Theory Showcase: Institutional Theory

The internet in everyday life I: sociability

Nowadays, much of our online time is spent socializing. Social media has become the commonly accepted label for these technologies, such as Facebook and Twitter, which can be used here to refer to media for interpersonal active mutual engagement. Currently, social media are used most intensively among younger and, in India and China, affluent urban populations[1]. This online socializing now occupies much of people's free time, and it is distinct from economic online activity and the use of online media for politics.

Social media are neither broadcast nor interpersonal media. Instead, social media attract people to spend a good deal of time monitoring what others are doing. A user's Facebook page is a mediated front stage, a means of presenting the self in a communicative format[1].

The spread of social media:

1. **Phone**. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, it was thought that phone would be used for very important political and business communications by only a few significant people. Contrary to these expectations, the telephone first became widespread when ordinary people wanted to keep each other company over distances.
2. Jumping forward, the main difference with regard to social media is not so much the new devices or technology, but that they extend this sociability still further.

Social medias in different countries:

1. The United State & Sweden: Facebook
2. China: WeChat, QQ, Sina Weibo

Everywhere social media are proliferating and becoming more dif- ferentiated: from the original function of connecting friends, these sites now connect more and less outward-facing groups and for different socializing purposes. Beyond social media, there are other tools for sociability/work/journalists/advertisers, such as Skype for video communication, LinkedIn media for work, such as LinkedIn. Greater differentiation leads to denser, more frequent and more multiplex or multimodal sociability, where multimodality also includes sharing content[1]. The number of social media is growing, and content is therefore ever more differentiated, but this is compatible with the trend whereby a few top social media sites dominate: differentiation and concentration are not mutually exclusive.

Napoli and Obar (2015) say that a 'mobile underclass' is being created becase they suppose that smartphone access to the internet is generally inferior to computer-based access: fewer sites with lesser functionality are available, small screen size and a smaller keyboard, downloads are slower.

Sociability and social devides

Sociability is about belonging to groups: family, friends and acquaintances.

Social devides: Marwick shows how this group pays an extraordinary amount of attention to its online self-presentation in order to enhance its status within the relevant social circles and beyond[2]. Everywhere, according to Miller et al. (2016), people need to arrange their social relations online, putting people into different groups on different social media platforms and organizing various kinds of relationships with them[3]. Other social divides include gender and age. Social media use is highly gendered, with families upholding ideals of femininity and virtue[3]. In India and China, there is still a major divide between urban and rural.

Visual co-presence

Most social media users post pictures and many also post videos, though far less is known about this more recent phenomenon. What kind of visual material do people post? Almost half were either 'selfies' or photos of 'friends', the other six categories were 'activities', 'captioned' photos, 'gadget', 'food', 'fashion' and 'pet'. Instead of narcissism, then, visual self-presentation, unless it is for entertainment or commercial gain, is part of sociability. To be sure, with regard to posting images and video, there is a need to be careful about what is made public.

Alone or together

The increasing use of social media has prompted debates about whether being online is fragmenting society and isolating people. There are also moral panics about whether social media are caus- ing a decline of face-to-face togetherness, as with Turkle's *Alone Together*[1]. For young people, learning how to present oneself to a larger public may bring them with many difficulties and anxieties. And online togetherness is often experienced as helpful and rewarding and pleasurable too, just as face-to-face interaction can also bring a mixture of experiences[1].

Gobalizing sociability

This section focus on the question: do the uses of social media evince any common or global patterns?

The growing uses of social media do not erase cultural differences. Miller et al. highlight how the uses of social media represent different social norms in different cultures[3]. Everyday sociability takes many forms on social media, yet it is structured in similar ways by the affordances of social media.

Reference:

[1] Schroeder, Ralph. *Social theory after the internet*. UCL Press, 2018.

[2] Marwick, Alice E. *Status update: Celebrity, publicity, and branding in the social media age*. Yale University Press, 2013.

[3] Miller, Daniel. *Social media in an English village*. Ucl Press, 2016.