

CONCERNING THE SOCIAL INDIVIDUALS OF VIRTUAL LIFE, THE ANTI-SOCIAL INDIVIDUALS OF REAL LIFE AND THE CREATION OF IDENTITIES IN THE SOCIAL MEDIA

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Abstract: New communications technologies have influenced billions of people in the recent years, entering into every area of their lives, and social networks have become the focal point of communication with their use. The manner in which communities perceive the world has changed in line with this, and individuals have reached the point of being able to express themselves in different ways, at different locations. These technological leaps have resulted in significant changes in social life, and the changes which have taken place have had a big impact on personal relationships, the manner in which people socialise and even lifestyles. The network community, which is based on virtuality, has found the opportunity to expand and become organised at a level not seen until today, and individuals have obtained the opportunity to ‘be together online’ simultaneously, ensuring that a new form of organisation and type of action have been born. Social media generates information and news in a very quick manner, while social networks simultaneously forward these to the very wide masses, at the same pace. Users are actively involved in both the generation of this information, and its transmission, while at the same time endeavouring to remain in step with the information traffic which is flowing. Today, almost everyone lives within the mobility of sharing in the social media, tracking hundreds of messages a day, and forwarding many of these to others by sharing them, themselves. However, while they are doing this, they are also becoming detached from their social circles in their real life. Within this context, this study focuses on individuals, who are intensively in communication through the identities they have created in the social networks, but have become detached from their own actual environments – becoming indifferent and anti-social. Focus group discussions have been held with 12 randomly selected persons from among these individuals.

Keywords: *Social Networks, becoming anti-social, virtual life, the creation of an identity in the social media*

1-INTRODUCTION

Broadband technology, which provides the opportunity for speedy access to the internet, has become widespread since the beginning of the 2000s in particular. As a result of this there has been a convergence in radio, television, mobile telephones and information technologies. The outcomes of this development are reading e-mails and accessing web pages from mobile telephones, or making or receiving telephone calls and watching television via the computer and the internet. A similar trend is also seen in internet applications. Services such as the web, e-mail, news groups, blogs, chat and games, which previously operated as separate applications, have converged. As a result of this, brand new applications, which contain some or all of these services, have emerged. At the head of these are the social networking sites. People are able to establish online networks or join existing networks by using these applications. Studies show that in terms of their fundamental characteristics, these networks have similarities with the social networks of the “real world”. However, there are also some important differences. These networks have much more distinct boundaries. They are easily penetrable and are more dynamic. What seems to be the only hurdle to establishing social

networks on a global scale is “language”, but this is also about to be eliminated due to the automatic language tools, which have recently been developed. As a result, there is an opportunity for easier interaction with more people, when compared to other networks (Acun: 2011, 71). In the transition process from the traditional media to the new media, McLuhan has referred to globalisation in the positive sense, and stated that the senses of touch and hearing of people have once again come to the fore through political, social and cultural communications, thanks to new information technologies. It is these senses of touch and feel which have developed the consciousness of existence of individuals and societies, as a new area of freedom (Tamçelik:2014, 29).

In societies prior to the modern era, space was limited to the area where the people which constituted the community were situated. However, under the conditions of being modern, the opportunities to communicate and interact with ‘*those who are not here*’ have developed in a manner not seen before. The subject has been freed from the lack of opportunities brought by being restricted to just one area. He / she is able to relay the riches of other experience areas to his / her own world. On top of this, he / she is also able to obtain the opportunity of overcoming the restrictions of time. For the first time in history, it is possible to deal with time independently of “*where*” a person is. Giddens has expressed modernism with the following words: “*Modernism is neither just a protest against old traditions, nor a result of their dissociation, but a proclamation of the emptying of time and space, at various degrees*” (Giddens: 1981,16).

The separation of time and space is of great importance for the excessive dynamism of modernism. “*The separation of time and space, and their transformation into standard “empty” dimensions, breaks and disposes of the connections between social activity and the “placement” of this activity into the characteristics of the contexts of being*”(Giddens: 2004,27-28). According to Giddens, this gives rise to opportunities for the subject to escape the shackles of local experiences, and become free.

Giddens argues that modern social institutions are unique in many respects, in other words that they do not reflect the traditional social order mentality. He also states that they continue their development within communities, with interruptions from time to time. Modern lifestyles have become separated from the traditional types of social order, in a manner never seen before, and the transformations brought by modernism display a considerable difference to the manners of change peculiar to the previous periods, both from the aspect of their extensiveness and the aspect of their intensiveness. When looking at it from the perspective of extensiveness, this difference has been influential in the establishment of a social relationship and interaction on the global scale, while from the point of view of intensiveness, it has been influential in the manner in which the most private and personal characteristics of our daily lives have changed.

In the modernising world, the concept of modernism, which has developed in connection with the strengthening of globalisation in the world, has taken its place in the minds of the people of today, as a fundamental value. Just as every concept which is created brings with it certain gains for the benefit of mankind, they also have impacts which are negative. Modernity, which constitutes the foundation of the intellectual world of individuals and aims to direct lives on this basis, in the 21st Century, also brings with it losses as well as gains. The fundamental question which needs to be asked here is what the gains and losses are, and whether the gains cover the losses. The author Albert Camus, defined what modernity expects from modern people in the perception of modern civilisation, as follows (before or around the time of the Second World War): ‘Modern people eat, drink, work, make love and read

newspapers'. Today, they do not even read that – they watch television and send tweets (Ökten, 2014, p.53). They spend time on the PC and connect to the social media via their mobile telephones and tablets, continuously sharing images and sending and receiving messages. As a result of this, he/she distances himself/herself from his/her environment, and becomes indifferent to it. What is important for him/her is his/her groups and friends in the social networks and his/her communication with them.

The developments in the information and communication technologies, today, have made establishing communication and reaching information much easier, at levels that no other technological solutions were able to achieve (Splichal: 2009,392). It has been necessary to computerise society for the management and concord of the freedoms and restrictions in communities which have become more and more democratic, starting from the 1970s. Within this context, new communication channels and technologies have been a part of the project to create a network community or an information society, as the only solution which would put an end to centralisation and simplify the collection and filing of information about people (Mattelart: 2012,181-182).

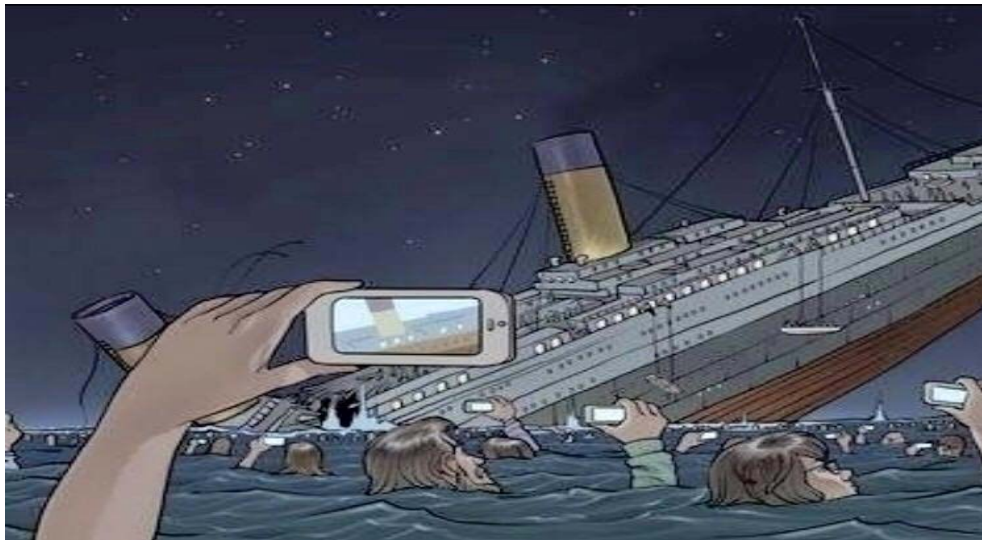


Figure 1: <https://www.facebook.com/francois.hada?pnref=story>, E.T.06.08.2015

With another dimension, the social networks, which we see as a vehicle for socialising, are also giving rise to the creation of anti-social persons, which is the complete opposite of their aim. Individuals, who are unable to express themselves and are introverted in real life, are endeavouring to respond to their search for socialisation, in order to make their presence known to their surroundings, through the social networks. Individuals are seeking to behave in ways they would not in real life, in the social networks, and this isolates them even more from real life, making them dependent on the social networks – so much so that the individual even becomes indifferent to what is going on around him/her in real life, and just lives in his/her own virtual world.

2-THE PHENOMENON OF IDENTITY AND BELONGING IN THE SOCIAL MEDIA

The creation or re-creation of identity continues throughout life. Identity is never final at any point of life. The endeavour to create an identity continuously sways between security and freedom, which are two fundamental human values, in the process of life (Bauman, 2010). The individual feels a need to be a part of a whole which is bigger and more effective than him/her and is noticeable. However, he/she does not want to be lost within a whole, and be

deprived of the opportunity to express his/her own individuality either. The belief of the individual that he/she is part of a whole which is stronger than him/her satisfies his/her sense of security, but he/she desires to protect his/her freedom and individuality at the same time, and seeks a way to satisfy his/her sense of freedom at the same time. Individuals who become estranged from themselves and the communities they live in, turn into drifters who walk around the labyrinth of the city and who have been abandoned in the crowds (Benjamin:1995, 130). Therefore, the more the environment surrounding the individual expands and the more tradition is lost, the more “making one’s presence known” and “becoming seen/heard/sensed” will increase (Simmel, 2009: 233).



Figure 2: <http://www.sosyalmedyahaber.com/2012/12/etkiler-ve-sonuclariyla-sosyal-medya-hayatimizin-neresinde>

The feeling of belonging is, most of the time, one of the dominant needs of the individual, within the process of becoming social. On the other hand, the feeling of being part of a mass may make it more difficult for him/her to reveal the characteristics which make the individual different from others and unique and for him/her to be recognised. On the one hand, the individual wants to make his/her presence felt as an individual, while on the other hand he/she wants to be part of a whole, which he/she values, and feel a sense of belonging, and at the same time attempts to balance this tension, within the process of socialisation. The feeling of belonging can be presented to the individual together with various coercions and incentives. Pressures from the family and surroundings can be listed among the coercions. Families endeavour to determine the groups their children will be a part of, during their childhood and adolescent / early adulthood periods in particular. However, the factor which maybe is more effective in directing the sense of belonging than coercions are incentives and encouragement. The individual will want to socialise in the groups which he/she approves of and where the elements, which he/she sees as a role model are present. Media, on the other hand, is the most important factor of encouragement, creating an awareness of the presence of communities with different characteristics. Social media environments in particular ensure the opportunity to meet in the virtual environment, and offer individuals an environment of which they may want to be a part.

Identity is a symbolic process of interaction and a story which changes and becomes reshaped in time. It is also seen that the vehicles of electronic communication – the internet in particular – make an impact in the process of the creation of an identity. Before these vehicles, it was seen to be gained through symbolic materials and as a result of face to face relationships, and that the formation of identity for most people was restricted to the venue and location they lived in. Their knowledge was local knowledge and these were transmitted through oral communication and in a form where they had been adapted to the realities of life. Public leaders, travellers and authorities within the locality were still influential models in the shaping of the identity (Timisi,2003, p.170). On the other hand, people – based on the profiles we see on twitter – set their roles in their daily lives to one side and develop reactions to incidents with their identities in the virtual world. The importance of the psychological position of the individual and social effects should not be overlooked in the development of reactions. Individuals are able to put forward the views they have been unable to due to social pressures, in the virtual world, using a second identity. In order to construct their identities, individuals use the social networks and Facebook – one of the most important social networks. One of the psychological aspects of identity construction is the desire to be liked – permanently. The presentation of an individual as he/she really is, or as he/she wants to be, is related to his/her recognition in the channel. If the person is not happy with any of his/her physical characteristics, he/she can create images with the photographs where he/she hides those features, therefore separating his/her identity in daily life from that within the social network. Again, a person may be passive from the aspect of politics in his/her daily life, but may take on a more active role in the social networks, where he/she is less well-known. We can adapt the words of Nietzsche in connection with this matter, to the present day, as follows: “An individual who wants to be liked within the community finds the opportunity to perfect himself/herself before presenting himself/herself, in the social areas.” If we are to summarise the photograph which has been shared, the profiles, which individuals have created and attempted to create, arise from the endeavour to attain the ideal identity (Kaya,2015).

Together with globalised communications, wherever individuals want to see themselves in their daily lives, those are the characteristics they reflect in the profiles they create in the social networks. The primary goal of individuals is the desire to create their own identities, in a completely subjective manner. All types of elements in their profiles – such as photographs, shared messages and images and friends –are a part of their identity and an indicator of their lifestyle. The profiles in the social sharing networks are each now vehicles of identity construction. As in social life, people need information from each other in the social networks too. This need is more an effort to find a position for oneself in the face of society, in line with the information obtained from other people. In order to create an ideal identity, behaviours which are not consistent with that identity are avoided or those behaviours are hidden(Kaya, 2015).



Figure 3: dependency on the Social Media - Animation,
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v3gOz-0u0Y8>

The one way sharing of information in the traditional media has now begun to be realised as a two-way, symmetrical and simultaneous flow of information, under the new system. The grasp of this new system in the media has in time also emerged in the social media, leading to people entering into dialogue with each other freely over the internet, and for the elements which are shared to increase. As a result, the sharing by individuals have reached a value within the virtual world and this value has turned into a new area of freedom. With this aspect, social media has emerged as the new form of control and communication of individuals (Tamçelik:2014,28). According to Mark Poster, who said that identities are formed during the process of mutual interaction, and through language, the communication established through computers has created its own authentic language. In computer communications, the subject wanders around post-modern semantic areas such as time/place, internal/external and intelligence/facts. The communications established with computers are comprised of electronic mails, discussion groups and teleconferences. Each of these involves the sending of texts written on the computer. Individuals are able to communicate with people they do not know, by hiding their own identities, and changing their names, genders, social roles and statuses (Timisi:2003,171172). In contrast to traditional forms of communication, social sharing networks also allow feedback and responses. According to Bauman (Bauman: 1997,60), the concept of the closeness of individuals has also become different in the global conditions. The person we speak to on the telephone can seem nearer than those in the same room as us, and the person we chat to over the internet can seem closer than those in the same home. In the virtual location which has been created together with the internet, there is no longer very much meaning to the differences between ‘here and there’, ‘in and out’ and ‘near and far’. With the issue of time and place in communications being eliminated, the boundaries of space and location is no longer a problem – at least for those individuals who are able to use electronic messaging. It is now possible to be almost anywhere in cyberspace (Karaduman:2010,2893).The conditions of today have been overcome through the development of vehicles of communication, and the process of identity shaping has now become more and more dependent to mass communication messages. This process has become effective in completing the creation of the identity and the group. For the first time in the history of communication technologies, individuals are able to communicate without taking into consideration the biological and social existence, sound, image, gender – in short individual history – of the “other” individual they are communicating with, through the

internet. Individuals are able to access the new opportunities of playing with identity, and as information concerning gender is not visible, users are free to define their genders to others. It is possible for them to hide their identity from individuals they do not know, and to communicate with them by changing their names, genders, social roles and statuses. Anonymity is fully valid. It has come to a stage where communication takes place through constructed identities (Timisi: 2003, 2). Social network sites have become a vehicle of communication which, on the one hand set up an area where the user is constantly searching for an identity, and individualise it, while on the other hand providing a sense of belonging and a safe harbour to a group of users who live in a world “full of uncertainties”, by functioning as a network which brings together friends from different social environments (Şener, 2010). Rheingold says that social network sites have created a new type of community which brings people together online, around common values and interests, and in this respect it can be seen that they are closely related to his concept of ‘virtual communities’.

Castells states that individuals and social groups reconstruct their identities according to the social structure they find themselves in as well as the conditions arising from the framework of space and time and cultural projects, and deals with the concept of identity by separating it into three different forms and roots. These are:

- Legitimising identity;
- Resistance identity;
- Project identity.

Castells argues that legitimising identity creates a civilian community and that identities which appear as a resistance can begin projects and produce subjects. However, despite these subjects being constructed by individuals, for individuals, they are not individuals themselves (2008: 14). It can be seen that the construction of identity occurs through interaction with others and that in a sense the identity is the standard of common “meanings and expectations”, which are learned as a result of these interactions. When these networks are examined at a macro and a micro level, the types (friendship, cooperation), and the numbers of members of the existing networks, and their structural void are the subjects which can be examined on the macro level, while group loyalty, the intensity of the relationship (group contribution), the health of the relationship, the subject of the relationship and individual social capital are the concepts which can be used for an examination at the micro level (Acun:2011, 72).

3-THE FINDINGS

Individuals, who are in intensive communication with the identities they have created in the social networks, are becoming detached from their own surroundings, and becoming indifferent and anti-social. Focus group discussions have been held with 12 individuals selected at random from social network users, with the purpose of obtaining their thoughts and views on this matter. According to the data that has been obtained, they have stated that they frequently use social networks mostly in order to be able to express themselves better to the individuals in their environment, to free themselves of feelings of loneliness, as they are constantly in communication with their friends and share information with them, and because it resolves their feelings of curiosity as to what others are doing. They have also stated that sharing matters on the social media is the best way to repair their personal relationships and convey their feelings. It can be seen that individuals who are unable to express themselves sufficiently in face to face relationships, and are shy, prefer to use the social networks more.

In addition to this, one of the primary reasons why they spend so much time in the social networks, is that they see the social networks as a way of leaving behind the stresses of the day and distancing themselves from their problems. Individuals, who are in constant contact through their mobile telephones or tablets, accept that they speak less with those around them, and are less sensitive to the things that go on in their surroundings. The individuals have stated that they are very happy to be in constant communication with friends who are very far away and people from different cultures, in their virtual worlds. Users connect to the social networks and communicate constantly, thus satisfying their curiosities as to where their friends and acquaintances are, and what they are doing. The opinion that being a part of the virtual world with a different identity would be meaningless, and that an identity which is different than their own social status and gender, is unnecessary for virtual friendships, is dominant. The primary reason for individuals taking their own photographs (“selfies”) at every location, and sharing these in the social networks has been seen to be their desire to feel liked and draw attention to themselves.

4-CONCLUSION

Everything that occurs in nature is related to everything else. These relationships, which are either voluntary or involuntary, ensure that the whole is formed. The situation carries more importance from the aspect of people. That is because the process of humans becoming humans began with their production of the tools of production, in the face of nature. Social synergies were born at a certain stage of these production relationships and together with the production relationships determining human relationships. With the development of communication technologies, the social networks, which began to spread towards the 2000s, today embrace global associations.

However, today, the efforts of individuals to detach themselves from real life and relationships and develop an identity in the virtual environment, mostly only succeeds in distancing them from socialisation, while also permitting them to develop user practices with feelings such as anger and hatred. One other aspect of social media which needs to be questioned is its development of a consumption cycle in a manner which is consistent with the spirit and definition of the era which we live in, by feeding the consumption process. Social media, which transforms consumption in a sophisticated manner, ensures that the individual, who is the subject, consumes by sharing himself/herself. Together with this, with the changing technology, communications and interaction opportunities, social positions and therefore identities are also constantly being reconstructed.

It can be seen that individuals who experience problems in face to face relationships with their surroundings are more devoted to the social media. Instead of chatting in the park or in a tea shop, people now prefer to share a photograph or a video in the social networks. The age of use of the social media has also fallen considerably. Thus, children are now more interested in the PCs, consoles and virtual games than the streets and parks. As can be seen, while responding to one need of society, social media is also able to create even bigger needs. People are paying the price of their addiction to the social media – which they define as monitoring technology – by losing their cultures and getting stuck in a virtual loneliness; living as people who are alone in the crowds. Individuals who experience simultaneous, interactive communication in the social networks, seal themselves off from the environment they are in. When users are in communication in the social networks, they become anti-social individuals who become detached from real life and their own surroundings at the same time, in the same as their entering into a parasocial interaction while watching a serial on the television.

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