psychological problems. First we talk about internet addiction or compulsive speech (CAD), where people prefer to spend increasingly more time in cyberspace, to the detriment of direct interaction. In some cases, they build strong feelings of identity in the online space, which implies difficulties in separating the virtual from the real action. Currently, this dependence is understood as a behavioural disorder involving the need for constant communication, even when not required.

In turn, the social elements of the Internet create dependency, also known as "dependence on social networks". This requires a

permanent connection for the virtual users, updating their own data and verifying virtual friend pages. In most cases, this behaviour can induce strong feelings of guilt and conflicts.

The lack of privacy is another consequence of social networks. Because interpersonal communication is changing, it becomes natural for the user to share the type of information they would be exposed to direct talks on online platforms. Although there are settings that provide the confidentiality of the respondent, they can always provide personal information.

Social networks are considered to have important positive effects on communication, creating the appropriate platform to expand the social circles and to explore new horizons through online connections. As channels of communication and interaction, they blur time-space boundaries. Messages can be posted at any time of the day without any movement or memory barriers. Access and dissemination of information is done in real time without any delays and having available unlimited space of content.

Largely, restrictions on the role of individuals are removed, users having the responsibility to become both communicators and participants. In this sense, anyone with internet access can receive and send messages, or simply as a commentator, reporter, citizen or politician.

According to the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, more than 63% of Facebook users in the United States access the site daily, 40% of them connect several times daily. Only 14% of Facebook users claim that they visit the site more than once a week (Duggan & Smith 2014).

Through social networks, people who are in interaction can share thoughts, knowledge and ideas. The diversity of knowledge and information can be gained through the perceptions and perspectives of people who socialize in a global network. Also, communication via social networks tends to be based on trust, so our messages tend to be more open.

On the other hand, by their interactive form, social networks are a way of strengthening or replacement of face to face interactions. This allows people to maintain existing connections, and to reconnect with old acquaintances.

According to PewInternet and American Life Project, 66% of American adults use social networking platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, MySpace or LinkedIn. Keeping in touch with family and friends is the main reason for using these virtual channels of communication. Over 64% of users say that staying in touch with current friends and family members is a major reason for accessing the sites, while half say that the resumption with old friends, with whom they lost contact, illustrates another important reason.

Over 14% of users state as a cause for the use of social networks the connection through an interest or a common hobby, while 9% say that to make new friends is just as important. Reading of comments about public figures is mentioned as a factor by 5% of the Americans, while finding a partner is a factor mentioned by 3% of users (Smith, 2011).

“The time that most people spend online reduces the time they spend on the relatively unsocial activities of watching TV and sleeping. Moreover, the relationships maintained new set of individuals who live far away through online communication only rarely are with an entirely new set of individuals who live far away” (Boase et al., 2006, p. 3). However, in most cases, communication through social networks takes place with those people that the user has direct contact or by phone. The stronger the direct contact is, the more likely to be contacted through socialization pages.

Social networks become extensive debate spaces where people can express their views and gain an understanding about how other people think and live. Therefore, social spaces like Facebook and Twitter, are intended to broaden the sphere of public speech and to shape new discussion perspectives on perspectives of social issues. There are no limitations of the content, the spread of information depends directly on the size of the network.

Social networks offer a whole new way to communicate: instead of eroding writing skills, it improves them. Social network Facebook encourages proper grammar by failing to set limits of words. Although they use abbreviations, most users are aware of how to spell correctly.

On the other hand, social networks that limit the user to a number of words (for example Twitter) encourages both a concise way of writing but also the individual's ability to quickly get to the point. For example a simple "bye bye" takes the place of longer separations.

In addition, the short text evolves to become their own language “some popular terms like LOL (" laughing out loud ") evolved into single words that have greater significance than their original abbreviation. LOL is used almost as a kind of punctuation, in order to add a joke or a certain inflection to messages. They do not always indicate a laugh literally” (Young, 2013).

Although people have become increasingly social and interactive with each other, the style of communication has changed. It was noted the tendency of media to communicate more via online platforms than by face to face interaction. Social networks play an important role in transforming the way people communicate. Therefore, communication by social networks becomes increasingly integrated into normal human

experience with increasing human communication process and adaptation to new technological requirements.

Notes:

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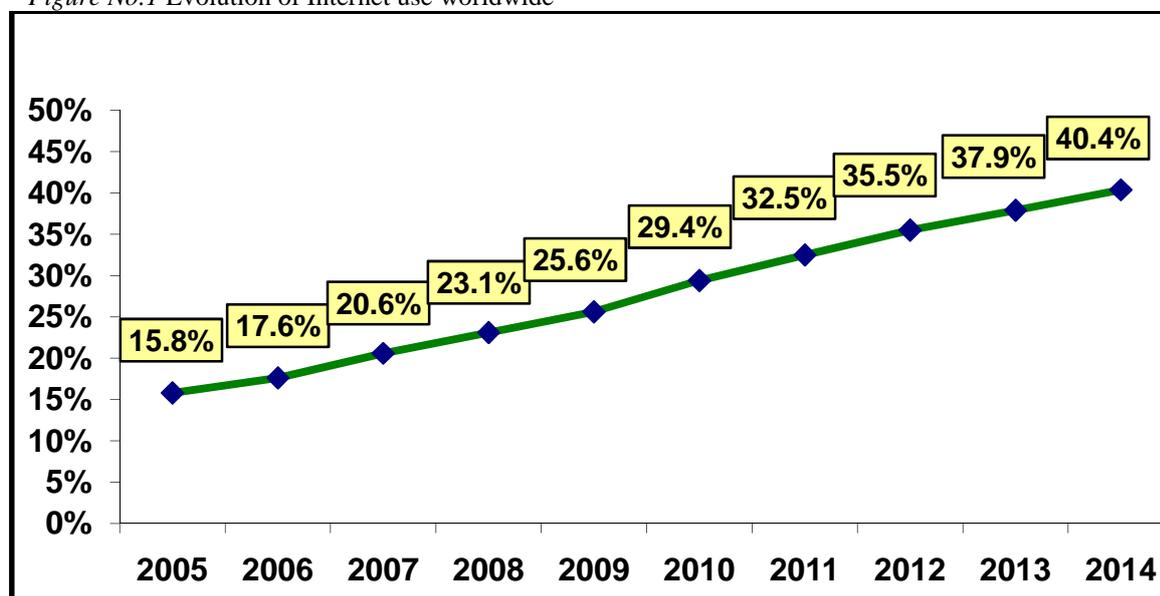
Appendices

Table No.1
 Top 15 Most Popular Social Networks

<i>Nr.crt.</i>	<i>Social Networks</i>	<i>Number of visitors per month</i>
1.	Facebook	9000.000.000
2.	Twitter	310.000.000
3.	LinkedIn	255.000.000
4.	Pinterest	250.000.000
5.	Google Plus+	120.000.000
6.	Tumblr	110.000.000
7.	Instagram	100.000.000
8.	VK	80.000.000
9.	Flickr	65.000.000
10.	Vine	42.000.000
11.	Meetup	40.000.000
12.	Tagged	38.000.000
13.	Ask.fm	37.000.000
14.	MeetMe	15.500.000
15.	ClassMates	1.000.000

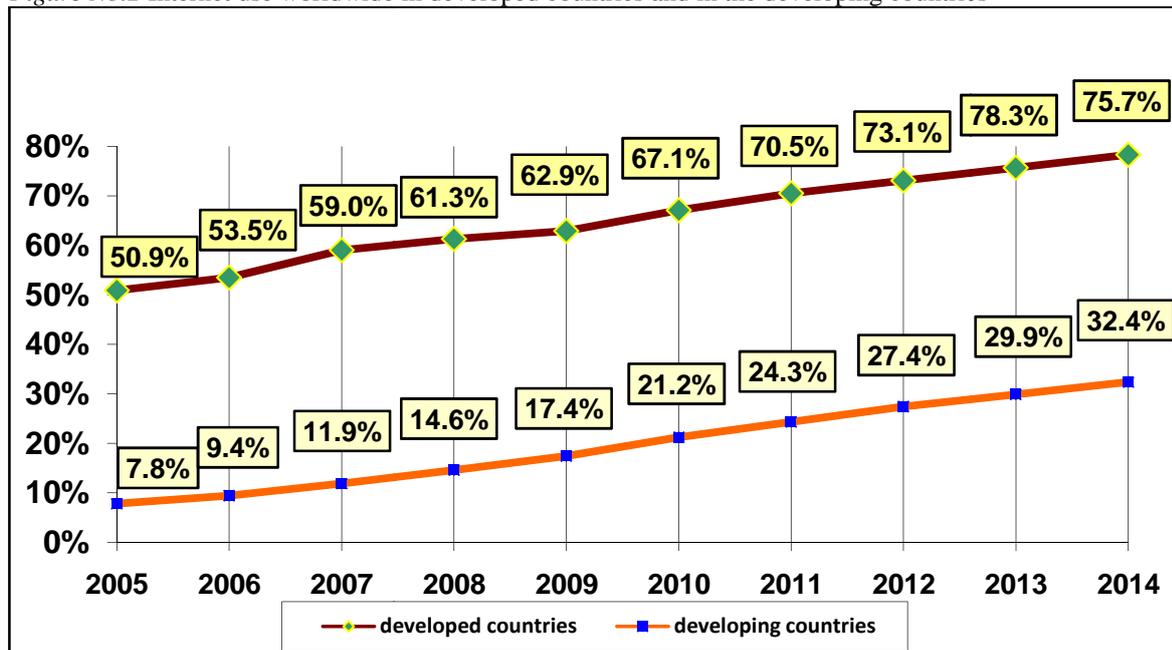
Source: <http://www.ebizmba.com/articles/social-networking-websites>

Figure No.1 Evolution of Internet use worldwide



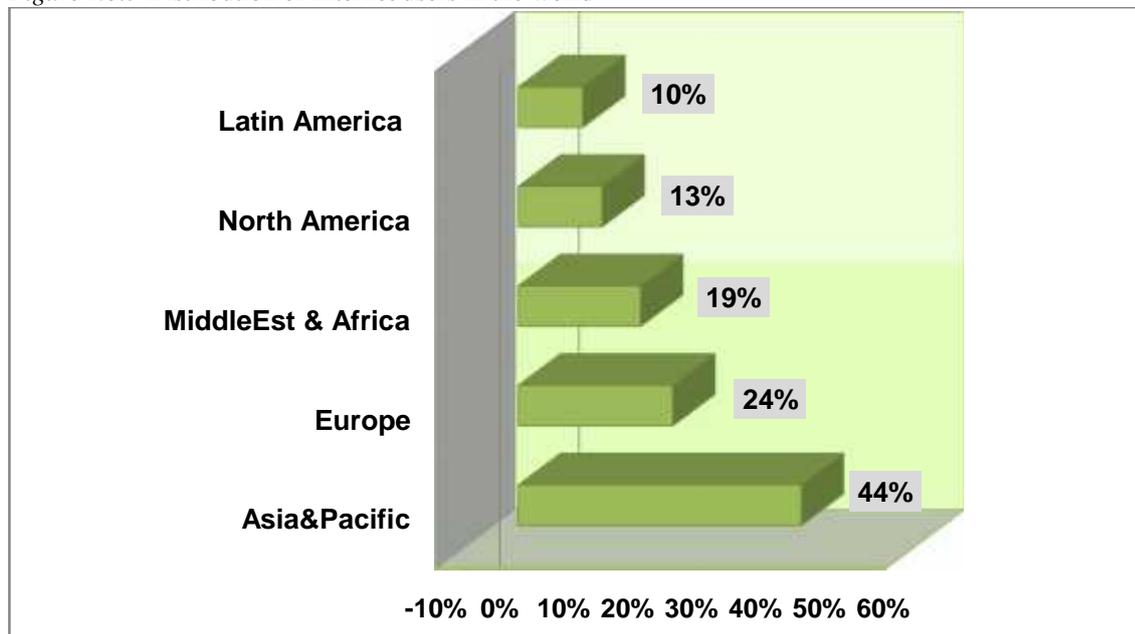
Source: ITU World Telecommunication / ICT Indicators database

Figure No.2 Internet use worldwide in developed countries and in the developing countries



Source: ITU World Telecommunication / ICT Indicators database

Figure No.3 Distribution of Internet users in the world



Source: The Statistics Portal, www.statista.com

