

## **Theoretical Aspects Related to Social Practices of Adolescents on Social Media**

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**ABSTRACT:** In the proposed article, starting from some theoretical considerations, we will reflect on the influence of online social networking on adolescent social attitudes and practices. At the same time, we will touch on some aspects of current trends in adolescents' preferences for the online communication space, as well as their prosocial behavior on social media. Many studies have highlighted the negative effect of using online social networks by children and adolescents. It is worth exploring, however, the positive impact of these practices. Adolescents' social relationships online are supported by the element of reciprocity in the exchange of positive messages, and this effect also reflects in real life.

**KEYWORDS:** social media, teens, online social practice, prosocial behavior, online interactions

### **Introduction**

Much has been written and it will be written about the influence of using online social networking on adolescent behaviors, practices and attitudes. Paradoxical seems an inexhaustible search term, and perhaps what makes this subject always interesting is that studies are barely resolving to keep pace with the rhythm at which technology is developing.

Although, over the years, many studies have highlighted the negative effects of social media use, recent research on the effects of online communication shows that it generates high social involvement among children and adolescents (Valkenburg and Piotrowski 2018, 9).

Starting from the above statement, we intend to look at how the prosocial practices and attitudes of adolescents are influenced in online interactions. If in real life personal exposure between peers generates closeness, does the same happen in the online media? Does social media promote self-disclosure? If so, does this social practice strengthen relationships between adolescents, causing prosocial behavior in the online and day-to-day life, in the long run? (Rotaru 2011, X, 5).

When we study the practices and attitudes of adolescents in relation to social media, it is important to have an interdisciplinary approach in which our fundamental theories and knowledge of different fields: sociology, psychology, communication sciences. From a sociological perspective, we are interested in studying the teachings of adolescent culture and their behavior on online social networking. Accessing online social networks is a bracing practice for more and more people. There are currently hundreds of online social networking sites where we interact to learn, exchange ideas, messages, or simply, want to know what has happened.

### **About Social Networking Theory**

Social networking theory in social sciences has origins in sociometry, which has attempted to quantify social relationships. This method is considered to be a major contribution to increasing the functionality of the groups. (House et al 1988, apud Oşvat 2012, 44).

Mark Granovetter has expanded the use of social networks to explain social phenomena in real life. The social structure is composed of social networks that are in different relationships with one another, being interested, creating common points, overlapping. Their role is very important in the lives of individuals.

The term network refers to "individuals (or, rarely, communities or roles) that are linked by one or more social relationships, forming a social network" (Marshall 2003, 489, apud Oşvat 2012, 43). Unlike other traditional sociological theories, in the sense of this theory, the attributes of individuals are less important (the individual represents only one point) than their relationships and relationships with other individuals within the network. (Grosbeck 2007, VIII, 42)

### **Social networks in virtual space**

The development of information and communication technology has led to an essential change in general lifestyle. Most of us, in order to adapt to evolution and progress, choose to transact most of our day-to-day activities using personal or service computers, the latter becoming more and more monopolizing our time, having the right consequently creating a dependence on virtual space.

The need people and teenagers in general, especially when interacting with each other, is that to inform each other, to exchange information and messages. In fact, at the basis of the social groups and the society, there was this need that generated the intercommunication relations.

Accessing online social networks is a bracing practice for more and more people. There are currently hundreds of online social networking sites where we interact, whether we learn, exchange ideas, messages, or just want to know what has happened. (Livingstone and Brake 2010, 80).

The appearance of online social networks has significantly changed the way we use the internet, but also how we stay connected with everything that happens online. Often, our online activity runs simultaneously with offline (online is in concordance with offline).

### **Adolescence and social media consumption**

In order to understand the social media correctly in relation to the adolescent culture mechanism, assuming attitudes, practices, behaviors, it is important to consider their age peculiarities as well as different theories about social media consumption. Recent specialist studies show that adolescents spend an average of 9 hours a day in social media today (Rideout 2015, apud Valkenburg and Piotrowski 2018, 11).

Although many hypotheses agree that the postmodern world, dominated by social media, generates a generation of superficial thinking that is unable to deepen the content, there is not enough scientific evidence to support this statement (Carr 2008, apud Valkenburg and Piotrowski 2018, 250). It is true that, for example, intense multitasking practice is associated with a diminished concentration of concentrated attention. However, this deficit is not generated by the social media itself, but by a specific way of using social networks.

Although strongly mediated, the causal relationship between social media use and the diminishing of intelligence in adolescents or the predisposition to digital dementia is not scientifically supported (Huebner 2012, 26).

There are studies that, starting from contextual variables and mediation, concluded that social media use has a positive impact on adolescent sociability. (Strasburger and Wilson 2016, 39). For instance, long-term consumers experience more social contacts than those who use these social channels in the short term. Also visible is the difference in the positive impact that online social networking has on social integration capacity.

### **Trends of Teenagers in the Digital Era**

The "digital natives", named by Tapscott's "net generation" (Tapscott 1998, 9), succeed in their online interactions of working and rapidly transferring the information they receive. Although we don't deal with a direct relationship, but with one intermediated by the device, adolescent interactions generate interpersonal relationships, whether if we are talking about communicating with a few emitters / receivers, or talking on a larger scale, about virtual communities that are in the virtual sphere. These communities are called "social aggregates" by Howard Rheingold, and result from virtual interactions "when enough people have long enough public discussions with enough emotional involvement to constituted interpersonal networking networks in virtual space" (Lenhart and Madden 2007, apud Grossek 2007, VIII, 43).

At the base of the preferences of adolescents for virtual space, there are motivations for the need to communicate and optimize their communication skills, the desire to receive feedback from third parties, about the perception of one's own person, the chance to experience different identities. (Valkenburg and Piotrowski 2018, 35).

Regarding the latter, the reasons why adolescents engage in virtual space in identity experiments (such as pretending to be someone else) are also varied: self-discovering (testing the reactions of others), social compensation (overcoming shyness) and social promotion - facilitating socialization (Pabian and Vandebosch 2016, 160).

The youngest of the social networking users are those who have access to the latest applications, gadgets, information, but they are also the ones who easily synchronize with the rapid pace of social-media changes, always looking for the next cool thing.

According to Raport within the EU Kids Online project in February 2019, Velicu & all found, in a study conducted between 2013 and 2018, the teenagers' meeting to phase out (progressively) the Facebook online socialization platforms in favor of the instant messaging like WhatsApp and Snapchat, or media sharing like Instagram (Velicu, Balea and Barbovschi 2019, 19).

Specifically, this does not mean that they're starting to give up definitively on Facebook by wiping their accounts, but their engagement rate is lower, because they use other online tools; they want to expose their thoughts, photographs, etc. only in front of a smaller online group, things that Facebook can not offer anymore.

### **Good social media relations means better relationships in real life?**

Preserving the already existing social relationships of adolescents is today greatly facilitated by social media. Recent studies on the effects of online communication show that this type of communication generates a high, rather than low, social impact (Valkenburg 2014, in Valkenburg and Piotrowski 2018, 247).

Some longitudinal studies suggest that social media encourage adolescents to share with real-life friends about things they would not have the courage to communicate face to face. Just like real-life personal exposure, personal exposure in the online space between friends provokes proximity, trust, so thus strengthens friendships. The principle is simple: when we confess something personal to a friend, we challenge him to share something personally with us. (Rotaru 2011, XI, 5).

This mechanism of reciprocity applies both online and offline (Reich, Subrahmanyam and Espinoza 2012, 368 ). Some studies have led to conclusions according to which the virtual activity of young people is in close connection with real life and influenced by it directly or indirectly, the relationships that it is creating them in the online media, sometimes following patterns in reality, both animated priority of socialization and belonging to a group.

### **Social attitudes and practices on Social Media**

According to Tőkés Gyöngyvér, referring to the results of the 2012 report of the Eu Kids Online report, launched in 2010, young people form their own online media repertoire ("media repertoire"), which includes some media usage habits, which are relatively constant over time, indicating the role of the internet in structuring the daily activities of children and young people. (Hasebrink Domeyer 2012, 758, apud Tőkés Gyöngyvér 2014, 55-57).

It is quite difficult to have a clear picture of our own media repertoire because it is not only a summation of the various media activities but rather a complex structure and focusing on objectives according to each individual's needs. As a structure, this is the sum of several specific components, like: the daily use of the Internet, the type of online activities, the particularities of the content accessed, the motivations that make the Internet being used, the way of integration in the daily activities as well as the subjective interpretation using the Internet.

Practicing of multitasking has undergone large changes in recent years among adolescents. If in the 1990s, 16% of adolescents used multiple means of communication simultaneously, after the advent of web 2.0 technology, increased very much, almost doubled, according to Valkenburg and Piotrowski (2018, 251). Among adolescents and beyond, it's a frequent practice to use multiple devices, communicating with people, listening to music, or commenting on various posts. The great amount of information we are assaulted with, and the major changes in the media landscape, force us to disclose this practice.

A relevant example in this respect is the practice of video games, where gamers perform more operations at the same time, are mindful of many visual information. Whether we are talking about media tv or social media on the internet, designers create products that demand distributional attention. The Wired Magazine is called "console entertainment", the steady stream of bit entertainment that comes through social media (Instagram, Youtube, Messenger and which we ingest instant without realizing that we are actually exploiting our need collective consumption of increasing amounts of information and entertainment (Miller, 2007, apud Valkenburg and Piotrowski 2018, 251).

According to the public data provided in February 2019 by Digital Lives, for Romania, within the EU Kids Online Project 2018, adolescents use the internet for a variety of practices, even if the uses of information (search news), creative (creating video content or audio to share with others) or participatory (discussing political or social themes). The same source found an evolution in Internet use for the homeworks, increasing it in teenagers aged 13-17. As regards accessing online news, there is an increase for all age and gender categories. As the data show, social access to the group of friends is one of the main motivations for children and adolescents to use the internet, over three quarters using the internet to communicate with friends and family (Velicu, Balea and Barbovschi 2019, 19).

### **Prosocial online behavior from the perspective of social exchange and generalized reciprocity**

Although it started from economic explanations (loss and gain), the theory of social exchange has come to a different shade, including factors that are not related to the economic sphere. So the theory of social exchange, in sociology, explains social life through the method of rational choice.

Emerson is the first to define social exchange as a theory (Voicu 1998, 142-162). The American sociologist uses in his approaches both the term "social exchange theory" and the "exchange approach". The value of exchange, in its view, is theorized in terms used by economists to define usefulness, but discovers the sphere of exchange and relationships whose benefits are not necessarily of economic, material nature.

The one who manages to theorize the issue of social exchange, bringing it closer to the field of sociology, is Peter Blau. He argues that "the mutual exchange of extrinsic benefits among agents may be absent or incomplete, such as where power relations are exerted" (Blau 1964, apud Oşvat 2012, 37)

The theory of social exchange had a strong echo in the 50s and 60s, represented by G. Homans. It starts from behavioral psychology, examining social behavior as a "change of activity, tangible or intangible and, more or less advantageous or expensive, between two persons" (Lallement 2007, 246, apud Oşvat 2012, 37)

The reproach that this paradigm has received has aimed at exaggerated reductionism, it implies that the relationship exists under the conditions of an advantage for both parts. From the point of view of interpersonal relationships, this theory starts from the idea that "interactions between people, their associations, are by virtue of an exchange of goods and services (material or symbolic)." (Iluţ 2009, 26). The concept of "exchange" remains attentive, but we are talking about a social change, which is much more complex than the economic one.

### **Reciprocity in online communication from the perspective of the Social Exchange Theory and the Theory of Generalized Reciprocity**

Prosocial behavior online is a voluntary behavior that targets the benefits of others or the promotion of harmonious relationships (Van Rijsewijk et al. 2016, apud Erreygers, Vandebosch, Vranjes, Baillien, De Witte 2018, 2).

Erreygers (2018, p.4) say that there are two explains for these findings: The theory of bounded generalized reciprocity (Yamagishi et al., 1999, apud Erreygers, Vandebosch, Vranjes, Baillien and De Witte, 2018) and findings: the reinforcing spirals model. People's prosocial behavior in social interactions in groups is influenced by their expectations of positive and reciprocal behaviors from other group members. So according with the theory of bounded generalized, when peoples are treated positively by others they will have at themselves a prosocial behavior. This phenomenon is happening in online media too in different context and members groups. (Erreygers, Vandebosch, Vranjes, Baillien and De Witte 2018, 4).

The norms of reciprocal prosocial behavior may quickly develop in online social networks, when peoples changes reciprocally positive messages. Some authors concludes that this process may even be more widespread online than offline, because online actions have the potential to reach a wider audience and to be witnessed long after they have actually taken place, compared to offline actions, which can only be witnessed by the people present at that particular place and time. (Lai and Turban 2008, apud Erreygers, Vandebosch, Vranjes, Baillien and De Witte 2018, 8).

They were distinguished two forms of reciprocity: direct and indirect reciprocity (Rankin and Taborsky 2009, Roberts 2008, apud Erreygers, Vandebosch, Vranjes, Baillien and De Witte 2018, 8 ). Direct reciprocity perspective means “paying it back”: returning a favor after having received one.

In indirect or generalized reciprocity entails “paying it forward”. Returning a favour to someone who did a favour at itself. Some authors demonstrated that generalized reciprocity also occurs online (Lauterbach et al., 2009; McLure Wasko and Faraj, 2000; Nelson and Rademacher, 2009, apud Erreygers, Vandebosch, Vranjes, Baillien and De Witte, 2018). In the research on cooperative behavior in the specific context of video game playing had concluded that playing violent video games cooperatively may increase later helping and cooperative behavior (Greitemeyer and Cox, 2013, apud Erreygers, Vandebosch, Vranjes, Baillien and De Witte, 2018, 4).

Moreover, research on cooperative behavior in the specific context of video game playing has reported that playing violent video games cooperatively may increase later helping and cooperative behavior (Velez et al. 2014, 626).

## Conclusion

Preserving the already existing social relationships of adolescents is today greatly facilitated by social media. The virtual activity of adolescents is closely related to real life, influencing each other, directly or indirectly. Relationships created in the online environment often follow patterns in reality, both of which are animated by the desire to socialize and belong to a group.

Adolescent preferences for certain online social networks change over time, depending on interests and relationships. According to the theory of bounded generalized, when people are treated positively by others, they will have a prosocial behavior. This phenomenon is happening in online media too in different contexts and member groups.

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