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Psychological Aspects of Social Media

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Glossary

Term	Meaning
ASD	Autism Spectrum Disorder
CMC	Computer Mediated Communication
EE	Entitlement/Exploitativeness
GE	Grandiose Exhibitionism
SNS	Social Network Site
UGC	User Generated Content

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1. Introduction

In recent years Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and many other Social Media Networks have changed the lives of their users in many different ways. The advent of smart mobile devices in everyday life has added an additional dimension to the frequency and ease of usage of such services. This paper examines the degree and the types of change that Social Network Sites (SNSs) contribute to the lives of individuals.

An overview of the current research is provided, as is an indication and evaluation of the spread of Social Media over the last 19 years, beginning with *Open Diary*¹ which brought online diary-writers together into a community and thus created what is thought to be the first SNS as we understand it today (cf. Kaplan / Haenlein 2010: 60). Initially a survey of the current areas of research is provided in order to supply the appropriate perspective for the necessarily constrained focus of this work and a limiting definition of the term "Social Media" is proposed.

This paper concentrates on the changes that individuals undergo under the influence of Social Media usage. The main focus is the change in self-awareness of individuals, particularly in respect of the person's level of self-confidence and degree of narcissism. Additionally and in contrast to that, the change in interaction of certain groups of people through SNS usage is discussed.

¹ www.opendiary.com was online from October 22, 1997 until February 7, 2014

2. Social Networks

Internet access in developed countries has long since become ubiquitous, just as it has more recently attained popularity in second and even third world countries – which is attributable in particular to the wide spread of mobile devices throughout emerging economies. Currently around 40% of the world's population has internet access (cf. Internet Live Stats 2014). No longer is the mere passive consumption of pre-defined content enough for the masses, but the technical possibilities brought about by the so-called “Web 2.0” have taken over.

Websites are no longer just accessed, but they allow or encourage interactions with their users, who are able to add their own web content. Social and networking features have been added to previously conventional sites, allowing users to create their own profile, link with profiles of further users, leave feedback and thus interact with others whilst creating (or one could say, leaving behind) a net of interactions and linked content. These types of interaction have even begun to change the nature of social relationships *beyond* the confines of the computer (cf. Feinstein et al. 2015) (cf. Schrock 2015).

2.1. A Definition of Social Networks

With the evolution of social networks, there have naturally been controversies regarding the precise definition of social networks and their components. Central to the discussion has been how Web 2.0 can be differentiated from *User Generated Content* (UGC) and what features an SNS provides additionally. The term Web 2.0 was initially coined in 2004 to describe software elements that provided web-developers and end-users with new possibilities to use the World Wide Web: “*as a platform whereby content and applications are no longer created and published by individuals, but instead are continuously modified by all users in a participatory and collaborative fashion*” (Kaplan / Haenlein 2010: 61).

If Web 2.0 is the technological basis, then: “*User Generated Content (UGC) can be seen as the sum of all ways in which people provide [...] content that are publicly available and created by end-users*” (Kaplan / Haenlein 2010: 61). Of course there are definitions of social media itself which include important aspects of communication in them like: “*using highly accessible and scalable publishing techniques, social media transform and broadcast media monologues into social media dialogues*” (Hye-Ryeon Lee 2014: 1346), whilst other attempts to explain what social media is – for instance from Bartsch and Subrahmanyam – do not distinguish between Web 2.0 and social media, stating that: “*on Web 2.0, also called the social web or social media, users can engage in a variety of activities including chatting, blogging, gaming, gambling, shopping, texting, and networking[...]. They provide users a digital space for self-exploration, identity construction, or for interaction with other people without some of the constraints present in the offline world*” (Bartsch / Subrahmanyam 2015).

Based on the definitions of UGC and Web 2.0 it was possible for Kaplan and Haenlein to formulate a general expression for Social Media, which shall be taken as definitive for this paper.

***Social Media:** A group of Internet-based applications that build on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0, and that allow the creation and exchange of User Generated Content*
(Kaplan / Haenlein 2010: 61)

Although this paper aims only to cover the area of social networks, it is nonetheless important to know that social media consist not only of social networks like Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn, but also cover other kinds of media interaction. Kaplan and Haenlein, distinguishing between six different types of social media, categorizing these according to medium, high and low social presence or media richness and high or low self-presentation or self-disclosure (cf. Kaplan / Haenlein 2010: 63).

		Social presence / Media richness		
		Low	Medium	High
Self- Presentation / Self- Disclosure	High	Blogs	Social networking sites (e.g., Facebook)	Virtual social worlds (e.g., Second Life)
	Medium	Collaborative projects (e.g., Wikipedia)	Content communities (e.g., YouTube)	Virtual game worlds (e.g., World of Warcraft)

Figure 1: Classification of Social Media (Kaplan / Haenlein 2010: 62)

2.2. The Evolution of Social Networks

Because of the large growth in numbers and needs of users, SNSs have had to adapt to stay current and efficient. To enhance efficiency LinkedIn, for instance, has updated its interface regularly since its beginnings in 2003 (cf. van Dijck 2013: 208). In the following nine years users' homepages have seen dramatic changes. The previously spatially orientated and visual interface has given way to a narrative interface. In response to the success Facebook has had, LinkedIn has added features like newsfeeds and network updates to aid the sites' social networking function (cf. van Dijck 2013: 208).

Not only have the SNSs seen an increase in demand, but also the Internet itself has grown fundamentally in popularity. Currently nearly half the world's population (40%) is online (cf. Internet Live Stats 2014). The largest percentage for a single country being Bermuda with 97.75% of residents having internet access. China as one of the world's superpowers has so far achieved just 46.03% coverage, whilst in comparison the other superpower, USA, has reached a penetration of 86.75% (cf. Internet Live Stats 2014).

2.3. Meta Theories of Communication Applied to Social Media

Social Network Sites are, in the realm of media science, a relatively new phenomenon, whose precise categorization still poses a challenge to researchers in the field of communications. The established overarching theories of media science were all formulated well before the invention of SNSs or – in most cases – even before the internet became established as such a ubiquitous medium (cf. Weber 2010: 9).

The topics under discussion in this paper can best be analyzed from the three perspectives of Constructivism:

- The observer
- “Wirklichkeit” versus “Realität”
- Construction

The first discusses how an observer – which is in this case described as a living and recognizing system i.e. a human – unconsciously constructs a reality (cf. Weber 2010: 174). This is interpreted as an individual using social media, constructing an implied image of himself on the platform to share with others.

Research on the analysis of Facebook profiles found (cf. Gentile et al. 2012: 1929) that users made an impression on people and create a projection in their profiles through selection of information and actively limiting *negative* information.

“Wirklichkeit” and “Realität” (realness and reality) in the theory of Constructivism are said not be identical, since “Wirklichkeit” is a construction of the individual and “Realität” is the undefined, beyond the construction of reality an individual builds for himself. In the realm of constructivism though, there has been an ongoing discussion of whether the concept of reality is philosophically arguable or not (cf. Weber 2010: 174). Construction itself is contrasted with architecture in which an architect plans through the means and processes of a construction project. Construction, according to the theory of constructivism, is unplanned and carried out subjectively both in the dimension of culture and neurology (cf. Weber 2010: 175). This stands in contrast to Gentile’s paper in which construction is described as being performed consciously.

In addition to the theory of Constructivism, the theory of Systems (cf. Weber 2010: 193) may also be applied. Luhmann’s theory states that there are four different types of system which can be classified as:

- Machines
- Biological systems
- Psychological systems or awarenesses
- Social systems.

The applicable type for this paper would be “social systems”, since social media can of course be classified as a social system in itself.

Additionally, Luhmann says that the elements of a system are dependent on each other and in an operational perspective are closed. With “closed” it is not meant that systems are isolated from their

environment, but rather that through their operation or working they follow a regulatory circuit. Any input coming from outside a system is not seen as “input” per se but is rather included into the system and transformed into a system element. An example would be if in a newsroom information is passed on, it is first transformed and becomes part of the coverage as long as it is not filtered out beforehand (cf. Weber 2010: 191).

At the start of the 1980s Luhmann’s theory saw a change of paradigm. Social systems were now thought of as self-reproducing systems where single elements (re-) produce themselves and thus become stable (cf. Weber 2010: 192).

Although both theories of constructivism and systems can apply to SNSs the particular interest of this paper overlaps to a greater extent with the theory of Constructivism, since representing oneself on Facebook or any other kind of SNS always involves some kind of “giving information of oneself” to others. A user-profile is the online representation of a person without ever being exactly congruent with the reality of a person’s life. The process of construction (of realness of the information) should not be seen as being made actively, thus maintaining congruence with the aspect of “Wirklichkeit” versus “Realität” central to the theory.

2.4. Mid-Range Theories

The communication theories of middle reach were constructed in the 1970s and, analog to the Metatheories, have only been sporadically further developed. However, in particular, two theoretical areas can be well applied to the area of SNS research.

2.4.1. Social Network Analysis

The research approach of “social network analysis” has the intention of combining:

- The micro level of single recipients
- The meso-level of the inclusion of recipients into social groups and
- The macro level of the embedment of social groups

into the social structures and dynamics of society. Social network analysis can, as a general purpose concept, be applied as a conceptual framework to many different network types, such as in the computer and business fields or of course to social networks. Graph theory and game theory (both contributing parts of network analysis) for instance can be employed for the definition of topologies and the simulation and prediction of data flows within networks of all types (cf. Easley / Kleinberg 2010: 8).

Social network analysis provides patterns to analyze relationships, whereby in social networks, the “nodes” describe people or groups of people (organisations) and an “edge” may represent a social interaction or network “friendship” (cf. Easley / Kleinberg 2010: 24). The approach recognizes – in contrast to the diffusion and persuasion research – that interpersonal communication is not simply the continuation of mass communication through a different channel. The use of mass communication can also have an influence on the extension of social structures (cf. Bonfadelli et al. 2010: 643).

2.4.2. Impression Management Theory

The terminology of self-presentation and impression management are used synonymously to describe “*the conscious or unconscious psychological process by which people present themselves to control the image other people perceive of them*” (Bartsch / Subrahmanyam 2015). This was first described in 1959 by Erving Goffman. He assumed that impression management is purely used to persuade. Through talking directly or indirectly to other people about someone and applying verbal or non-verbal expression (e.g. through an individual’s posture), a person’s impression of someone can be altered. Impression management itself can be positive or negative, positive ways including self-promotion and entitlement.

Negative techniques include understatement, self-handicapping (handing over responsibility for one’s actions) and intimidation. Other researchers have added techniques to the list over the years (cf. Bartsch / Subrahmanyam 2015). Van Dijck adds, that there also has to be a distinction made between unintentional and intentional self-presentation. He stresses, in agreement with Goffman, that intentional presentation can sculpt a person’s identity, whilst even unintentional displays are part of self-expression.

Relating these findings of Goffman to social media today, one recognizes that SNSs use interface technologies to promote unintentional self-expression whilst enabling self-promotion consciously. The users themselves implement these techniques to their advantage (cf. van Dijck 2013: 201). These interface technologies translate relationships between people, things and ideas into mathematical equations to direct performance of the user. Even though Goffman’s theory was first introduced in 1959 it is still relevant to many social network sites today (cf. van Dijck 2013: 202).

2.5. Difficulties in Psychological Research of Social Media

The psychological analysis of social media carries with it methodological problems, since social network users are not only consumers, but also creators and producers of content. Therefore, unlike in other mostly one sided media (though there are less and less one-sided media through the integration of comments and feedback), social media cannot be regarded as an independent variable as can the methods for analyzing media effects not only be applied solely to seek out casual relationships between distinct variables.

Users bring into the social media their pre-existing psychological characteristics and relationships. It is therefore plausible that a user, already having trouble in the offline world, would not benefit from social networks and their features such as “wall posts”. Baumer concludes that this field of research would benefit from more social and cultural diversity and the connection between users’ media interactions and measures of psychological well-being (cf. Baumer 2013: 84). This conclusion should however be critically compared with 3.2.7, which describes at least one contradiction to this.

3. Personality, The Self and Social Networks

Until recently research has only been directed to how individuals present themselves in their profiles or how personality affects the SNS use, but not conversely how SNS usage directly affects personalities and self-views. Research has been published (Gentile et al. 2012) suggesting that introverted people tend to use more computer mediated communication (CMC) and that extroverted people present themselves more openly on the internet and in general use SNSs more.

As Gentile concludes, there has been little research on how social networking sites correlate directly with an individual's personality, self-views and the shaping of their identity (cf. Gentile et al. 2012: 1929). Research has also shown that individuals turn to Facebook to seek social support. Several media outlets have speculated that, because of the self-presentational nature of SNS, there are correlations between SNSs and positive self-views (cf. Gentile et al. 2012: 1930). On the other hand there is evidence that users abuse SNS to behave in anti-social ways, proposing that further research in general might better seek beyond the positive or negative affects of computer mediated communication to investigate why people use SNS in ways that are detrimental to relationships (cf. Carpenter 2012: 482).

3.1. The Five Factor Model

The Five Factor Model (or "Big Five Model") is a tool commonly used in measuring how media affects the personality of an individual. The premise of the model suggests that personality can be evaluated by five bipolar factors specified as: *extraversion*, *agreeableness*, *conscientiousness*, *neuroticism* and *openness to experience*. The Five Factor Model is a good fit for research concerning social media since it has been linked to how individuals interact with other people and maintain their social relationships (cf. Ryan / Xenos 2011: 1659).

Researchers found that the factor *extraversion* is positively correlated with the size of the relevant SNS and how much an individual interacts with others (cf. Ryan / Xenos 2011: 1659). Additionally in the study done by Ryan and Xenos they found that *extraversion* is also positively linked to every kind of communicative feature on Facebook even though this negates a study done three years earlier (cf. Ryan / Xenos 2011: 1659). Ryan and Xenos attribute this apparent contradiction to the fact that Facebook has undergone various changes in the interim (cf. Ryan / Xenos 2011: 1662). The Big Five factor *neuroticism* on the other hand has been found not to be correlated to every kind of communicative SNS feature, but only to "the Wall" on Facebook (cf. Ryan / Xenos 2011: 1662).

Another factor of the Big Five, namely *conscientiousness*, was found by Ryan and Xenos to be negatively correlated to the time spent on the SNS Facebook. There has been no significant relation between shyness and the usage per day nor between any of the related factors of loneliness (cf. Ryan / Xenos 2011: 1662).

In the study done by Ryan and Xenos, the researchers hypothesized that individuals with high scores on narcissism and extraversion would likely use the social network site Facebook more than the high scorers on loneliness and conscientiousness (cf. Ryan / Xenos 2011: 1660). They found their hypothesis concerning narcissism and extraversion to be true, but that Facebook non-users would have higher scores on loneliness and conscientiousness has only been found to be true for the sub-factor social loneliness (cf. Ryan / Xenos 2011: 1663). Additionally, they critiqued the Big Five Model on being too broad to reflect nuances. In retrospect the authors would recommend inclusion of narrower personality traits such as shyness and narcissism (cf. Ryan / Xenos 2011: 1659).

3.2. Self-Awareness of Social Media Users

As with the investigation into the effect of social media on personality, little research has yet been done on the self-views of people (cf. Gentile et al. 2012: 1930). Subsequently a more detailed analysis of the present findings in regard to the leading question of how social media influences self-views will be given.

3.2.1. The Typical Users of Social Media

Considering the chosen definition of Social Networks in 2.1, it used to be appropriate to assume that the typical user was one from the younger generation ready to explore newer technologies (cf. Ziegler et al. 2015). The older generation on the other hand – having grown up before the era of cell phones – was thought to have more problems adapting. Ziegler does not mention what he means by older generation, but there is recent data which suggests, that – as SNSs usage has over time proliferated – not only the 18 to 29 year olds are using social media but that other age groups are also catching up (cf. Pew Research Center 2013) and as depicted in Figure 2 below.

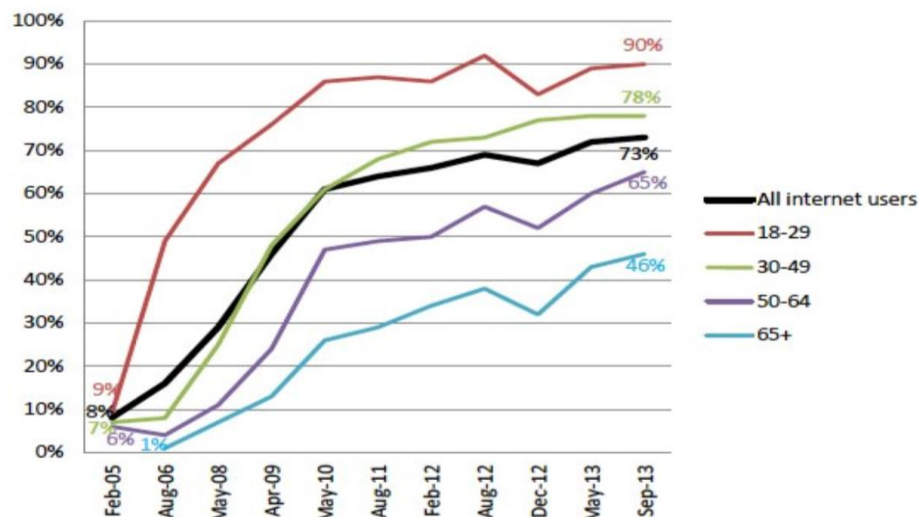


Figure 2 Social Networking Site Usage by Age Group, 2005-2013 (Pew Research Center 2013)

Simultaneous interactions with multiple media are not necessarily second nature to the older generation. Research has repeatedly shown, that neural connections and cognitive functions decline with age, and

that these are often so important in media multitasking. This and the potential feeling of being left out when coming to technology can create a hurdle for some older adults who would otherwise embrace newer technology. But findings suggest, that if seniors do overcome this hurdle, they are for instance much better able to stay in touch with family and friends. Getting the elderly to play video games has been found to be beneficial in helping improve their cognitive skills and even have positive effects on well-being (cf. Allaire et al. 2013).

What effects social media have on individuals is also age-dependent. For instance, sociability is affected more profoundly between the ages of 30 and 70. People under 30 are more likely to have opportunities to socialize in the non-online world through, for instance, school or other educational programs. People over 30 on the other hand are likely to have additional responsibilities like family or a profession, thus imposing time constraints on online activity (cf. Sabatini / Sarracino 2014: 32).

Not surprisingly, therefore, is the finding that the younger generation are the most avid users of technology and media. A study found that high school students are the most frequent users of media whereas middle school students average the highest on video games (cf. Rosen et al. 2013: 952). The vast majority of students reported that technology has bettered their quality of life. This stands in contrast to recent observations that there is a negative correlation between school grades and media use. Some researchers suggest however, that the negative effects of media usage is attributable to constant multitasking (cf. Ziegler et al. 2015).

3.2.2. Narcissism

Before some of the studies involving narcissism are presented, it is important to recognise that there are different aspects of narcissism. Narcissism can be divided into *vulnerable* and *grandiose* narcissism. People with high levels of vulnerable narcissism have an enhanced feeling of importance which is combined with vulnerability. They tend to be depressive, have low self-esteem and think that people are out to get them (cf. Campbell / Twenge 2016).

This paper concentrates the discussion to *grandiose* narcissism which in turn can be separated into grandiose exhibitionism and entitlement/exploitativeness. Grandiose exhibitionism or GE includes features like “*self-absorption, vanity and exhibitionistic tendencies*” (Carpenter 2012: 483). High scorers in this area seek constant attention thus displaying outrageous behaviour and using any opportunity to self-promote (cf. Carpenter 2012: 483). Entitlement involves the expectation of favours without assuming anything in return (cf. Carpenter 2012: 482). People with high scores on this scale are willing to manipulate others to their advantage and feel they should get anything they wish; others’ feelings and needs being of no interest whilst reaching their goals. A study has for instance shown that people with EE are likely to have negative relationships reported by their roommates (cf. Carpenter 2012: 483).

3.2.3. Narcissism and Social Networks

Several studies have shown that narcissists have a higher number of social contacts and therefore also “friends”. Their exhibition of themselves on SNS is flattering, they also tend to use more first-person

singular and second person pronouns, depending on the context. There has been contradictory evidence of narcissists using more SNS than others, in particular Facebook (cf. Campbell / Twenge 2016) (cf. Ryan / Xenos 2011: 1662). Any force in society can increase narcissism if it can increase the opportunity to present a grander image of the individual. Media itself is said to lead to an increase in overall narcissism in a culture. It does so through offering the possibility of a greater self-presentation and self-regulatory mechanisms of self-esteem to a larger community (cf. Campbell / Twenge 2016).

3.2.4. Self-Esteem

There is evidence that there are links between the previously discussed trait of narcissism and self-esteem. People with high levels of grandiose narcissism tend towards moderately high self-esteem. There is a difference in the rating of superiority of people with high self-esteem and narcissism, narcissists rating themselves as superior on agency (therefore being prepared to take action regardless of the situation) only, whereas individuals with high self-esteem do so across a variety of traits. Gentile reasons that narcissists have a low commitment in relationships, change partners more often and exploit them in temporary gains of self-esteem, whereas people with high self-esteem see themselves positively whilst still caring about others. (cf. Gentile et al. 2012: 1930)

There is evidence that narcissism itself is related to the number of people known on SNSs but not in real life. Researchers therefore suspect that this may be a reason to believe, that SNSs increase narcissism (cf. Carpenter 2012: 1930).

3.2.5. Self-presentation

Self-presentation is often used as a synonym for impression management (see 2.4.2). As van Dijck writes, Erving Goffman saw the act of self-presentation as a performance (cf. van Dijck 2013: 200) and has even compared it to theater, where actors wear masks to show different aspects of themselves (cf. Bartsch / Subrahmanyam 2015). Van Dijck says, that multiple selves have appeared only since public communication has gone online. There is still, though, a distinction made by most between the professional projection and communication towards friends (cf. van Dijck 2013: 200).

Van Dijck goes further, saying that users had to adapt their privacy settings and presentation style as they discovered that platforms can be used for professional self-promotional purposes as well as self-presentation. The platforms have evolved from a space to express oneself, making and maintaining connections between friends to a more professional use (cf. van Dijck 2013: 200). The architecture of the platforms have also changed to suit the more narrative type of self-presentation. This can be seen in the changes LinkedIn made to adapt to Facebook. The first stage of change according to van Dijck was from 2002 to 2008, where social network sites were run as community spaces to get people to connect. After 2008 however, sites have changed to make a business out of connectivity and the data transported through these connections (cf. van Dijck 2013: 200).

People have begun to consciously present themselves on social media and popularity is increasingly measured by online manifestations of ,for example, “followers” or “likes”. Van Dijck states 2009 as marking the beginning of marketing and promotion of the self as an object. Stars and politicians amongst others use the possibilities to promote themselves and their opinions (cf. van Dijck 2013: 202). Other research cites the presentation of Miley Cyrus on social media as a performance and therefore inauthentic. Conversely, the self-reflexion, in the form of her explaining what she does and why, makes her actions authentic (cf. Dubrofsky / Wood 2014: 285). Van Dijck explains that an online persona can be thought of as the professional brand of a person and so one cannot be contemplated without the other. The intermediate goal in self-presentation is to have millions of followers (cf. van Dijck 2013: 202), who may then – ultimately – be influenced.

3.2.6. Positive Effects of SNS

This paper has, until this point, discussed effects of social media on individuals that could well be considered negative. Much of the research tends to highlight negative effects, even casting doubt on the value of social networks. As the team around Feinstein concludes, social networking sites are able to enhance negative influences on well-being. In a positive sense, users are provided with new ways of comparing themselves to others (cf. Feinstein et al. 2015), but there are examples of other very positive sides to SNS-use in the literature.

3.2.7. Autism Spectrum Disorder

ASD is – as defined by the American Psychiatric Association – a complex, lifelong, neurological disorder which can cause problems in thinking, feeling, language and relations with others. Symptoms may vary in severity but include communication problems and difficulty in relating with other people (cf. Parekh 2015).

There is reasonable belief, underpinned by scientific research, that those with Autism Spectrum Disorder whilst suffering in the offline world due to a deficit in communication abilities then thrive in the online communities of social networks.

Brosnan and Gavin did three studies investigating the relation between ASD and social media.

- The first found, that people with ASD prefer online over offline communication.
- The second discovered, that those people are able to express emotion on SNS.
- The third showed that these people are able to engage in empathetic interactions with others online.

All of these abilities are for ASD sufferers otherwise significantly restricted by their medical condition in a normal face-to-face communication. So, despite their condition, people with ASD are able to engage in normal communication in the context of online networks. The inability of other SNS-users to recognize sufferers of ASD within the online context is what gives those with ASD a heightened self-esteem (cf. Brosnan / Gavin 2015) and is certainly a noteworthy, positive effect of SNSs.

4. Summary

The proliferation of internet access and the ensuing rise in popularity of social media have had a major impact on many people's daily lives. This paper sought to discover what impacts social media have on individual personality. To this end, existing literature, dating from 2010 onwards, was researched.

4.1. Results

The development of software deployed on the internet has come a long way since the advent of Web 2.0 (see 2.2), to the point now, where the average, untrained user is able to define a profile for himself and is able to cooperate online with other like-minded individuals in so called social networks. Social media provide not only online networks but, as discussed in 2.1, offer other kinds of social interactions in the form of blogs, collaborative projects, content communities as well as virtual game and social worlds.

The tool most commonly used to analyse the effects of media on personality is the Big Five Model, but which has – as seen in 3.1 – been criticized by researchers as being rather too broad to sufficiently reflect minor changes in personality traits. SNS users themselves were in the earlier literature, most typically from the younger generation, but this has changed over the years, to the point where the older generation has largely managed to overcome the hurdle of adapting (see Figure 2). Once adopted, there are numerous benefits from SNS use (as discussed in 3.2.1) which include positive self-views, social support on Facebook, keeping in touch with family and friends, overall well-being and in general an enhanced feeling of quality of life.

Often it is not only a single persona the users display online, but multiple personae. As a person is able to be simultaneously present on multiple networks and display different versions of him- or herself on different sites, the concept of multiple identities becomes possible. A positive application of differing on- and offline personae is observed amongst sufferers of ASD who, by the nature of online communication, are able to engage in relationships much better in the online context. The result for them is a heightened self-esteem when using SNSs.

Whether or not a significant majority of SNS-users are narcissists (according to the definition in 3.2.2) is still under discussion. Narcissists do certainly present themselves in a flattering way and rate themselves superior to others. The narcissist level in society is said to be potentially elevated through any force which allows the opportunity to present a grander image of the individual and SNSs lend themselves ideally to this (see 3.2.3). Intentional presentation of the self has been found to be able to sculpt a person's identity and even unintentional displays are part of self-expression. SNSs enable self-promotion and promote self-expression. Self-presentation towards friends as opposed to professional use is still found to be distinctively different for most people. The platforms utilized have been themselves found to have changed to more professional applications, promoting business out of connectivity (see 3.2.5).

4.2. Conclusion

Theories of mid-range and at the meta-level have been found to have only slowly adapted to the new media forms. SNSs themselves have also had to evolve over time to stay current as they have seen an increase in demand and requirements. Not only due to this dynamic does this field of research remain difficult for researchers to pinpoint. Because social network users are not only consumers but also *creators* of content, it additionally becomes challenging to isolate single influencing variables.

From the theory of Constructivism in 2.3 one can derive that the perspective of the observer correlates with the one of a general SNS user. The user constructs a realness – may this be conscious as Gentile says or unconscious as Weber proposes – which is different from the undefined reality beyond any construction. The creation of realness occurs through the process of construction, which in the example of a user is creating and maintaining a profile on SNSs such as Twitter or Facebook. The user selects information as a contribution to an audience, where he presents himself invariably in a flattering manner, appropriate to the methods of impression management (as described in 2.4.2).

Through impression management the user influences how other people view him, with the goal being to gain followers or likes in order to enhance self-esteem. Through simultaneous presence on multiple networks, many individuals maintain multiple online profiles which, psychologically speaking, correspond in a limited sense to their offline personae. Seen in the case of a person suffering from Autism Spectrum Disorder in 3.2.7, the person may be able to automatically present a positive side of him- or herself without having to let other people know of their disorder whilst in the online context.

The theory of systems discusses (see 2.3) that there are different systems in which one can classify objects and ideas. A social network is itself such a system and can be technically classified under social systems. Information from outside is “taken” and processed and can therefore be thought of as part of it. This is applicable to any kind of SNS on which global topics are discussed. Systems are self-enhancing whereby in an SNS one thought follows another throughout discussion of a topic on Twitter or Facebook. SNSs are not isolated from the world but operate in an inclusive circuit.

Social networks can be analysed within the auspices of social network analysis (see 2.4.1.). Patterns are provided, for instance, to analyse the relationship between users and/or the behaviour of narcissists towards others. The fact that social network analysis recognizes that mass communication can also have an influence on social structures is very important when realizing that people with ASD or people who are shy can communicate without others noticing their disadvantages. Social network analysis is able to analyse relationships between single people, how people are included in groups and the groups’ inclusion in society.

One can ultimately say, that social media *do* affect people and their behavior in many different ways. Since it is a very recent field of science, research has by no means reached a consensus. As Carpenter in 2012 concludes, the field of identity-forming of an individual has yet to be explored in great depth and questions are still open especially concerning long term effects and changes over whole cultures as

Internet access evolves. There are still open questions for which definitive answers have yet to be found. A case in point would be the issue of whether narcissists do use more SNSs than others or not.

4.3. Outlook/Further Research

A very interesting approach for further research would be, if it were possible to have direct access to raw SNS data from Facebook or LinkedIn and be able to do analysis emanating from the currently unresearched approaches from the meta model. An example would be linking awarenesses to a particular topology extracted from the data according to the network analysis and imposing certain game theory rules in order to potentially simulate or prototypically predict future behaviors.

Also, as some researchers suggested in 3.1, it would be helpful for future exploration in the area of personality and media (not only social media) to narrow the traits analysed in the Five Factor Model and develop techniques to include narcissism and shyness.

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Selbständigkeitserklärung

Ich erkläre hiermit, dass ich die Proseminararbeit selbständig verfasst und keine anderen als die angegebenen Quellen benutzt habe.

Bern, Februar 2016

Janice Butler _____