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Sharing and exchanging: private, public spaces on digital social networks

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FOREWORD

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Issues linked to traces and e-communication are central for researchers in the department of Information Sciences of the University of Le Havre-Normandie, France. These discussions have nurtured, along with published works on this theme for more than ten years and major scientific events organized regularly by two of these researchers, Sami Zlitni and Fabien Liénard, in collaboration with Laura Goudet, assistant professor of English linguistics at the University of Rouen-Normandie, the coordination of this issue of Netcom.

Under the title “Sharing and exchanging: private, public spaces on digital social networks,” it gathers a selection of texts written by researchers from all continents who work on digital communication. Let us not forget that, according to our view, the issue of digital communication in public and private spheres also questions “these digital networks said to be social” (Stenger & Coutant, 2011), while observing the fact that “profiles” organize digital traces and structure data economy, because these profiles are enviable for users and participants of this medium. In the last volume devoted to trace (Galinon-Méléneq, 2017), Olivier Ertzscheid evokes the fact that documentary profiles (which allowed to qualify the being thanks to the sum of documentary traces, produced and detectable) have preceded identifier profiles (where the being is characterized by “the sum of various individual profiles allowing, by aggregation, to reconstruct the trace of his expression on social networks, and thus, his ‘digital identity’”). He also points out

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the fact that modern algorithmic profiling analyzes both documentary and identifier profiles, and “also the reception of parts of the volumetric explosion linked to Big Data [...]” (2017 : 143-144).

Social network sites, as used by danah boyd and Nicolle Ellison (2007) allow for the elaboration of a public or private profile on the website, the management of a contact list and the exchange of data, as well as the ability to navigate and check data from other members on condition of permission. The volume of signs and symbols; the volume of traces is immeasurable, especially since the main issue nowadays is to generate (as much) data for the list, the group, the community as made possible through the inscription, the engagement or the action demanded on a social network. In order to show their presence (Merzeau, 2009) and occupy these specific spaces, young and old users alike qualify the Others’ data through signs and symbols, write comments using a variety of languages, publish selfies and/or photographs, broadcast live videos of events or thematic and rigorously edited videos—be it for communicational, informational, pedagogical, mercantile, promotional, or even propagandist goals.

The papers selected in this issue all deal with digital communication, be it produced or used in private or public spaces.

For Crystal Fulton, student development of digital literacies is a key component of university education, intended to lead to digital citizenship. This paper considers student participation in collaborative authoring in Wikipedia as a means for facilitating student acquisition of core digital research competencies in their development as active digital citizens.

The second paper is devoted to the use of liking on Instagram. Beata Jungselius states that the social practice of liking on Instagram is to be unpacked. Based on in-depth interviews with 16 Instagram users, the findings suggest that the meaning making process of interpreting Likes is complex. The findings show that in order to understand Likes, users create social reference points to interpret Likes they do and do not receive. Drawing upon these findings, ways of understanding the complexity of this seemingly simple actions as expressions of social support are discussed.

In his article, Sung do Kim attempts to discuss the non-anthropocentric semiotics of writing agency. He argued, following some key notions of cybersemiosis, intermediation, architext, ANT that conceptions of material agency find in computational writing machines, a more productive explanative model. Indeed, the very existence of human writer and non-human agents of writing are regarded as meaningful actants that cowork in the semiotic mediation. He also endeavoured above to affirm that human writer and material agents as relational entities participate in the emergent sign process. In sum, the purpose of his article is to construct an epistemological

problematic of the digital writing in the perspective of a non-anthropocentric concept of post-human writing. The digital media revolution is intimately related to the writing revolution. In particular in the context of artificial intelligence, it's time to rethink the nature of writing regarding the question of agency of writing. The paper poses a fundamental question, who writes in fact in the digital era? In this regard, a non-anthropocentric conception of writing is needed to explain the posthuman literacy which is based upon the assemblages of human and machine writing. This article insists on the fact that the machine behaves in the digital writing.

Zita Komár and Veronika Pelle are interested in conceptualizing the notion of successful and efficient communicator and presentation in business contexts. Following a literature review on empirical studies and research conducted in business settings, the paper introduces the design of the complex methodology of the examination as well as the challenges and new perspectives of the research. It also reports on the shift in the scope of examination from business to educational contexts, comparing employers' and future employees' expectations about vital communication and presentation skills. The theoretical and methodological frameworks are completed by a Hungarian case study conducted among university students and a final outlook to the current state of communication skills development in (higher) education with lessons to consider.

In their chapter David Parra, Concha Edo et Almudena Rodríguez deal with the information industry, which began to use algorithms in its production processes as a result of the generalization of this kind of tools in the large corporations dominating the current digital economy; and in the areas of content search, social networks or electronic commerce. The paper examines the process of gradual implementation of this technology in Spanish cybermedia through the analysis of the four that have the largest number of unique visitors on its website. Furthermore, this study examines the aspects related to the application of algorithms in the distribution and generation of content and in the relationship with audiences and advertisers.

The paper by Sandra Robinson reports on the curriculum design and delivery of a practice-based, experiential learning course, which introduces students in an undergraduate communication and media studies program at a Canadian university to the challenges of working with social data using an analytics platform. The curricular development approach is modeled in part on pedagogical approaches to experiential learning, educational technology and teaching, and also reflects on recent theorizing in platform studies within communication and media studies. The paper argues that by emphasizing a clear link between theory, information ethics, and practice, students can build critical analysis skills necessary to understand the complex relationship between

social data and communication and develop data literacy skills that extend their training in critical communication studies.

Michael Paulsen and Jesper Tække argue in their article that ‘the media situation’ of the digital age brings new possibilities of Bildung (i.e. emancipation and edification). Through comparing the situation ‘before’ and ‘after’ the internet, they detect a change in the communicative infrastructure of teaching. Before the internet the authors see teaching taking place in closed classrooms almost without interactional contact with the surrounding world. In this setting Bildung is mainly made possible through ‘internal interaction’ and representation of knowledge about the world. After computers, wireless networks and smartphones has entered the scene we see teaching taking place in communicatively open classrooms with possibilities of interactional contact with “outsiders”. In this setting Bildung is not only made possible through knowledge about the world, but also through internet mediated interaction with others. Through an uncovering of these new possibilities they conclude that social media like Twitter can be used to support ‘interactional Bildung’. Empirically, Michael Paulsen and Jesper Tække base their argument on an action research project called ‘Socio Media Education’. We carried out this project in a Danish upper secondary school class. An important element was that the class and its teachers had to use Twitter for written interaction in all subjects. Theoretically the authors found their argument on educational theory (Kant, Klafki, Biesta), medium theory (Eisenstein and others) and sociology (Luhmann and Goffman).

We warmly thank all the researchers who have contributed to the present volume—they thus play a part in a better comprehension of uses and practices of digital communication in the broadest sense, especially these of social networks.