DIGITALAGE
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NEW
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Southeast European Center
for Semiotic Studies

Digital Age in Semiotics & Communication, a journal from the Southeast European Center for Semiotic Studies at the New Bulgarian University and founded by Prof. Kristian Bankov, explores the new forms of knowledge, social and linguistic interaction, and cultural phenomena generated by the advent of the Internet.

A topic is chosen for each issue by the editorial board, but the topics will be always related to the issues of the digital environment. The topic is announced with a call for papers and will also be available on our Facebook page (facebook.com/DigitASCjournal).

The working language of the journal is English. It uses double-blind review, meaning that both the reviewer's and the author's identities are concealed from each other throughout the review process.

Periodicity

The journal will be published biannually by the Southeast European Center for Semiotic Studies and the New Bulgarian University Publishing House.

Purpose

The purpose of the journal is to provide a collaborative work field for scholars interested in researching new phenomena in the dynamic digital world. Our main purpose is to build a scientific bridge between the fields of semiotics, communications, social sciences and the problems of the digital era. We believe that our collaborations can raise the level of understanding for modern digital phenomena, providing both a solid theoretical framework and profound applied research.

The pilot issue summarizes the whole research program of the Center and the journal in particular. It is open to various problems concerning developments in digital culture and phenomena. We are interested in working with scholars from different research and applied fields, such as semiotics (both applied and theoretical), communication studies, marketing and advertising, linguistics and literary studies, anthropology and ethnography, cognitive science and psychology, and computer science.

More specifically, our interest is directed to:

- New forms of knowledge;
- New media and the immersive e-consumption of experience;
- New forms of social relations in the age of social media;

- New habits of communication and self-expression/representation;
- Online corporate communications;
- Digital narratology and e-fiction;
- Digital grammatology;
- Digital audio-visualisation;
- Internet linguistics.

The magazine is supported and reviewed by our International advisory board as well as by chosen external reviewers.

For more information and submission of papers: DigitASC@nbu.bg

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FROM TEXT TO INTERACTION (INTRO)

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Before being the title of our new journal, *Digital age in semiotics and communication* was a short definition of the research program of the Southeast European Center for Semiotic Studies at the New Bulgarian University. Or rather, it was a project for such a research program, following the publication of some successful articles on new media, the big demand for such topics in our university courses, and the convergence of four PhD candidates in semiotics with topics on digital culture. Furthermore, we have organized two round tables with the same title, one in 2016 at the 3rd ICON conference in Kaunas and one in 2017 at the 13th World Congress of the International Association for Semiotic Studies (IASS), and finally we have dedicated an entire Early Fall School of Semiotics to it this past September. From the participants in these events come the papers of the first issue of the journal, as well as the consolidated impression that such a research per-

spective could canalize a lot of contributions that were frequent but outside a unified program – until now.

Of course, today speaking of a "unified program" in the humanities is a utopian act, given the nature of our communities, the hyper-productivity of our colleagues, the orientation towards projects, a shortage of funding, and predatory open-access publishing. *Digital age in semiotics and communication* is the first specialized semiotic journal dedicated to the deep cultural transformations after the advent of the internet, and thus provides a platform for a long term collaboration with those fellow semioticians who intend to dedicate their research predominantly to such a topic. It is conceived as a platform for a kind of intellectual crowd sourcing for new semiotic ideas, adequate to new cultural realities, thus opening our discipline to the cultural agenda of the XXI century.

But *what are the new ideas we seek?* This is an important question because it touches not only theoretical issues, but a vision for the future role of our discipline as well. The new ideas we are looking for are obviously related to the application of semiotic theory to the problems of digital culture. Our statistical observation is that the big figures of present day semiotics are not very eager to deal with internet, social media, mobile communication, etc. It is enough to see the topics of the series "Semiotics and its Masters" during the last two world congresses of the IASS (2014 and 2017) where among about 40 titles we see one or two exceptions. Definitely such lecture series represent the highest quality of scholarly research and present many new ideas. The identity of our discipline relies on the work of these scholars and what we invite here for is not in opposition with them. It's just that the new ideas of the "semiotic masters" are about "old" subjects, like the value of past masters, or a theoretic clarification of the ideas of Peirce or Greimas, the language of science and mathematics, the statute of biosemiotics, reflections on the notions of text and sign, etc. Here we invite new ideas on new cultural realities. On the one hand this might be application of the existing semiotic models to the cultural consequence of the advent of the internet. Such are all papers in the present issue, in addition to those that do not apply any semiotic model. This is why we included "and communication" in the title: with the incredible proliferation of the new communicative forms we may even postpone the semiotic synthesis. It is important to involve "internet natives" in semiotic research, scholars with digital habitus who will not be inclined to distort the new cultural reality in order to fit the old schemes, but rather question the old schemes in order to improve them with regard to new cultural realities. And this is the long term strategy of

our project – may we think of *a new semiotic paradigm*, different from the major existing paradigms and more adequate to the digital age?

One possible direction for such an inquiry is to have a closer look at the "semiotic ontologies" which ground the major currents in semiotics. Eco, for instance, attempts this in the first chapter of *Kant and the Platypus* (Eco 2000) called "On being". There he interprets very freely Aristotle, taking two key phrases from his work: "being can be said in many ways" (21) and "Being is everything that can be spoken of" (9). From there Eco constructs a strong pragmatic framework, which puts the speaking and language as the major theoretic "gate" where Being is semiotically captured. After this it is not difficult for him to demonstrate that the major philosophic ideas of the Western tradition are nothing else but part of the infinite endeavors to *put Being into words*, being this the only possible way to approach it.

Another important foundation of semiotic theory comes from A. J. Greimas. If Eco puts the pragmatic dimension of the verbal language at the center of his foundation (as well as Lotman in the center of the Semiosphere), Greimas focuses his entire paradigm on the abstract immanent side of the linguistic phenomena, from where he expands semiotic inquiry towards a universal grammar of signification. Here again a strong theoretic "gate" is constructed, everything relevant for the semiotic interest is captured by the unavoidability of meaning. Greimas often quotes the famous aphorism by Merleau-Ponty that "we are doomed to meaning (condamnés au sens)", which means that whatever phenomena comes to being in the human world necessarily assumes a meaningful form, for which verbal language prepares our cognition.

But the great step in this paradigm shift is achieved when a basic unit of signification is taken not as the word and its semantic implications, nor the statement and its ontological claims of truthfulness, but the *text*. The text is the methodological "gate" of this approach, the occurrence of signification when we have to study it scientifically (see Marrone 2010: 3-80), i.e. as linguists and not as bad philosophers (Greimas 1970: 10). "Outside the text, there is no salvation", says one of Greimas' most famous slogans, but that is exactly where we are going to look for it.

During the golden years of structuralism and semiotics the textualist perspective was so powerful that some philosophers, not bad at all, worked on it in dialog with semiotics, often being critical but still strengthening the semiotic ontology of the text. Among many I would mention Derrida and Ricoeur, both important "gatekeepers" within unique and influential paradigms. Derrida invented the writing/differance "gate" in order to be able to deconstruct any kind of discourse the others made, as well as his

own sometimes. He put in circulation another mythical textualist slogan: "there is no outside the text!"

More important for our review of semiotic ontologies is that of Ricoeur. He was the first to try to systematically define what a text is (Ricoeur 1970), but he was also the first to develop the textually inspired *narrative ontology*. In his initial attempts he exports textualist "knowhow" to the general notion of human action (see Ricoeur 1991 *From text to action*"), where instead of considering the natural interactivity of the way people exist socially within a new paradigm, he relies on the analogy with the textuality and on the linguistically inspired speech act theory. Then he develops his theoretic masterpiece–*Time and narrative* (1983 – 1985), where Being is postulated to occur only in a narrative form. Such a move, in a similar vein to Eco, is taken from a very "passionate" interpretation of some of Aristotle's notions from his theory on drama (in *Poetics*), resulting in the reconceptualized notion of *emplotment*. Thus in Ricoeur, emplotment becomes the theoretical "gate" for the occurrence of Being.

Before I move to the proposal that interactivity should be the ontological principle of the digital semiotics paradigm, I would like to comment on the status of a phenomenologically-oriented semiotics. If we have to put it in the same figurative interpretation, phenomenology puts the theoretical "gate" of its method on *perception* and its backstage, *intentionality*. As a philosophic orientation it gave a huge impetus of the XX century thought and its hybridization with the linguistic turn is the best we had for decades. But a phenomenologically-oriented semiotics does not represent a unified paradigm with well-defined theoretic "gate", perhaps because there are too many competing candidates, or maybe because the overwhelming figure of Peirce monopolizes the scene and in his genius insights there is anything but unity. As Eco notes, "it's well known that you can make Peirce say anything you want, according to how you approach him" (Eco 2000: 399.), so the temptation (to which almost no semiotician resists) is to find a theory of everything you need in his writings. In our case we can look for a theory of interactivity which we can then apply to internet culture, thus proving for the nth time that Peirce was right. However, this is not our intention here, although as a method the digital semiotics approach could have many things in common with cognitive semiotics, inspired by Peircean phenomenology, as postulated by Sonesson in his recent publications (Sonesson 2017).

It is not an exaggeration to say that many of the famous semiotic paradigms are conditioned if not entirely inspired by the great cultural innovations of the XX century like the artistic avant-gardes, mass culture, mass

media, and psychoanalysis. Think of the Moscow and the Prague linguistic circles, Barthes, Eco, Lotman (in part), Kristeva, etc. In this sense, semiotics as a research discipline is in debt to the great cultural innovation of the last decades – the advent of the internet. Obviously when we live in a different time, doing theory has a different meaning, after the managerial turn of the academic system, obsessed with scientific metrics, pushes us to write articles rather than monographs, humanities are more and more marginalized, we are paid to be teachers rather than researchers. Still, here we are, founding the first journal entirely dedicated to a semiotic innovation, adequate to the theoretic challenges of present-day culture.

The proposal for reflection here came after a discussion with Simone Arcagni in Sozopol, where interactivity was placed in the center of what he called "the post cinema galaxy" (together with immersion, technology, web and software; Arcagni 2016: 36 ff). Contemporary analysts provide various models for the culture of the digital age, all of them considering interactivity as its central distinctive feature. Thus for example Manovich compares one time's notion of document or a text with what goes on today:

> In software culture, we no longer have "documents," "works," "messages" or "recordings" in twentieth-century terms. Instead of fixed documents that could be analyzed by examining their structure and content (a typical move of the twentieth-century cultural analysis and theory, from Russian Formalism to Literary Darwinism), we now interact with dynamic "software performances." (2013: 33)

The penetration of such a "software mediation" into our experience of the world has deep cultural consequences: *the cultural content "behaves" in an interactive manner*, our cognitive habits are changing, and those of the internet native generations are incompatible with traditional notions of education, knowledge and society. Both de Kerckhove and Carr examine the psychosocial consequences of the age of interactivity, seen as an outsourcing of the mind's effort of thinking into external processing devices. De Kerckhove's (2011) strong statement in opposition to Carr, is that today "interactivity is a condition, not an option", that the connective mind is better than the previous ones. Carr sees in this cultural interactive condition a degradation in attention and depth of thought. Interactivity requires a permanent taking of decisions, which are interruptions of attention compared to the inferential walks of the mind of the linear text's interpreter (2010: 115 ff).

Further examples proliferate. Our proposal is to place interactivity as the ontological principle of a paradigm for digital semiotics, not because of the psychological consequences, but because of the deep shift in the logic of meaning it brings. In digital culture, language is no longer the lord of semiotic phenomena, but *the communicative disposition of the culture holders*. The language is there, together with an incredible variety of visual, audio, kinetic and other expressive forms. But it is a different kind of temporality that determines the syntagmatic chain of meaning making. In the textualist perspective, the theoretic gate is based on the immanent relations inside fixed texts, which are later exported to grasp a cultural reality that is supposed to have a sedimented pattern of occurrence. In digital culture there are no cultural sediments, there is no time for the habits to take place before the new ones are necessary. The cultural logic is that of the participation in a mediated flow, where the battle for meaning and recognition of our digital existence meets the scarcity of time and attention of those we are addressing. At the time of Shakespeare and, later, of the textualists, the whole world was a scene where what was taking place was previously written as text; today the whole world is a videogame where each player's participation depends on the availability of resources like lives, time, power etc. *The cultural logic of the digital age is economic and not linguistic as it was before*, in the same way one story may work as a linear narrative and be experienced (rather than interpreted) as a videogame in a completely different way. One thing is to produce sense, playing with the dead body of the text; another is to be inside the narrative and qualification, performance and sanction to depend on your decisions, skills and management of scarce resources.

Interactivity transforms information into experience, and this is our last consideration. Jeremy Rifkin's point that the new economy transforms markets from the logic of the exchange to that of the access to a paid-for experience (2000) is quite similar to Manovich's observation on the XX century documents and the XXI century software performances. *Digital culture is deeply commercial in its foundation*, as far as the new economy is much more efficient at absorbing every aspect of our lives into the logic of economic value. Big data mining is the process that transforms our daily online activity into a precious good, purchased by companies and corporations. We receive amazing services for free such as Google, Facebook and many others, in order to spend the most precious and scarce resource there – our time. And this process is not "innocent" at all. Our lives take the shape of those services, anonymous software algorithms select the content which forms our worldviews, determine the range of our online social

life, and suggest us what to do in future in order to be more predictable as consumers.

This is more or less what the paper of **Vuzharov** "Personalization Algorithms – Limiting the Scope of Discovery? How algorithms force out serendipity" is about. The text is very informative and rich with explanations for the major backstage processes behind the seductive services of *Google* and *Facebook*. The author keeps a strong ethical stance concerning the necessity for more awareness in this regard, and to make the point more clear uses the textual pragmatic model of Eco from *The Limits of Interpretation* (1992).

The next two papers analyze new *identity mechanisms* emerged in digital culture. **Andacht's** paper "The Imagined Community Revisited through a Mock-Nationalistic *YouTube* Web Series" is dedicated to a new and original form of video narrative, addressing the Uruguayan national identity in a totally different way compared to the nation formation described by Benedict Anderson in *Imagined Communities* (1983). The main theoretical concept of the British scholar is semiotically revised with the help of some Peircean terms.

The paper of **Lankauskaitė** and **Liubinienė** "A Shift from 'Me' to 'We' in Social Media" examines the impact of the Web 3.0. on the mentality of internet users. The shift from 'me' to 'we' is seen as a consequence of technological innovations which allow crowdsourcing, participatory culture, collective intelligence, etc. The thesis is illustrated with three case studies of an online TV, an offline social action, initiated in social media and an online project for artistic collaboration.

The next five papers are dedicated to various *aesthetic and interactive practices* in digital culture. In his paper "Postcard from Istanbul: Digital Reconstruction of the City as Memory in Tasos Boulmetis's *Polítiki Kouzína / A Touch of Spice / Baharatin Tadi*", **Dimitriadis** explicates the narrative mechanisms for representing the past with the help of digital effects. Contrary to the mainstream use of the digital special FX, in this case a strong poetic effect is achieved in visualizing the space of memory.

Cassone dedicates his paper "'It's over 9000.' Apeiron Narrative Configurations in Contemporary Mediascape" to an interesting videogame phenomenon, started as a pen and paper role-playing game in Japan prior to the digital age. The particular narrative device of individual growth of power in the fictional discourse, after the transfer of the plot as a videogame, is analyzed with the tools of generative semiotics and is spread as a meme and viral phenomenon.

Another paper is about "Constructing the Corporate *Instagram* Discourse – a critical visual discourse approach". There **Poulsen** takes a critical stance towards an important incoherence in the way Instagram represents its mission, and at the same time how the app is trying to regulate the use of the platform and its visual tools.

In his text "Formalism and Digital Research of Literature," **Debnar** examines another phenomenon typical of the digital age–the mass digitalization of literary texts and the challenges for the reader in front of huge archives available for everybody. The key notion of his text, borrowed from Moretti, is *distant reading,* and the author's contribution is to demonstrate the validity of the formalist approach to that theory.

In "Enchanted Object: Indian Sari, Negotiating the Online and the Offline Space", **Khanwalkar** makes a sociosemiotic analysis of a garment with huge symbolic value – the *Sari*. The main object of the research is how online discourse on the Sari upgrades and transforms its significance, how local and global interact in the identity formation process.

In the next section there are two papers on the digital age in *corporate communication*. In "Engaging Brand Communication in Facebook – a Typology of the Brand Page Users", **Kartunova** identifies four types of Facebook users of corporate pages using the classical approach of Jean-Marie Floch. The study is supported by empirical data, collected among the target groups and puts the main emphasis on brand culture adoption and brand narrative engagement.

Asimova has chosen a semiotic content analysis approach in order to investigate "Digital Culture of the Regulated Industries. Focus: Tobacco Sector". The conclusions state that although the efficacy of the legal regulations in such industries, social media, blogs and forums open possibilities for marketers in innovative ways of promotion.

Contrary to all other papers the last text in the journal, written by **Yankova** and entitled "The Effeteness of Social Media" holds a conservative stance and argues that similarities to past social relations are more relevant than the differences. The author shows how an abstract metaphysical vision of Peirce about the universe can be extended to the cultural reality of social media.

The second issue of the journal will invite contributions on the world of digital eroticism. The title is "Love and Sex in the Digital Age: a Semiotic Perspective". Please visit: DigitASC@nbu.bg.

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PART I Knowledge and Identity in Digital Age

PERSONALIZATION ALGORITHMS – LIMITING THE SCOPE OF DISCOVERY? HOW ALGORITHMS FORCE OUT SERENDIPITY

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Abstract

The Digital has become ubiquitous and inevitable. Each day, fewer non-digitals remain, as others become digital immigrants, and finally being succeeded by digital natives. Billions of devices are now connected, as remote access and IoT-added-value have become commonplace. Cloud services have supplanted old-school digital products, personal data has become more valuable than most other resources, while our attention span has been shrinking, constantly besieged by millions of signals.

It is now virtually impossible for anyone to exist outside of the Digital; it is virtually impossible not to rely on online services, not to have our data collected, not to have information tailored especially for our personal consumption, based on our unique digital footprints. UX Design paradigms have been shifting, moving us further from simple interaction, departing from on-screen interfaces, and simultaneously eliminating the need for a

user's encyclopedic competence (as per Eco) and even going past navigational competence (as per Bankov).

Communication structures define communication outcomes. Communication structures literally shape our world, as Benedict Anderson would argue. While his analysis turns to the printing press as a causal mechanism for the formation of the nation states, one could argue that the algorithm-based structure of information delivery means a departure from the potential for serendipitous discovery, changing our systems of expectations, the way we think, and the way we perceive the world.

If the entire system is based on our past, a mirror image of ourselves, this would mean that we are more likely to receive answers pertaining to a world that is entirely within our scope. The farther we depart from encyclopedic competence, and then from navigational competence (where we were at least able to browse into areas unknown), the farther we are moving from the unfamiliar. There is an event horizon, the information beyond which is completely outside our reach, and this event horizon is more and more tightly enclosing us.

Essentially, our entire information inflow is based on a *user model*, derived by various algorithms, deep learning mechanisms and AI systems – a veritable black box, which, in turn, weaves a personalized and unique Dynamic Text for a very special Echian "model reader" – the "model *user*". We will try to demonstrate how this relationship may lead to a limited outlook.

While Internet users may agree that their online experiences vary, as they generally tend to, the truth is somewhat more complex – and far less transparent. The Internet is different for each of us; in fact, since between 2006 and 2010, the Internet has become almost fully personalized. This paper looks at the structure of today's Internet – more precisely, User Experience Design, personalization and recommendation, algorithms and artificial intelligence – and at the way its information delivery design influences users. Far from claiming the discovery of a novel phenomenon, our text will attempt to apply semiotic methods to existing hypotheses and analyses, in order to help clarify how certain subtle (at first glance) changes in structure and infrastructure may have led to rather profound changes in individual perception, and thus in the very fabric of society.

Mundane Internet use can be described as serving a few main purposes: connecting with others (including email, chat, social media); getting infor-

mation (including news, research, finances); shopping (for products and services); and entertainment (video, music, gaming). (Meyen 2010) .These activities tend to take place on a surprisingly limited number of platforms, many of them owned by Google (including local versions of the search engine, YouTube, Gmail and other Google services)[1] and Facebook (including Messenger, Instagram, Whatsapp)[2].

Therefore our analysis will concentrate on prominent players, mostly Google and Facebook, seeing as they command (at least as of today) the largest piece of the Internet pie, also due to the fact that they either tend to set the trends, or purchase other trend-setters in the market and absorb or adapt their models. We may also mention some other large players such as Apple and Amazon, or trending developments, such as IoT, autonomous cars, etc., but only as much as they fit within the scope of our current analysis.

Personalization

Personalization is typically presented in terms of relevance and user satisfaction, i.e. showing only search results (in Google's case), social media posts (Facebook), product recommendations (Amazon), etc., which are *relevant* (i.e. useful, appropriate) to the specific user. This is a leading feature of most online services, since relevance is one of the most important keywords in what we now call the Attention Economy.

This need for relevance is born out of the sheer amount of data available online; the Internet has come to contain a veritable – and unfathomable – universe of information, feeding the need for contextual reduction of available information down to applicable micro-universes and, effectively, their rendition into legible discourse universes (such as, for example, the list of search results for a certain search term by a specific Google user).

In order to fulfill their stated purpose (a topic we will revisit later) and to deliver a better user experience, online services, such as Facebook and Google, utilize proprietary algorithms, meant to provide an improved and customized information flow to their users.

Google launched its personalized search in 2005, first in beta, then only to subscribed and logged-in users. This new search would take into account all of the information available about the logged-in user and would attempt to provide the most relevant search results to any search query. Then, in

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[1] Similarweb – 100 Top Websites (last accessed September 2017 from https://www.similarweb.com/top-websites)

[2] Comscore Mobile Metrix (last accessed September 2017 from https://www.comscore.com/Products/Audience-Analytics/Mobile-Metrix)

2009, Google launched the personalized search to all users, logged-in or not. Respectively, this would mean that, while there is more personal information about logged-in users, the algorithm still has plenty of data available in order to narrow down the search results for anyone – data such as date and time, location, browser, device, pages visited, scrolling patterns, as well as any other data Google's cookies manage to collect.[3] In fact, Google's Chrome is now the most widely used browser across almost all platforms, which allows its parent company to collect even more information about its users.

Similarly, Facebook introduced its NewsFeed in 2006 – the familiar stream of "stories" coming from friends and pages that every Facebook user knows so well. While initially a purely chronological mass of consequent items, Facebook changed the logic behind the Newsfeed in 2011, due to the ever-increasing number of "stories" avalanching the users – reportedly, over 2000 items per user per day; the NewsFeed was to become a highly personalized affair, delivering only those stories the algorithm deems worthy of the user's attention, based on her past interactions (with her Facebook friends, pages, topics, etc.) and on her similarity to other users.[4]

While these developments have indeed managed to improve the end-user's experience, they have also defined a certain structure, a pre-set mode of information retrieval and communication: both services have achieved their current level of personalization by creating a complex model of the user and serving data (be it status updates and links, or search query results) based on that model.

The way this user model is created generally relies on three (and–judging by patents filed by some of the companies–soon to be four) main paradigms: user behavior, collaborative filtering, inference/extrapolation (and soon – disposition/emotion analysis).

Behavior analytics is a historical, statistical analysis based on past actions and preferences by the specific user. It requires the capture and aggregation of large quantities of raw data (signals) across all of the user's connected applications and devices. While a logged-in user is easier to track across multiple devices, it is still possible to collect plenty of information even for users who are not logged into the platform. Marketing and analytics services, such as Acxiom, have devised methods that allow them

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[3] Personalized Search for Everyone. 2009. (last accessed September 2017 from https://googleblog.blogspot.it/2009/12/personalized-search-for-everyone.html)

[4] The Evolution of Facebook News Feed. (last accessed January 2018 from http://mashable.com/2013/03/12/facebook-news-feed-evolution/#d7dXN2ZeQPqf)

to match figures from different user sessions and, subsequently, aggregate immense volumes of data. (Pariser 2011).

Collaborative filtering, on the other hand, relies on grouping users into clusters based on their similarities. It is based on overt social characteristics and processes, such as rating certain songs (on Spotify) or purchasing certain products (on Amazon). These user signals can then be interpreted as an approximation of the user's perception of the respective realm and her association (by similarity) to an abstract cluster of users who exhibit similar attitudes. Such filtering mechanisms largely power recommendation services, such as Spotify's Discover Weekly playlists; they look at a cluster of similar users and recommend highly rated items to those users who have not yet encountered them (or, at least, for whom there is no data regarding such encounters in their user profiles).

In contrast to collaborative filtering, inferential methods are based on covert social characteristics and processes, and often rely on psychographics and statistical data drawn from large populations. They are based on the analysis of hundreds of thousands of records in order to extrapolate additional details about users. For example, using explicit Facebook page likes in order to reach certain conclusions (e.g. if the user likes Nutella, she is classified as a sweet-tooth, chocolate lover). However, this method also relies on implicit traits in order to classify users (e.g. if the user is male and his Facebook page-likes include "Wicked the Musical", the "No H8" campaign, and other human rights campaigns, he may be classified as gay).[5]

Finally, we should mention the newest trend in user profiling, namely dispositional analysis. While this technology is still being tested and fine-tuned, it does show great promise (for marketing purposes). What this method aims to achieve is to recognize the user's current mood, in order to surface adequate information (or to render an applicable discourse universe). It is yet another layer of the user model, which would allow an app or service to use the built-in webcam (or other available instrument) of a user's device, analyze her face (or why not pulse, bodily temperature, etc.), and eventually display information, which would harmonize with the user's emotional state (or would, in more unethical circumstances, take advantage of her momentary emotional state).

Essentially, the entire premise of personalization is an approach built upon the user's observed behavior, her user model constantly being updat-

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[5] Halliday, Josh. 2013. Facebook users unwittingly revealing intimate secrets, study finds (last accessed January 2018 from https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2013/mar/11/facebook-users-reveal-intimate-secrets)

ed with regard to the persistent flow of new behavioral data. In other words, the user model is an attempt at a digitally reconstructed approximation of the user's individual encyclopedic competence and system of expectations.

Algorithms and Data

Collecting all of the abovementioned data is a gargantuan task. So much so that collecting, analyzing, and utilizing this data has become one of the most lucrative fields. Little wonder this phenomenon is dubbed Big Data. Actually, data has been called the most valuable resource, effectively displacing even oil.[6]

In fact, although Google is generally regarded as a search company while Facebook is thought of as a social network, they both depend almost entirely on data, all of it collected from the Internet users who peruse their free services. What they do with this data is straightforward: they sell it. This statement may sound rather blunt, so we will peek into the process.

Both companies' revenues are generated mostly by advertising. In fact, this is how – and especially *why* – they offer such high-quality services for free: their model, albeit not sound from a classical free-market point of view, depends on subsidizing the free side (social, search, chat, entertainment, office suite, etc.) of their business via revenues from the paid side (advertising), while, on the other hand, the free side accumulates the data needed for the smooth (and profitable) functioning of the paid side. (Srnicek 2017).

This internal structure, therefore, requires that the services these companies provide for free are of high quality. Even more importantly, they need to make sure that the users are not only satisfied, but drawn to the services, addicted if possible, and even dependent on them. In some cases, the companies practice customer lock-in – making it prohibitively expensive (not necessarily in financial terms) for a user to switch to a different service. Far from malevolence, this actually demonstrates strong business acumen. Which brings us back to the topic of relevance: a well-functioning, lightning-fast and relevant web service – one able to avoid the notorious attention crash – is a *good* service.

Google managed to replace Yahoo and AltaVista as the most used search engine by replacing their tree-based, dictionary-style search process with a rhizome-based (as Eco would regard it), encyclopedia-style search algorithm, while Facebook enjoys the benefits of the network effect to the

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[6] The World's Most Valuable Resource is No Longer Oil but Data. 2017. (last accessed January 2017 from https://www.economist.com/news/leaders/21721656-data-economy-demands-new-approach-antitrust-rules-worlds-most-valuable-resource)

extent that not using Facebook services bears a relatively high social price. With the added value of high quality personalization across the board, the two services have achieved supremacy over most other end-user services, while their unsurpassed ability to collect, analyze, package and sell user data has made them into powerful one-stop-shops for advertisers.

While this development bodes well for the companies, it has a frustrating side effect: it turns the algorithms, which work behind the scenes to provide the personalized information flow to users, into double agents. Their loyalty has no alternative but to shift from the (freeloading) user to the (paying) client, at least to some extent, seeing as these high-quality free online services are, after all, only a part of actual commercial entities (and quite gainful ones, at that), rather than not-for-profit organizations (as a counterpoint, we should mention Wikipedia, which has managed to remain free and independent from advertisers and the corresponding market forces). Since the objective of these companies (both companies are listed) is first and foremost profit, business interests come first.

An additional deficiency of algorithms tends to remain unnoticed, although recently there has been an upsurge in research on the topic: algorithms are not neutral, are imperfect, and are subject to their creators' fallibilities. (O'Neil 2017). This can be related to the point above: when an algorithm is created to serve a certain primary purpose (while also satisfying a certain other secondary requirement), it *will* tend to lead to skewed outcomes, as opposed to a neutral algorithm (which is, most likely, unconceivable, since this would require a programmer without competing allegiances).

What this implies is that, if the ideal (neutral) algorithms were applied to the semantic micro-universe of a specific user's web experience, in order to reduce the available information down to an applicable discourse universe, they would produce a snapshot that would correspond *only* to the user's properties and desires. However, since algorithms are imperfect, they would tend to render a more limited version of this potential discourse universe, since it would have to meet the conditions for two separate agents – the user *and* the algorithm's distortion (due to its primary purpose, its creator's fallibilities, etc.).

Structure and Control

What we have depicted in the previous section is, essentially, a form of control. However, it must be re-stated that this is not a malicious design; rather, what we are observing is a healthy (from an economical point of

view) pursuit of optimization and market domination, which, however, cannot be realized without the shaping of the information delivery mechanisms – i.e. the design of the algorithms. On the one hand, the algorithms must be designed in a way that will increase the (perceived) value for the users, in order to attract them to and retain them within the service. And on the other hand they concentrate on those traits which can be most useful to the highest bidder for the advertising space offered on the services' real estate.

Additionally, but not independently from the previous points, the services do shape the rules for their users. A simple illustration would be Facebook's "Like" button – one of the UX (user experience) affordances that Facebook's algorithms rely on, when modeling a user's NewsFeed and her entire potential semantic universe. This button is utilized when a user wants to interact positively with a certain piece of information on Facebook, be it a status update, photo of a cat, a shared link, etc. This creates an instant semiotic contradiction – "things she likes" vs. "things she doesn't like" (respectively S_1 and $\sim S_1$ in Fig. 1)[7]. However,

Figure 1: Semiotic Square

even with the recent introduction of Facebook "reactions" (the new ones being "Love", "Haha", "Wow", "Sad", "Angry") one will be unable to complete the semiotic square with the obviously missing "things she dislikes" (S_2) and "things she doesn't dislike" ($\sim S_2$). Indeed, it would be hard to have the latter without the former, however "dislikes" are impossible to monetize in the existing ad-based profit model. Essentially, what we have here is an incomplete structure serving as the user model's foundation, which is then used as the filter through which the user perceives the universe.

Additionally, Facebook and Google both prioritize items with which the user seems more likely to interact, based on her user model. As stated earlier, this is a matter of relevance. This approach, however, has been criticized profusely. One criticism in particular uses a facetious illustration: if roads functioned the way Facebook does, and if we were to take into account the
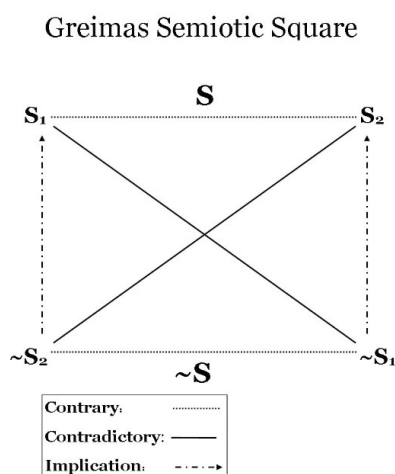
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[7] EmmaSofia515–Own work, Public Domain, https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=10232752

way people react to accidents (rubbernecking), then roads would have to provide us with more car crashes. Essentially, this model tends to conflate popularity with legitimacy.

The substantive design of this infrastructure results in a lopsided representation of reality. As has been stated time and again, the medium shapes our perceptions. Communication structure defines communication outcomes; as Benedict Anderson would argue, it literally shapes our world. Just as he analyzed the influence of the printing press and capitalist printing on the formation of nation states, here we are looking at the algorithm- and recommendation-based structure of information delivery and the possibly resulting changes in our systems of expectations, in the way we think, and the way we perceive the world. "The medium is the message."

User Experience Design and the Text

As we alluded to earlier, the abovementioned algorithm design and the fight for relevance are all facets of User Experience (UX) design. While the notion of UX has only recently become familiar to the public (although it was introduced by Donald Norman of the "Nielsen Norman Group" in the 90s), the field has actually been around for a long time, variants of it appearing under different names – including Interaction Design, User Interface Design, Usability, Human-Computer Interaction (HCI), and even Clarisse de Souza's Semiotic Engineering. (de Souza 2004). UX has been evolving parallel to technology, as its main stated purpose is to improve the experience of the user's interaction with products or services – so its roots can be traced back to the industrial age.

What we have been experiencing recently is the migration of UX away from the screen (or monitor) and closer to direct experience – or, as de Souza would put it, a decrease in articulatory and semantic distance. (de Souza 2004, 100). The goal is, essentially, to make it easy, intuitive and hassle-free for users to achieve their goals through the design language of the user interface of a product or service.

Until recently, during the Internet age's initial stages (when search engines were still modelled after the Porphyrian tree), navigating through the vast and constantly growing universe of information depended on the user's (Echian) personal encyclopedic competence: she had to understand *what* to look for and use her memory (recall Eco's letter to his grandson – "Learn to memorize")[8]. Eventually, with advances in UX design, retrieving

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[8] Eco. Umberto. 2014. Caro nipote, studia a memoria. (last accessed January 2017, from http://espresso.repubblica.it/visioni/2014/01/03/news/umberto-eco-caro-nipote-studia-a-memoria-1.147715?refresh_ce)

information from the Internet became rather a matter of navigational competence: the user only had to know *where* to look. (Bankov 2010). Now, with advances in AI decreasing the distance between request and result, such as with Google Now, Apple's Siri, Amazon's Alexa, Microsoft's Cortana, etc. – services, which are, arguably, still in their infancy – users need to rely on what could only be called an inquisitorial-processual competence: the user must only figure out *how* to frame the query in order to achieve the desired result. However, as these services mature, as Natural Language Processing moves forward, and as the Internet of Things (IoT) and more autonomous technologies such as self-driving vehicles are developed, we may move to a post-competence stage, where the interface has become invisible (and indistinguishable) and the articulatory and semantic distance has virtually been obliterated.

As can easily be observed, the predominant model of Internet use has changed immensely: from a single version for all users, through several steps of increasing personalization, to a fully personal Internet tailored for every user based on his or her user model, and delivered by a connected interactive agent with a minimalistic user interface, such as Amazon's Alexa. Essentially, our personal Internet is a complex Dynamic Text, dynamically woven *for* us (through with nary a sign of awareness on our side) – and only meant for our eyes (or ears) – and exclusively based on our very selves, on an immense set of parameters, opaquely aggregated by an ever-developing and constantly progressing multitude of algorithms, in order to re-create our sets of expectations: our *user model*.

A Semiotic Model

Our personal Internet's Dynamic Text, then, would be authored by way of the *user model* and intended to be read by the ideal actuation of the *user model*, namely the *model user* (recall Eco's Model Reader).

In order to arrange the process more legibly, let us turn to Eco's three intentions, as analyzed by Valentina Pisanti: the *intentio auctoris* (what the empirical author intends to say), the *intentio operis* (what the text wants to say with reference to its underlying signification system and by virtue of its textual coherence) and the *intentio lectoris* (what readers make the text say with reference to their own system of expectations, their wishes, drives, beliefs, and so on). (Pisanty 2015, 54). Additionally, to clarify the essence of the *intentio operis*, Pisanti maps the three intentions onto Perice's triadic model:

[We] could try the experiment of projecting the three *inten-tions* onto the vertices of Perice's triangle. The *intentio auctoris* would correspond to the Dynamic Object ("really efficient but not effectively present," and therefore knowable only through the signs that represent it), the *intentio lectoris* to the Interpre-tant (the effect the text has on the interpreter's mind and en-suing behavior), the *intentio operis* with the Immediate Object ("the Object as represented in the sign," i.e., the communicative intention as it is represented by the text), while the expressive manifestation of the text would coincide with Peirce's Repre-sentamen.

The *intentio auctoris* and the *intentio lectoris* are psychologi-cal events, unknowable in themselves unless they are displayed as signs, and yet quite easy to conceive of as 'the cognitive ac-tivity that goes on in the author's and in the reader's minds.' The *intentio operis* acts as an interface between the two: on the one hand it is determined by the *intentio auctoris* (which, like the Dynamic Object, is the first mover of semiosis) and carries traces of it, and on the other it kindles an indefinite number of effects in empirical readers.

Intentio lectoris
(Interpretant)

Text surface | Intentio operis | Intentio auctoris
(Representamen) | (Immediate Object) | (Dynamic Object)
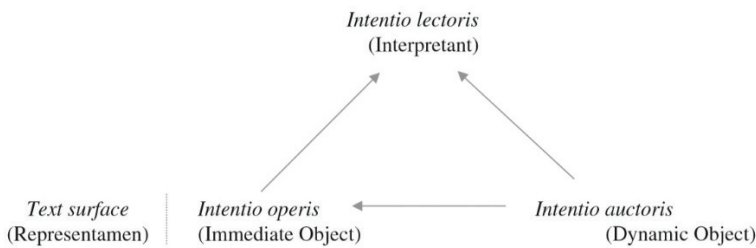
Figure 2: The above image represents a "normal" text, with a "normal" author and a "normal" reader.

It is very difficult to define the precise semiotic nature of this linking element (as it is difficult to define Peirce's Imme-diate Object). On the author's side, the *intentio operis* is a nec-essarily selective representation of an indefinite *continuum* of mental events that are channeled within the author's intention to produce certain cognitive effects on somebody through a communicative strategy (the Model Author, in fact). On the reader's side, the *intentio operis* is the matrix that generates all the possible interpretations of the textual Representamen (the Model Reader, possibly?)(.) (Pisanty 2015, 55).

Our primary interest is the triadic relationship of the three Echian intentions, represented in the diagram above, as opposed to the Peircean fundamental, which Pisanti has utilized as a stepping stone.

Based on our reflections earlier in this text, it can be suggested that there would exist a feedback loop, where the *intentio auctoris* would ideally directly feed into the *intentio lectoris* (since the reader's own model is the basis of the Dynamic Text – authoring it, in a way). However, as we have already argued, the user model is skewed: the *intentio auctoris* has been intercepted and adulterated by an external agent – the algorithm (with its inherent biases and imperfections) which acts as a sieve, effectively rendering the *intentio auctoris* a debasement of the model of the *intentio lectoris* (Fig. 2). Thus, the empirical reader is presented with a localization, a specific (probably unique) frame of the encyclopedia that is otherwise available, the frame having been fashioned to suit the *model user* created (and compromised) by the algorithms (due to the nature of information that is important to the Services that collect it and feed it into the model itself). In fact, the External Agent appears to have violated the relationship between the three intentions, as it has positioned itself in such a way as to influence each of them: as it collects data from an initial state of the *intentio lectoris*, it creates a contaminated version of the potential *intentio auctoris*, essentially rendering a Dynamic Text whose *intentio operis* reflects the distortions brought into the cycle. Effectively, the *model user*, based on a reductionist *user model* is but a facsimile of the empirical user.

In most day-to-day communication, "the interpreter's main objective is to identify the *Intentio auctoris* starting from the perceptible clues which are present in the form of *Intentio operis*". (Pisanty 2015, 58). However, in day-to-day use of the Internet, the interpreter is unaware that she is, in fact, being presented with a Dynamic Text, that there is an author (of sorts), and that she is only looking at a modified subset of the available information.
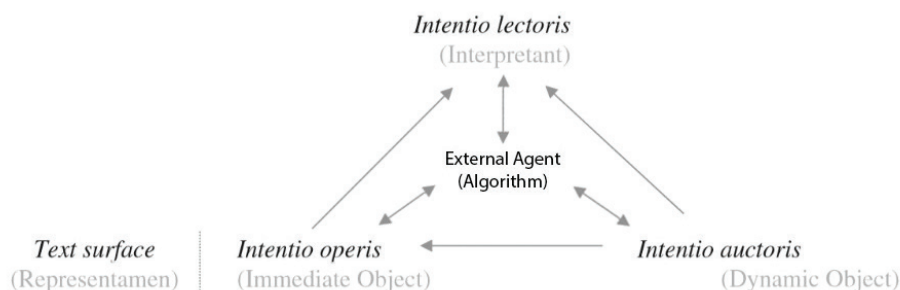
Figure 3: Illustrating the external agent (algorithm) and its effect on the model

Naturally, one could argue that the better the algorithm, the better the model, and the more perfect the representation of the user. Essentially, the most perfect algorithm would be able to provide information which corresponds ideally to the user's own encyclopedic competence – no more, no less. Effectively, this is a self-perpetuating and self-limiting system. Such a structure would minimize serendipity, or chance discovery and productive error. The farther we depart from encyclopedic competence, and then from navigational competence (where we were at least able to browse into areas unknown), the farther we are moving from the unknown.

Only information from the known universe will be available to the user, while all else sits, unattainable, behind an event horizon which, counter-intuitively and almost paradoxically, shrinks around the user as the algorithms become ever better at knowing her.

A Short Afterword

This text is, admittedly, looking at a greatly refined depiction of the way we consume media and the way our environment promotes the construction of our worldview. Such distillation is a prerequisite when trying to construct a valid model. Still, it would be sensible to note the fact that, while the self-perpetuating and self-limiting model we have described may indeed result in departure from serendipitous discovery, human beings, as a rule, do exist in societies and would hardly be as restricted in their sources of information as our analysis may illustrate.

Additionally, some of the companies mentioned in the text have been attempting to correct for certain aberrations their services have been shown to exhibit – for example, Google already allows users to review and edit some of the building blocks of their user profile at myactivity.google.com (although, as many UX designers know well, an option only exists as much as users are aware of it and willing to use it). Additionally, some services rely on human-curated content parallel to algorithm-created content – namely some Spotify playlists created by experts, or Yahoo! News articles which are manually selected to appear, due to their overall importance, as judged by actual human news editors.

It is our hope that grim forecasts, claiming humanity has surely headed towards a dystopian future fully controlled by a handful of extremely powerful supranational corporations, will prove false, as will visions of civilization depicted in fictitious discourses such as Netflix's "Black Mirror" series. However, we do believe that simply considering these issues is far from useless, as it can serve as our collective "things we dislike," in order for us to know what we should strive for instead.

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THE IMAGINED COMMUNITY REVISITED THROUGH A MOCK-NATIONALISTIC YOUTUBE WEB SERIES

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Abstract

This paper is based on the question: can we revisit the notion of 'imagined community' (Anderson, 1983) to use it as a reliable analytical tool for media studies in the digital age? The concept is widely used in social sciences and media studies, but is used more often than not with total disregard for its epistemological purport, thus jeopardizing its heuristic value. I consider a concept initially proposed as a valuable approach to study the emergence of nations in the 19th century, adapting it to analyze a popular parodic take on the 21st century nation which takes YouTube as its medium. I argue that Anderson's 'imagined community' benefits from being redefined in terms of Peircean semiotics. My approach is based on Peirce's phaneroscopic categories, and on the iconic working of the human imagination. As a case study for this revisited concept, I use a YouTube weekly series called *Tiranos Temblad*, which consists of an odd medley of amateur

videos drawn from that social media website. The topic of all these videos is a discussion of or reflection on the small Latin American nation of Uruguay. Some of the edited videos are local but many come from abroad. The latter enthusiastically praise Uruguay but lack even the most elementary knowledge about it, as the voice-over narrative never fails to remark and celebrate in a deadpan style that makes the series curiously funny. I claim that this web series is a parodical revisiting of nationalism and of the rebranding of a nation.

Keywords: imagined community; YouTube; *Tiranos Temblad*; post-nationalism; Peircean phaneroscopy

1. The bountiful archive of YouTube as a digital *Wunderkammer*

> So much is talked about memory, because it does not exist any longer. (…) There are sites of memory, because there are no more environments of memory. (P. Nora, 1984, xvii)
> Just like in the disrespectful window display
> Of any pawnshop, life is all mixed up,
>
> And wounded by a sword without rivets
> You can see the Bible crying next to a boiler
> (*Cambalache*, tango by Enrique Discépolo, 1934)

The notion of "imagined community" that Anderson (1983) posits to account for the emergence of modern nations in the 19th century makes use of ritually shared materials for reading and listening, such as newspapers and patriotic anthems. Nowadays, it includes audiovisual artifacts constantly created by anonymous individuals to be shared by an indeterminate number of viewers scattered throughout the planet, namely, homemade videos that their non-professional makers upload on the social network YouTube as soon as they film them. This bountiful audiovisual archive was called "a kind of digital *Wunderkammer*" (Gehl 2009: 45) which functions as a *frame* only, since "YouTube does not produce any content of its own, only the frame in which content appears; all of the content is provided by third parties" (Ibid.).

That kind of variegated audiovisual material is the raw material of *Tiranos Temblad. Resumen de Acontecimientos Uruguayos* ('Tyrants tremble!

An overview of Uruguayan Events' – henceforth *TT*), a weekly YouTube series that was launched in December 2012 and distributed until October 2016. Besides being amateur productions, the feature all the video fragments share that make up each program is their having as an explicit theme or implied scenario everyday life in Uruguay, and an attitude about this country which oscillates between utter satisfaction and unrestrained euphoria. The sheer banality or the ridiculous nature of what is represented every week in the images of the collage edited in *TT* would seem *a priori* incompatible with the kind of emotion that was compared with "a secularized religion whose fully worked-out liturgy, symbols and mass actions (...) became integrated into the daily life of the people" (Elgenius 2005: 26). Besides the non-serious nature of the materials of *TT*, there is the odd tone used by the narrator, whose voice-over glosses every single clip, from the beginning to the end of each episode, which contributes to its comic effect, which I analyze below.

1.1 YouTube as the launching site for a post-nationalist & postdocumentary culture

The hypothesis of the article is that the parodic style of *TT* is an expression of post-nationalism in the internet age, an ironic though not scornful revisiting of patriotism. In a similar sense to Corner's (2002) claim of our having entered a "post-documentary culture" on television, one which features prominently the reality show as a popular variation on the respected film genre that John Grierson (1933) baptized as "the creative treatment of actuality", I claim that we have entered a post-nationalistic and post-documentary culture whereof the YouTube series *TT* is emblematic. My claim does not amount to asserting the death of that powerful, widespread collective emotion; it is a reflection on the endless redefinition of politics as the distinctive discourse of citizens: "The *logos politikos* is not a single code or original text, but a creative process through which many speakers and audiences collaborate to invent ever more eloquent statements of who they are and what they should do" (Hariman 2008: 260).

But why should we study non-serious, „parodical" signs, or the Uruguayan imagined community in the second decade of the 21st century? To answer this query and verify my hypothesis, I propose a semiotic analysis of an alternative way to imagine the social realm, an identity ideology that is the upshot of new technological affordances. I use 'ideology' here not as that which, say, social constructionism aims to unmask (Hacking 1999), but rather as Mannheim's (1960/1936:52) definition, "the totality of the structure of the intellectual world belonging to a social group in a

given historical situation". Taking a qualitative approach to the meaning of certain *TT* episodes, I study the signification process of what became a very popular phenomenon with many followers inside and outside the country.[1] Concerning the artificiality of the technological devices with which the nation is imagined, I agree with Anderson (1983: 6): nations "are invented where they do not exist". Still, that does not make them in-authentic; a nation "is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their commun-ion" (Anderson 1983:6). For the invention of the national community to take place, there must be the cultivation of a style, the careful selection of material signs with which to imagine the limits and the collective identity of the people who dwell in it. Something akin to this process happens to people who do not belong to it, but who imagine a certain nation as an appealing place. That is precisely the main plot of every *TT* episode, the recurrent theme of that bizarre mishmash of mundane events. Its name is deceitful, since these are not media 'events', not in the sense discussed by Dayan and Katz (1994), in their study of "*The live broadcasting of history*". In this study the authors analyze memorable occurrences such as royal weddings, a Pope's historic visit or the funeral of a powerful politician. The media representation of such moments creates worldwide interest for its high position in the news agenda; due to their impact on public opinion, they become historical landmarks. Those features are glaringly absent from the (mostly) domestic or amateurish art videos that the *TT* editor selects to construct this YouTube series. Nevertheless, the adjective 'Uruguayan' cor-rectly describes the distinctive feature of the heterogeneous videos com-posing this audiovisual collage. Whether made by Uruguayans who live in the country or outside of it – a *centripetal* vision–or by foreigners who visit Uruguay or make a cognitive/imaginative journey through this small Latin American country – a *centrifugal* vision –, all the videos found on You-Tube and organized for each episode's montage have as their single, explicit topic Uruguayan matters, be they geographical, cultural, political, musical, meteorological, sports, etc. A way to describe this uncanny creation is to picture an encounter or cross between a wickedly faulty *Wikipedia*, Ferdi-nand Cheval (1836 -1924), the creative, improvised builder of the *Palais Idéal*, and the reclusive artist of the eclectic shadow boxes Joseph Cornell (1903-1972). The two obscure creators became honorary members of the

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[1] The average number of visitors of each episode of *TT* on YouTube is 100.000. At the time of writing this article, the creator has not uploaded a new program for a year. The last one covers many months (17.03.16-25.10.16), and it is the 75th.

surrealist canon, after their demise. Such is the exotic and bewildering nature of the audiovisual concoction for each episode of the YouTube series *TT*.

The series is a labor of love for a "new-fangled" curator to an imaginary, virtual museum of disposable artifacts from individual memory that, had it not been for their inclusion in the montage of *TT*, would have never been watched by the channel's very large audience, and would have had an altogether different meaning. The domestic videos undergo a noticeable change in their signification from being edited, glossed and classified in one of the regular sections of *TT*.

An important theoretical contribution to make sense of this non-commercial social media project is Nora's (1989) "sites of memory": "we have seen the tremendous dilation of our very mode of historical perception, which, with the help of the media, has substituted for a memory entwined in the intimacy of a collective heritage the ephemeral film of current event." Three decades later, the prescient verdict of this French historian has been confirmed through the endless proliferation of domestic personal videos distributed on websites such as YouTube. These signs work as a substitute for oral memory; they seek to create an iconic inventory of the social imaginary of our time.

2. Towards a "new fangled" representation of one's cherished (?) nationhood

To study these new "sites of memory" (Nora 1989), I analyze a new kind of Latin American media representation of sociocultural events that, due to their banal and frivolous nature, seem to be doomed to oblivion. Such is the fate of the constant filming of everyday life, the pervasive cultural practice aiming to obsessively preserve individual memories, and to share and socialize them on social media. This habit endows trivial video material with a potential for becoming a collective memory, which modifies its overt mundane, ephemeral character. The act of recording the everyday in all its shapes involves an operation of "metacommunicational" framing (Bateson 1972: 179; Goffman 1986, *passim*), namely, the act of transforming videos of almost all moments of everyday life into the kind of occurrence that no longer coincides with a ceremony, such as a wedding or a holiday trip. Normally, their life cycle is short and it addresses a small audience, for instance when a video is shared with family and friends through WhatsApp or on someone's Facebook page.

But it is becoming increasingly common to take a further representational step: to share the domestic video on social media, notably YouTube,

not before giving it a title. This current avatar of the *home movie*[2] changes its tiny family audience to a wide, global spectatorship. The cultural practice of sharing what is private or intimate with a massive audience without clear limits entails a second framing act. The choice of *TT* as an object of study is due to its interesting narrative strategy of scavenging through hundreds of YouTube videos and then re-signifying that framing operation of everyday experience. The videos then undergo a third *keying* (Goffman 1986: 44-45), namely, "the set of conventions by which (…) an already meaningful primary framework is transformed (and) seen by its participants to be quite something else". The variegated episodes (of lengths varying from 10 to 12 minutes) compose an odd virtual artifact of memory that is neither individual nor social; through its unconventional montage *TT* has become part of the virtual heritage of a Latin American nation. This is not only due to the selection of videos about Uruguay, but also the painstaking curatorial effort of organizing the material that goes into the making of each episode. To use the terms of Kermode (1967: 46), what takes place through this elaborate montage may be described as the radical transformation of clear instances of *chronos* – the kind of unremarkable temporality that is soon forgotten – into a modest instance of *kairos* –the kind of time that is most significant, those special moments we redeem from oblivion, so they remain in our memory. Through their special status, such memorable occasions shape our lives.

In what follows, I will approach the transformation of overtly banal videos, which deserve to be forgotten almost as soon as they were made, (the caught filming of a relative, silly chance observations) into a „new-fangled" form of *neo-* or *post*-nationalism. This effect is attained through the use of parody and irony, which are found not only in the comments of the narrator-cum-curator of *TT*, but most remarkably in the monotonous, deadpan tone he uses during the entire length of each program. Thus *TT* may be construed as an imaginary museum of the short-lived but revealing memory of the cultural practices of an imagined community of Latin America, in the second decade of the 21st century. For my take of this media phenomenon, I will use both Benedict Anderson's account of the genesis of 19th century nationalism and C. S. Peirce's semiotic model.

2.1 When the social imaginary is built in the shape of a chaotic pawn-shop

Elsewhere (Andacht 2001), I have studied the tiny verbal and visual rectangle of the postage stamp as a privileged semiotic window to the ideol-

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[2] We could consider *Le repas de bébé* (1895) by the Lumière Brothers as the oldest antecedent of this domestic film genre.

ogy underlying the nation whose name that sign proudly exhibits, to its social imaginary. Although Anderson (1983) does not mention the stamp as one of the artifacts used for the invention of the modern nation, it is also part of "this extraordinary mass ceremony" (Anderson 1983: 35) of contemplating a shared identity sign. Writing about the effect of the collective consumption of newspapers ("one-day bestsellers"), Anderson (1983: 42) claims that "The idea of a sociological organism moving calendrically through homogeneous, empty time is a precise analogue of the idea of the nation", a similar temporality functions in the viewing of each episode of *TT* construed as a one-week viral video. The relevance of this kind of material representation is justified by Anderson's claim that "communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined" (Anderson 1983: 6).

If someone with no knowledge of Uruguayan culture watched a typical *TT* episode, what that neophyte viewer would find most remarkable would be the promiscuous mixture of video fragments. Although there is an underlying order in the apparent audiovisual turbulence, the deadpan style of the voice-over narration is bound to perplex the newcomer: "two brothers read a book on dinosaurs; an aunt recited (a poem by Uruguayan poet) Juana de Ibarbourou; a dog which is seen barking had a dream; a group of masked *Quinceañeras* danced; a group of men carried bricks" (*TT* #70). The eccentric prologue is followed by euphoric images of young female tourists seen wandering the Uruguayan countryside; of a young woman doing an appreciative "little dance" as an homage to the country, also in the heartland; then a Japanese and a German advertisement selling soft drinks made with or using the name 'mate' – the traditional Uruguayan herbal beverage – in their label; a group of wildly ill-matched inventions that juxtaposes funny-looking home-made devices with the engineering design of an eccentric inventor. Without any transition there ensues a parade of "a dog who remains perfectly still on a dock (which we are told has already been featured on *TT*); a man who taught how to make a home repellent". The incongruous group of edited video fragments creates the impression that the average *TT* episode – between 7 and 14 minutes – is much longer than what it actually is. The closure of this episode is brought about but one last deadpan styled comment: "And we leave you with the *what-the-fuck*[3] moments of the week: "the armadillo cat, this hand that was swallowing the clouds along the highway."

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[3] In English, in the original; it uses a video of a Uruguayan adolescent who cheerfully uses that expletive.

It is fitting to describe the disorderly collage of *TT* with the rhetorical figure of the "chaotic enumeration". Spitzer (1945) uses this trope in his study of the poetry of Walt Whitman, which "violently brings close together the most disparate things, the most exotic and the most familiar, the gigantic and the minuscule, nature and the products of human civilization as a child who were leafing through the catalogue of a large store" (p. 26). To borrow a musical landmark of this region's popular culture, I compare the anarchic audiovisual catalogue portrayed by *TT* with the tango *Cambalache* by Enrique Discépolo,[4] first performed in 1934 (Andacht, 1996). Its lyrics describe the staggering chaos of modernity epitomized by the "trouble-ridden and feverish 20th century". Besides violating the relevance principle of any imaginable TV news both in its composition and its very name – the parodic use of 'events' – the list of dull mundane occurrences selected each week overtly disregards the 'tellability' of Labov & Waletzky' (1967) narrative model, the criterion which makes a story worth being narrated in conversation: "what happened and why it is worth telling" (Bruner 1991:12). The odd, counter-narrative of *TT* celebrates the 21st century iconic *cambalache*, namely, the hectic deluge of images and sounds constantly uploaded to that boundless archive YouTube.

Directly after the avalanche of trivial Uruguayan occurrences placed at the beginning of the episode, comes a ritual phrase uttered with resigned boredom – "Another week in Uruguay" – and the regular sections of *TT* ensue. The voice-over keeps using indefinite articles and pronouns (*a* young woman, *a* couple, *a* singer, *some* men), as an entomologist who watched a garden from afar. However, gradually there is more specificity as some proper nouns drawn from the original title of each video–visible in the lower right corner – are used in the montage. A key ingredient of a verbal parody is the textual repetition of what somebody else said (Rossen-Knill & Henry 1997:723); this juxtaposes the parodied style together with the parodying style. Another is the transposition of the fragment in a collage, which furnishes a wholly different context from the one that was designed for the mocked video. The hybrid resulting from the combination of the quoted video, the verbal gloss, and the new context provided by *TT* creates the comical effect of the series.

These are the categories or regular sections of each episode which bear a visible title: ENIGMA; UNCOMFORTABLE MOMENT; OHHHH MOMENT, and CRACK[5]. They are all followed by the English phrase: "*OF*

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[4] A '*cambalache*' is a pawnshop, a place which typically exhibits a chaotic accumulation of things in its windows.

[5] 'Crack' is used as a noun; it refers to an outstanding athlete, or by extension to anyone who does something remarkable.

THE WEEK", but when he says it, the narrator always talks in Spanish ("*de la semana*"). The choice of the English printed sign alludes ironically to the globalized world which tiny Uruguay entered timidly from its peripheral position. The song that celebrates the apotheosis of the weekly CRACK, which is joined in an ungainly and solemn manner by the commentator, is also performed in Spanish. There is also a sui generis section that does not classify a single type of videos or have a descriptive title; the "what the fuck moments of the week" section comes at the end of every episode. If one searched for the distinctive feature of all that is shown and narrated in *TT*, for its core ideology, 'banal' would fit the bill.

I will now look more closely at the category that sets the dull climax of the program, its purpose being to commemorate a prowess or its very opposite. A ritual phrase introduces viewers to *CRACK of the Week*: "And the nominees for the Crack *de la semana* are..." The list of those deserving such a prize is one further instance of chaotic enumeration to comedic effect, as it includes animate beings – humans and animals – as well as inanimate ones. These are some of the candidates: "an excavator which served water in a mate"; "these jumping worms which came out of a red bell pepper" (*TT* #70); "the chair (called) Jessie" manufactured in Uruguay, whose video shows that this piece of furniture resists any kind of assault without breaking down (*TT* #21). It is not unusual for the narrator to violate without any explanation the apparent criterion that defines a category, for instance the alleged virtue or exceptionality of him, her or the thing that deserves to be celebrated as the *CRACK of the week*. Thus we watch the big effort that a group of young women make in order to move a large sofa through a window, and once the deed is accomplished, the narrator determines that the person who is to be awarded the prize, which is both visual (two Golden cups resembling those of the soccer World Cup, Fig. 1) and musical, is the only one who had not joined the hard-working group, but who ran as fast as she could to be the first one to sit on the sofa (*TT* #35).

Figure 1. Two Golden cups resembling those of the soccer World Cup

On other occasions, several nominees are crowned simultaneously for their efforts, whether successful or not, instead of honoring, as expected, a solitary champion. This paradox works particularly well in this nation: Uruguay still cherishes the memory of its irretrievable sporting glory, namely the legendary victory of their national soccer team against Brazil in the 1950 World Cup final. The decision to crown several people instead of just one, or the gesture of celebrating an anti-prowess, is a parody of the always yearned for but unreachable world victory in that sport, a part of their national identity. Although the improbable sport victory of the tiny David versus the regional Goliath is not likely not happen again (Andacht 2002), the cherished memory is deeply rooted in the Uruguayan imagined community.

3. Peircean phaneroscopic categories to analyze the categories of *TT*

To analyze the realm of nationalism that is an imagined community, I will use Peirce's theoretical model, and the phenomenological categories that form the basis of the many-hued, multi-functional sign process or semiosis. The simplest valency found in his analysis of experience is *Firstness*, an absolute, possibilist qualitative element; *Secondness* pertains to all that exists, reacts, resists and thus affects our perception; *Thirdness* characterizes the process of representation, which involves a purpose, whether we are aware of it or not (CP 1.532)[6]. And the categories apply recursively to themselves. I propose to analyze the collective imagination that engenders the modern nation as "the Firstness of Thirdness, the peculiar flavor or color of mediation" (CP 1.533). To analyze the ideology that is staged in each and every parodic episode of *TT*, I will use the term 'Mentality' (CP 1.533.), which Peirce proposes to describe the qualitative dimension of any law or regularity, such as nationalism, the ideology that in an ironical key tinges the entire chaotic collage of this YouTube series.

The first part of the program's name is sure to puzzle a foreigner, but not a Uruguayan, even less one that lived in the country during the hard, leaden years of the military dictatorship (1973-1985), as the writer of this text did. The phrase "Tyrants tremble!" belongs to the refrain of the national anthem, one of the semiotic artifacts to which Anderson (1983) attributes the power of creating the imagined community, and, I would like to add, the nationalistic ideology or 'Mentality'. During the dictatorial regime, on holidays, when the anthem was performed in public places such as a cin-

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[6] I use the conventional way of quoting the work of Peirce: *x.xxx* is a reference to the volume and paragraph of *The Collected Papers of C. S. Peirce* (1931-1958).

ema, only that portion of its lyrics was shouted vehemently, rather than sung, with the unequivocal aim of repudiating the dictatorship, which brutally suppressed any form of explicit opposition.

With its deadpan tone, *TT* parodically revisits that sentiment of stifled rebellion, and transforms it in an ironic smile that resignifies the very notion of nationalism and political involvement in peaceful times, in the age of social media. The program has a *Mentality* or flavor of mediation that is utterly different from that which prevailed during the time of State terrorism. It is not by chance that besides having borrowed that eloquent fragment of the nation's liturgical song, the opening image of *TT* is a playful icon of the flag, wherein the heraldic image of the sun, with its geometrical, flaming figure, is set upon the name of the series (Fig. 2), as if the national emblem sponsored it.

Figure 2. The logo of the series

Although most of the edited videos that make up *TT* show anonymous people doing banal things, every once in a while, a celebrity makes an appearance in that chaotic arrangement. When this happens, the famous one is not represented as such, in a glorifying performance, but in a rather oblique way, for instance, in an amateur shaky video, and he is portrayed doing something strange, wholly unrelated to the celebrity's aura. Such is the case of a video of rock musician Steven Tyler made while he was on tour with his group, Aerosmith, in Uruguay. We learn that "after he played for thousands of people, he ended up digging into a garbage container in the Old Town" (*TT* # 35). The climax of the video narrative arrives with a comment that makes explicit what I claim to be the central meaning of this series: "He arrived as a star and he leaves as a humble person". Thus, the narrator makes a parody of the proverbial Uruguayan humbleness, its negative arrogance, namely, boasting about *not* boasting about the supposed national virtues as a key ingredient of Uruguayan mesocratic social imag-

inary. This is a Mentality that takes pride in not being proud of its nation, and in the love of middle-class ideals, and most of all in not trying to be outstanding, a defining feature of the nation's collective identity (Andacht 2002). On this point, it should be mentioned that at no time do we see the narrator.

4. Concluding signs: the semiotic virtual antidote to nationalism *Tiranos Temblad*

The quoted remark of that episode of *TT* ends with a musical scene that is part of almost every program; it is the song *Uruguay* composed by Russian violinist Aleksey Igudesman. The video shows the artist playing while accompanied by a youth symphonic orchestra of Austria, as he sings exuberantly with a heavily accented Spanish, in a manner that borders ridicule: "Uruguay is the best country, better than France and better than Paris!" With his unaltered deadpan tone, the narrator of *TT* says that the bizarre behavior of rock musician S. Tyler – which was classified as the "*ENIGMA of the week*"–is "a further evidence that" and then comes the end of the program with the musical quote that exalts this nation both excessively and with an unmistakable foreign element. Few expressions of praise can match that of humbleness in the imagined mesocratic realm: the strong desire to not be exceptional in any way, to be just one more modest member of the national collective unit that is represented as a key national virtue. As in a kind of contagion effect, this national trait has allegedly infected the American rock star in his first visit to the country. The ironical praise of the national ideology expressed through the leader of Aerosmith's supposed transformation into a mesocratic citizen is an example of the way in which "parody creates and sustains public consciousness first and foremost by exposing the limitations of dominant discourses: it counters idealization, mythic enchantment, and other forms of hegemony" (Hariman 2008: 253).

Based on the audiovisual material of the YouTube program *TT*, there is sufficient evidence to support the hypothesis of this text: the commented edition of quotes of miscellaneous, eccentric and overtly trivial videos, with their centripetal and centrifugal visions of the Uruguayan nation, generates as its central meaning post-nationalism, the ironic revisiting of patriotism in the age of social media. In Peirce's semiotic model, meaning corresponds to the *interpretant* component of the semiosis process, which is defined as "the mental effect, or thought" of the sign (CP 1.564). Far from being an unchanging element, as I have already stated about the evolving purport of political discourse, meaning is part of a logical metabolism inseparable from temporality: the sign "addresses somebody, that is, creates

in the mind of that person an equivalent sign, or perhaps a more developed sign. That sign which it creates I call the interpretant of the first sign" (CP 2.228). To express it most succinctly, "symbols grow" (CP 2.302).

My claim is that the programs of *TT* are interpretants of present-day national ideology in Uruguay; the numerous visits to this YouTube channel and the enthusiastic comments on *TT* episodes can be construed as acts of legitimation. The imagined community represented by *TT* is one of the forms through which the Latin American political collective imagines itself today. This article's aim has been to understand how these signs are generated, and identify their political consequences. TT's remarkable popularity coincided with a historical moment of surging prestige for Uruguay's nation brand. This was the outcome of a politician's popularity who was described by international media as "the world's poorest president" (José Mujica, 2010-2015), and of some laws which were passed during his term of office (e.g. the legalization of recreational marihuana). According to Kanarek (2015), this was mostly the work of quality news media such as *The Guardian* and *The Economist*. The parodic take on nationalism performed by *TT* could be understood as a defensive reaction to this threat to the traditional *Mentality* of this nation; thus a strange semiotic virtual antidote emerged to keep the time-honored limits of the imagined community, and of its hegemonic ideology, in a non-traditional manner.

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TT # 21 (05/12/2013 to 06/01/2013) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4_jFflmtDc8

TT # 35 (10/06/2013 to 10/12/13) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kPPS93dyF6Y

TT # 70 (08/03/2015 to 08/23/2015) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=riU7JzkQhAc

A SHIFT FROM "ME" TO "WE" IN SOCIAL MEDIA

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Abstract

Currently media power is distributed via the multi-media World Wide Web. Web 2.0 has transformed every prosumer into an individual, mini-organism – "Me the Media" (the concept coined by Bloem, van Doorn & Duivestein 2009). Recently a trend has started to emerge, which indicates that Web conversations are creating new power relationships. This is especially vivid in the current multi-media coverage of political events, supported by cross-cultural social activism. Thus, the aim of this study is to analyse the emerging new trends in current social media that embody the shift from "Me" to "We" in power relationships. The idea that everyone is inter-linked and inter-active on the Web, involving not only common citizens and politicians, but also companies or brands, supports the finding that "We the Media" is the next development in social media, which needs to be taken seriously and investigated on a wider scale.

Keywords: Web 3.0; crowdsourcing; participatory culture; collective intelligence; digital culture; network society; media power; collective action.

Introduction

Contemporary media theorist and psychologist Sherry Turkle in her book "Alone Together: why we expect more from technology and less from each other" (2011) considers the question of how technology redefines human communication. If new technology denies direct communication, we come up against a problem – a huge amount of lonely, isolated people, crying for attention with the help of selfies. The book was published in 2011, and since then we have witnessed the great advance in technology development, together with the new modes of communication and new behaviour models emerging. Is the problem of loneliness and isolation still relevant in the contemporary networked society? Alongside the development of this software, undermining modern communication, it is possible to hypothesise that at least on social media a shift from the emphasis on "Me" (the inner self-isolation) is occurring towards the emphasis on "We" – the community, which focuses its attention on participation and solving common problems or initiation and implementation of joint ideas in action. To test this hypothesis, our research aims at analysing the emerging new trends in the current social media which embody the shift from "Me" to "We" in several areas. In order to accomplish the aim, the following objectives have been set: to analyse the changing context of contemporary digital culture; to discuss the model of online self-identification, concentrating to the shift from Ego to Hyper Ego; to provide interpretation for the shift from "Me" to "We" based on the research of media content and emerging patterns in communication.

In order to research new patterns in communication, we have employed netnography as the research methodology. Netnography is a term coined by Robert V. Kozinets (2002) to describe the use of online marketing research techniques to gather information about the way individuals behave and interact in the cybersphere. It has evolved from ethnography, a widely used research methodology in the field of cultural studies, perceived as a qualitative understanding of cultural activity in context. Nowadays ethnography, as outlined by Barker and Jane (2016: 39), becomes less an expedition in search of 'the facts' and more a conversation between participants in a research process: "Ethnography now becomes about dialogue and the attempt to reach pragmatic agreements about meaning between

participants in a research process" (Barker and Jane 2016: 40). Nowadays, in the context of media-oriented cultural studies, ethnographic techniques are increasingly being used to investigate the ways communities and cultures work online and on social media platforms. Thus netnography, or ethnography on the Internet, is a new qualitative research methodology that adapts ethnographic research techniques to the study of cultures and communities emerging through computer-mediated communications. As outlined by Kozinets, (2002) "netnography uses the information publicly available in online forums to identify and understand the needs and decision influences of relevant online consumer groups. Compared to traditional and market-oriented ethnography, netnography provides researchers with a window into naturally occurring behaviours, such as searches for information by, and communal word-of-mouth discussions between, consumers" (Kozinets 2002).

The structure of this paper develops along the following lines: analysis of the contemporary digital culture, including an overview of the prosumer society, participatory culture, crowdsourcing, collective intelligence, etc. and the discussion of emerging new trends in social media, which embody the shift from "Me" to "We", finalised by conclusions.

1. Analysis of factors, initiating the changes in contemporary digital culture

Contemporary digital culture acquires a variety of new features; to name a few, it could be referred to as "Digital Culture", "Visual Culture", "Participatory Culture", etc. All these concepts have evolved as a result of developing contemporary media technologies which permeate our everyday life and cultural environments.

New media, without having a long history behind it, is always in the process of development. The fact that more and more people use social media makes the subject relevant and important to research. Much of current research focuses on the direct impact of social networks, both to individual, and communities, as well as to the development of social media itself. However, the impact observed is more psychologically, socially, and behaviourally based.

As electronic communication emerged, its impact on the society became evident when people appeared to be more and more involved in the networking. The term "Network Society", first used by Jan van Dijk (De Netwerkmaatschappij (1991) (The Network Society)), later by Manuel Castells (The Rise of the Network Society (1996)), can still reflect the sit-

uation of the society today, even if the means of communication and the devices are more advanced. Castells claims that the devices, and currently developed new social networks, in this case social media, influence the behaviour in the everyday society because of information management. "... The definition, if you wish, in concrete terms of a network society is a society where the key social structures and activities are organized around electronically processed information networks. So, it's not just about networks or social networks, <...> It's about social networks which process and manage information and are using micro-electronic based technologies" Castells (2010). This assumption reflects what is exactly happening today. People might unconsciously behave according to the information they receive on the web. The information is filtered out by certain parameters, according to previously made choices, as searches, clicks, or "like" buttons are hit. Then, the web offers one or the other option according to the past activity and influences the following behaviour both online and in reality, when it comes to advertising, event promotion, and social involvement. We tend to use and attend the things we are used to seeing.

Along those lines, it is also worth mentioning Lev Manovich (2013), and his book "Software Takes Command". Software within social media, its developments and improvements allows for the surveillance of a user's every online step, and for the influence of the future behaviour there. The impact of software being a part of our daily lives lies not only in the improvements of user interface, or general layout of the web environment, but also on how advanced the web itself is. The algorithms used for content delivery and promotion, or determining patterns of interest through searches, most visited sites, or general activity on the web are not a novelty these days. They allow to create networks of people, groups, masses with the same interests, goals, or working for the same cause, from all over the world.

Discussion about the internet, especially Web 2.0, is impossible without mentioning the participatory culture. Henry Jenkins, the Professor of communication, journalism, and cinematic arts at the University of Southern California has made the greatest impact in defining and promoting the concept of participatory culture. By "participatory culture" he means a form of culture in which the media users act not only as consumers, but also as producers. He calls them prosumers. The term is most often applied to the production or creation of some type of published media. Recent technological advances have enabled private persons to create and publish such media, usually through the Internet. This new culture as it relates to the Internet has been described as Web 2.0. Further on, Jenkins elaborates on convergence culture – the combination of new media and old media

within a single piece of media work – the coming together of different media products/technology (Jenkins 2006).

Another important concept, coined by Jenkins, which is very much important in understanding the digital culture is collective intelligence. Collective or group intelligence, as defined by Jenkins (2006), emerges from the collaboration, collective efforts, and competition of many individuals and appears in consensus for decision making.

"None of us can know everything; each of us knows something; we can put the pieces together if we pool our resources …. Collective intelligence can be seen as an alternative source of media power" Jenkins (2006).

Jenkins' conception of media convergence, and in particular convergence culture, has inspired much scholarly debate. Jenkins argues that convergence represents a fundamental change in the relationship between producers and consumers of media content.

Fuchs (2017), writing about the three forms of the web's sociality (cognition, communication, and cooperation), speaks about the change of interaction on the web from Web 1.0 to Web 2.0 to Web 3.0. According to him, all three forms are intertwined and depend on each other, but he also admits that a change is present. "The three forms of Sociality (cognition, communication, cooperation), are encapsulated into each other. Each layer forms foundation for the next one, which has new qualities" Fuchs (2017). These "new qualities" are what we have now on the web and in society, different kind of communication, cooperation, the need and willingness to participate and contribute to the pool of intelligence and resource. Cognition alone is not enough, but it is not absent either.

John Moravec (2008) believes that a new paradigm for 21st century education will change the way teaching is perceived. If in the environment of Web 1.0 the teaching was solely concentrated on communicating the knowledge in one direction – teacher to student, in Web 2.0 it develops both ways – teacher to student and student to student, and finally in Web 3.0 the interaction involves not only teacher to student and student to student, but student to teacher. This brings to the conception of crowdsourcing as "a practice of obtaining needed services, ideas, or content by soliciting contributions from a large group of people and especially from the online community rather than from traditional employees or suppliers" (Crowdsourcing in Merriam Webster dictionary, 2011). Thus, crowdsourcing aligns with the idea of the need for a bigger online community to achieve certain goals, therefore one cannot be alone anymore once one is connected online. Nowadays, the simplest example could be Q&A platforms, where one person asks a question, and the community on the web tries to answer it as

best they can, based on their experience and knowledge. That way, the one who asked the question gets more information from different sources and has many more chances of getting the proper answer.

Among other scientists, Viktor Mayer-Schönberger and Kenneth Cukier in their book "Big data – the essential guide to work, life and learning in the age of insight" (2017) refer to Big data as to "things one can do at a large scale that cannot be done at a smaller one, to extract new insights or create new forms of value, in ways that change markets, organizations, the relationship between citizens and governments, and more" (Mayer-Schönberger & Cukier 2017: 6). In a way they also predict the change in the relationship between citizens as the collectivity, contributions which may bring about major transformations. Further on, they concentrate on description of the three major shifts of mindset: "the first, is the ability to analyze vast amounts of data about a topic rather than be forced to settle for smaller sets. Using all the data at hand instead of just a small portion of it. From some to all. N=all. The second is a willingness to embrace data's real-world messiness rather than privilege exactitude. The third is a growing respect for correlations rather than a continuing quest for elusive causality" (Mayer-Schönberger & Cukier 2017: 19).

All the theories and studies briefly discussed in this section clearly illustrate the shift from "Me", the user of the web, the consumer of the information, to "We" – prosumers who are collaborating, creating, and sharing the content. This trend is particularly in line with Jenkins' ideas, and is supported by other authors as well.

Analysing this trend, it is also important to concentrate on the issue of virtual prosumers' identities. It could be observed that some studies aim to research "Me-Media" dynamics (Bloem, van Doorn & Duivestein 2009), while others discuss the conditions of multiple identities enacted in Multi User Dimensions (Turkle, 1995). For Turkle, the multiplicity and heterogeneity of online identities is rooted in the new social experience of postmodern culture. Barker and Jane (2016: 265) note that "the decentred or postmodern self involves the subject in shifting, fragmented and multiple identities. Persons are composed not of one but of several, sometimes contradictory, identities". In this "Me-Media" dynamic, composites of digital alter egos are rapidly becoming an accepted form of personal and brand identity. They increasingly form the basis for the social and economic activity in which individuals, organizations, and government engage. As Bloem, van Doorn & Duivestein 2009 note, "the third media revolution emancipates physical identities to the "Hyperego" level: the digital Me's all

are hyperlinked and super active on the Web, involving citizens, brands, companies and politicians" (Bloem, van Doorn & Duivestein 2009:14).

As the aim of this study is to test the hypothesis that a shift from the emphasis on "Me" to the emphasis on "We" (the community) is visible in social media, the second part will deal with the analysis of different cases, selected according to the methodology of netnography and illustrating the emerging trend in the current social media.

2. Analysis of the emerging new trends in social media, which embody the shift from "Me" to "We"

Following the principles of netnography, several cases will be analysed and discussed in detail, illustrating the trendy shift from the individual to the collective action in social media.

The interface of social media networks itself allows for assumptions that it was designed for crowds to use, for masses to engage in one or other activity online. First of all, the existence of the Newsfeed could be discussed, as it is now one of the most significant features of social media. Introduced on Facebook in 2009, it soon reached other social media platforms such as Twitter, Instagram, and others. This feature allows seeing changes made by people in the friends list on Facebook, whether it would be a life event or an ordinary update. Previously seen as a breach of privacy, now it is adopted by many users and rarely questioned.

Furthermore, developments or User Experience features like "like", "follow", "share", "subscribe" or buttons of similar origin, presumably encourage participation and connection with others that hold similar interests. By clicking one or the other button, social media users assign themselves to one or the other group, a so-called segment of interests that might be later used for advertising, research, or general reach purposes, sometimes unknown to the users.

Another development that is widely used, appearing less as an automatic process and more as something actively adopted by the user, is the use of hashtags, tagging, and commenting. The users themselves choose which hashtag to use or whether to use it at all. Tagging might be more intrusive because one user can be tagged on photos or posts by other users, but the one tagged now has an option to remove the tag without any repercussions. The other possibility, commenting, permits users to engage each other in public discussions, confirming their interest in a particular topic, or the need of the discussed matter to be at the top of the Newsfeed.

All these features are directly connected to the Newsfeed, because the more attention a post gains, the more likely it is to stay at the top of the page for the longer time. Every like, share, comment, or follow expresses the approval of the crowd on the web, the social media users. This is where the collectiveness becomes evident; one or two likes is nothing compared to two or three thousand.

The following cases can show the power of those developments, and how groups of people across the web create trends that help them to stay visible and followed, and how "Me" on social media shifts to "We".

2.1. Illustration of the power of crowdsourcing (Case 1).

Laisvės TV (EN – Freedom TV) an alternative internet TV channel started in Lithuania, joined Facebook on 28 Aug 2016. First TV show was streamed on 11 September 2016 on YouTube (https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCMfPBtm9CWGswAXohT5MFyQ/about). The channel had 157 videos (by 29 August, 2017). By the time of 29 August, 2017 it held the number of 47,316 subscribers, and the most popular video had 9,237,401 views. The show is so popular, some of the episodes have been made in Russian as well.

It is an internet television channel based only on open code. The shows are streamed on YouTube, but despite the premise it is still professional and of high quality. Television production professionals and experienced specialists also contribute to the production of several different TV Shows, broadcasted on the same channel. Apart from being non-profit television production, it aims at the viewers as the ones who know what they want to see most. Again, each "like" (22,819 people like and 23,352 people follow the page as of 30-08-2017, (https://www.facebook.com/laisvestv/) on Facebook page, or Subscribe click, acts as an approval of the content. The viewers are not only invited to watch the content, they are also able to contribute both financially and creatively. Financial contributions are made on Patreon, a sponsoring platform where individuals can donate money and directly support the project. Currently Laisvės TV has 4,423 patrons, and gains $15,389 per month Patreon.com (http://www.patreon.com/laisvestv 30-08-2017). This is one of the best examples of crowdsourcing, the TV channel is the only one in the world supported exclusively by its viewers. Laisvės TV also stresses the importance of not allowing the big corporations to support them, because they want to preserve complete objectivity, and no influence on the content. The example of this channel, now a platform of addressing various issues of the wider community shows that the

community itself can be responsible for the content it receives and, moreover, that the contributions of each single member, through crowdsourcing practices, can create something powerful and worthwhile, convincingly indicating that Social Media is a place for crowds and collectivity to flourish.

2.2. Practical implementation of participatory culture (Case 2)

"Putvinskio gatvės diena" (EN – Putvinskis street day) http://www.vdu.lt/lt/ivykiai/renginys-putvinskio-gatves-diena/ announced on 27 May 2017 is an event dedicated to one particular street in the city of Kaunas, Lithuania. The citizens of Kaunas were invited through social media to join and spend some time with their neighbours enjoying conversations, social, educational activities as well as to explore what that street has to offer. The interesting thing is how social media and activity on the web urged the people to get out of their houses and join the live conversations with the people they live close by. This illustrates how, though social media users may be "alone together" Turkle (2011), participation on the web brings some part of that collectiveness into the real world as well.

Another illustration triggering participation is related to the joint composition of the Lithuanian coat of arms used as a decoration on the car of a well-known racing car driver Benediktas Vanagas who participated in the Dakar rally in 2017. He has used his social media profile and invited his fans to participate together, at least virtually, by creating a big collage of photos that would make up a Lithuanian coat of arms – Vytis. People were able to click a link on his Facebook page, which would take them to a webpage allowing to upload a photo. The photo then appeared among thousands of other photos, together creating a silhouette of a horse and a knight riding it. A car sticker was made which later decorated the car and was kept through the Dakar ride of Benediktas Vanagas.

This shows the Social Media Network to be an outlet that not only allows informing people of the option to participate (the driver still shared photos and videos from the site, kept the fans up to date), but also to take a part in symbolic car-race as the member of community signifying the belonging to the state that the driver represents. Through Social Media people were able to virtually join the race, and become "Them" on the web, instead of only "Him" alone – the driver.

2.3. Collective intelligence in action (Case 3)

The power of internet seems to be more and more important to the various creators of media content, especially artists, when they search

for inspiration or for something to build their work upon. A tool, called Hit-Record, was established by a well-known actor, Joseph Gordon Levitt, to bring artists together for collaboration. A creator (a writer, actor, painter, filmmaker, singer, etc.) can upload his or her product on the web for other artists to use for their creations. All of the work that is submitted becomes open source and anyone that belongs to the platform can dispose it. For example, if there is a writer who submits a poem, a singer can take it, and record a song with the lyrics of the poem. Then later, a filmmaker can take the recording and use it as a soundtrack for the film. Any kind of similar collaborations and exchanging artwork is possible and encouraged. The platform is a great example of reaping the benefits of collective intelligence to create the best work possible, because it might be so, that one creation is much better in a different form and seen through somebody else's eyes, and HitRecord permits exactly that.

Conclusions

1. Emerging new trends in social media are related to the shift in a semantic paradigm, which consists of a transfer of the emphasis from "I" – individual achievement, goal attainment, individualism, to "WE" – Web 3.0, crowdsourcing, participatory culture, collective intelligence, etc

2. Rapid and overwhelming technological development paves the way for the current changes – the shift from individualism to collective actions on the web.

3. A observed shift from communication to cooperation which enables joint actions to be translated into real mass activism.

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PART II Aesthetic and Interactive Practices in Digital Culture

POSTCARD FROM ISTANBUL: DIGITAL RECONSTRUCTION OF THE CITY AS MEMORY IN TASOS BOULMETIS'S *POLÍTIKI KOUZÍNA / A TOUCH OF SPICE / BAHARATIN TADI*

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Abstract

Reconstructing space with the use of computer generated imagery (CGI) is commonly used in moviemaking to enhance the depicted pro-filmic reality, creating virtual spaces in which layers of the narrative that are more difficult to represent via realistic mise-en-scéne, such as emotional conditions, can become visually explicit. In the 2003 film *Polítiki Kouzína / A Touch of Spice / Baharatin Tadi*, the Istanbul-born Greek filmmaker Tasos Boulmetis digitally combines heterogeneous elements to reconstruct a virtual experience of his own sense and memory of Istanbul: the urban landscape in the film is a hybrid of on-location scenes of the modern city, CGI and enhanced coloring, digitally fused into a mural of historical and personal memories. By deliberately conveying a strong emotional tone to the audience, the film equates the notion of place with the experience one has of it: as the memory of mid-Twentieth century Istanbul is digitally re-com-

posed, the city dissolves under the pressure of its emotionally charged reflection, and the general concept of "location" is redefined through individual perception. Digital technology is used not simply to bring to life a past urban setting, but becomes a tool for affect, thus revealing invisible layers of the filmic narrative.

Keywords: film, special effects, narrative, visual space, cinema, digital

Introduction

After the sweeping effects of digital technology applications on cinema, the visual construction of space (especially in relation to the connection between characters and setting) has been a controversial subject. The technologies used to create locations, on the one hand, make more extensive use of digital graphics both to impress and affect audiences with the life-like quality of the virtual spaces, now easily recreated with computer generated imagery (CGI); but on the other, when the distinction between shooting on-location and pure CGI is blurred, various aesthetic, narrative and even ontological issues arise. Tasos Boulmetis's *Polítiki Kouzína*[1] (2003) is an example of such a movie, as it uses digital manipulation to establish the strong bond between man and city. This bond is presented through the childhood memories of the main character Fanis (Georges Corraface)[2], deported as a child with his family from Istanbul in the 1960s. Thirty years later he is a successful scientist in Athens, burdened with nostalgia and regret. In a game of flashbacks that continuously blend present and past, the viewers share Fanis's memories and perceptions, filtered through the heavily emotional recollection of family feasts and enhanced senses. The city of Istanbul, both of Fanis's present time and of the 1960s, is deliberately presented like an old postcard: pastel colors and sepia tones, in addition to digital compositing of live action through CGI, are employed to evoke a nostalgic rendering of the city which relies heavily on the visual for meaning. Istanbul in *Polítiki Kouzína* transcends the literal and the geographical; in order to be conveyed more as a carrier of memory and emotion than an actual place, the city becomes dematerialized, a virtual metropolis reworked with CGI so that both compositing and color manipulation transform its actual spatiotemporal aspects for the sake of nostalgia and memory, at the inten-

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[1] The movie was also marketed outside Greece under the Turkish title *Baharatin Tadi* and the international title *A Touch of Spice*.

[2] The character of Fanis is played by Georges Corraface (adult), Odysseas Papaspiliopoulos (18 years old) and Markos Osse (8 years old).

tional expense of a completely accurate historical or visual representation of the real city. Stretching over a turbulent past and a promising future, this kind of representation of the city becomes the perfect setting for narrating lives in limbo; it represents all things stuck "in-between" the old and the new or the past and the present, and eventually becomes the ideal setting for both conflicts and their resolutions.

This mixture of elements lies at the core of the content as well as the technical aspect of the movie. By following Fanis's story the viewer is introduced to an image of Istanbul that is inextricably bound with the lives of its inhabitants. Fanis is portrayed as a man unable to get over or even cope with the emotional void left inside him after his family is deported from the country and resettles in Athens, trying to adapt to conditions vastly different than those they were accustomed to in Istanbul. On the level of character development, these traumatizing events lead the main character to develop into a creative, emotional and multifaceted personality that matches the essentially heterogeneous nature of his beloved city. In addition to this, the concept of fusion is also reflected in the structure of the movie itself; just like cooking, a major theme in the movie, politics and astrophysics are interrelated in the story as the background to all of Fanis's memories. Real actors and settings are mixed with CGI as a commentary on the effects of blending and pastiche, stressing the effect of meanings deriving from thoughtfully assembled narrative elements and technical bric-a-brac.

This multi-leveled visual game of "cooking", in the wider sense of mixing things together, is also reflected in the wordplay implied in the Greek movie title, *Πολίτικη Κουζίνα*. The movie poster features the first word of the title in uppercase letters (*ΠΟΛΙΤΙΚΗ Κουζίνα*), thus intentionally concealing the stress between either the second or the last syllable, and causing significant ambiguity in the way this word is read.[3] This ambiguity acquires a clear dual denotation within the context of the movie: on one hand, *Πολίτικη Κουζίνα* means "Istanbul Cuisine", a reference to the wealth of Istanbul culinary tradition and appreciation of the elaborate food on the family dinner table, which is an important social ritual forming the axis around which the entire familial structure of the Greek community of Istanbul revolves. When the stress is on the last syllable on the other hand, *Πολιτική Κουζίνα*, it becomes a figurative translation and metaphor for "political give-and-take", a Greek turn of phrase and, in the context of the storyline, refers to the political turmoil of the time during the deporta-

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[3] The poster retains this ambiguity although the movie was marketed using the first alternative for the title, i.e. Polítiki instead of Politikí.

tion of Fanis's family. On the etymological level, the root of both Πολίτικη and Πολιτική remains the word "πόλις", the archetypal Platonic concept combining city, state and community, denoting the link that connects all aspects of human life with one's communal environment. The city in this sense becomes the stage or setting upon which modern man performs the drama of his existence; as such, enhancing it visually with the use of CGI can indeed accentuate the visual and emotional impact of that drama.

Coloring Memory

In *Polítiki Kouzína,* one of the main agents underlining this visual, existential continuity between man and urban landscape is the way in which the color palette is manipulated in post-production. In order to communicate Fanis's nostalgia and emotional void, Boulmetis seems to have considered the Greek audience's collective memory, a significant part of which comes from old refugee families as a result of several military conflicts Greece was involved in especially during the 20th century. That collective memory has infused Greek culture with the strong feeling of the abandoned homes. The visual coherence of coloring in the movie, in combination with the emotional associations of the specific colors selected, creates a strong aesthetic impact, which is sanctioned within moviemaking with the goal of establishing or supporting the meanings moviemakers wish to communicate.[4]

The use of color to establish additional layers of meaning is both common in the practice of moviemaking as well as a recurring issue in cinema theory. With regard to the frequency or willingness to use digital technology in post-production for chromatic alterations, Richard Misek observes that it is commonplace practice nowadays, ranging anywhere between a subtle color grading to a complete re-working of the entire color palette, and applied to almost everything available in the media (169). The obvious reason is that the features of color, such as tone, hue, intensity, etc. are parameters associated with the handling of light, which has always been an intrinsic feature of cinematographic expression. Brian Price comments that moviemakers have long realized the importance of color in conveying meaning: far beyond being an "incidental characteristic of film stock", color selection is a very careful process that is expected to affect the experience of spectators by establishing "meaning, mood, sensation, or perceptual cues"

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[4] In contemporary cinema, John Belton discusses the "Digital Intermediate", i.e. the stage in postproduction that begins when the original film material starts undergoing digitization and ends after the new, digitally processed files are transferred back to film (58) and locates a significant portion of the creation of meaning in a movie by moviemakers in the process that a movie goes through in that stage (59).

(2).[5] William Johnson also acknowledges that specific use of color in visual arts helps elicit emotional responses, due to the associations that the spectators make between certain colors and specific emotional conditions (6); in fact, he comments on the ways in which movie-wide chromatic patterns, like e.g. a specific hue or palette, help the story acquire a visual consistency and aesthetic unity (17), which is the case with *Polítiki Kouzína* as well. Finally, John Belton uses the examples of movies like Gary Ross's *Pleasantville* (1998) and Frank Miller & Robert Rodriguez's *Sin City* (2005) to describe the way the application of a specific color scheme in a movie anchors each color to a specific matrix of meanings that subtly blends with the overall narrative (62–63). In this sense, color becomes a subtle, powerful meaning carrier; regardless of whether the action takes place in a real or a CGI set, color becomes a kind of second-order, virtual background that provides additional layers of meaning that operate parallel to the literal ones and are associated with the internal, emotional and non-verbalized state of the characters.

Most of that non-verbal meaning in *Polítiki Kouzína* relies on selecting color schemes traditionally associated with memory, longing, and the pain of nostalgia. This had to be accomplished in a way that would not only make sense in the fictional microcosm of Fanis's family story, but would enable spectators to forge associations with their own stories as well. Since the associational meaning and significance of specific colors are culturally and ideologically-bound, thus expected to be different across various traditions and geographical areas of the world, according to Philip Cowan (143), the use of color in *Polítiki Kouzína* should also be traced back to the cultural and historical specifics of the region. The entire movie has been digitally processed to obtain a faded pastel tone, making it resemble the old hand-tinted postcards from Asia Minor, whose old-style aesthetics and patina now carry the melancholia of "leaving home" that Boulmetis wishes to make resonant throughout the narrative. This color manipulation directly sets the emotional tone for an audience that actually retains such mementos. The movie respectfully capitalizes on the fact that objects like these carry their own history in Greek tradition, being vital components in the micronarrative of origins and heritage that families cherish.

Digital post-production colorization cleverly extends this "old-postcard" color effect, from the use of actual postcards as props in the story, to

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[5] Price notes that, despite this conscious and meticulous attention to color by moviemakers, the field of film studies has actually paid little attention to the ways color is used in movies (2).

the old-looking texture of the entire movie. This artificially created texture ensures strong associations of memories with the present time, as if it is a reminiscence of a distant past brought to life in the present time. When Vassilis (Tassos Bandis), Fanis's grandfather, teaches him and his friend Saime (Gözde Akyildiz)[6] geography with spice-scented postcards of Greek landscapes, in a scene where the movie subtly reproduces even the yellow-ish stain that time leaves on paper, everything is contextualized, from the colors to the screened objects and the characters, in a unified representation of past-ness or remembrance blended with the intangibility of space. In Vassilis's lesson, a place can be experienced even without actually being there; in the same way that Fanis and Saime experience distant places only with vision and smell, spectators are seamlessly transferred into a heavily emotional long shot of the two children near a lighthouse in the Bosporus, which features the trademark CGI-enhanced scene of a bright red umbrella being carried away by the wind over the sea. This example perfectly ex-emplifies the capacity of digital colorization to reaffirm and transfer fun-damental oppositions (such as those between past and present, or waking and dreaming) to the visual plane that Misek asserts in his commentary of the potentials of digital film coloring (177). Facilitating the interaction between color and context – which are, for Beth Tauke, "reciprocal coor-dinates" that "symbiotically fade in and out of each other" (28) – digital coloring eventually bridges not only present and past for the characters, but places the audience on this bridge as well.

Enhancing the impact of physical objects without possessing any tan-gibility of its own, color is a powerful catalyst for meaning because, ac-cording to Tauke, it connects to other sensory associations while actually remaining inarticulate (27). Fanis comes to know the world through such an overwhelming process of associations that it is permanently imprinted in his unconscious; colors, smells and language, like his grandfather's spice mixes, are bound with the attic of the spice store, forever tangled with the image of Istanbul he puts together in his imagination. This spiritual rath-er than intellectual way of knowing the world around him establishes an urban universe, within the fictional world of the narrative, that exists only in his mind. In addition, it also demonstrates the spatial and temporal dis-placement Istanbul undergoes in the movie for the sake of representation, and that the audience comes to share both with the main character and

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[6] Gözde Akyildiz plays the 5-year-old character. The adult Saime is played later in the movie by Basak Köklükaya.

with each other through the common experience of movie-watching and the power of collective memory.

Although hardly a novelty in cinema as a whole, in the digital era color reveals its true potential as an important sub-narrative tool. A striking example in *Polítiki Kouzína* is the scene in which various CGI images and scenes from the city are linearly composed and chromatically unified in a simulated panning shot that represents an artificial panorama of scenes from life in Istanbul of the late 1950s. The scene is successfully composed, not only because it conveys a large amount of visual information in a very compact yet coherent way, but also because it succeeds in representing the way a succession of memories provides a seamless transition from the present to the past. As grown-up Fanis in present-day Athens hears of his grandfather's sudden illness (his grandfather, who was not deported but remained in Istanbul by his own choice), Fanis's mind is flooded by a sudden recollection of the city. He tries unconsciously, through an overwhelming emergence of tangled memories, to recompose the image of Istanbul from the bits and pieces he remembers from childhood. Vassilis embodies the entire array of Istanbul memories that Fanis retains, as all his childhood experiences of the city revolve around the image of his grandfather. As such, Vassilis stands at the very center of the emotional link between Fanis and Istanbul; when that link is broken with his death, the city is reaffirmed for Fanis, and for the audience in the process, as nothing more than it already was: a part of his memories, which is more important that the actual place.

The chromatic patterns used in the movie, particularly in the artificial panning shots, stress this semantic displacement of the city as a site which carries personal, individual signification. In that sense, the digitally composed virtual panning shot does not aim to realistically show what Istanbul was like fifty years ago, but to illustrate how the city is reconstructed as memory inside Fanis's mind through a series of mental associations. The actual Istanbul dematerializes under the pressure of the enchanting mural with which it is replaced on screen. Blending time and space, CGI aids this deliberate dematerialization, serving a different representational intention in moviemaking with regard to aspects of rendering history on screen; it is an example of CGI not serving a probably futile pursuit of presumed historical or spatiotemporal accuracy, but becoming a version of what Louise Krasniewicz sees as the "visual demonstration of the boundary fluctuations that humans and their worlds are experiencing" (qtd. in Burgoyne 228). Mediating all historical experience through Fanis's subjective experiences, the movie finds its place in the branch of digital cinematic historicity that favors a more personal, rather than objective, authenticity.

On similar grounds, Robert Burgoyne discusses this kind of CGI which establishes a different kind of authenticity in its depiction of the past, one that subordinates "fidelity to the record" to "meaningfulness, understood in terms of emotional and affective truth". This kind of historical cinematic consumption by spectators, Burgoyne continues, is established on the effect of memory and, similar to the latter, is associated with the physicality of the human body; thus it directly targets a more affective experience, i.e. one that simulates a more personal contact with the past that is being screened (223). This kind of experience has an impact that exceeds an accurate but emotionally flat visual historical representation. Digital technology in *Polítiki Kouzína* on one hand enables this multi-layered experience of cinematic historicity by facilitating the association of multiple stimuli with one another; and, in the same context of Burgoyne's argument on other digitized historically-based narratives (224–225), it immerses the audience, through characters' viewpoints, into an experience of history that, though completely artificial, becomes an unlived collective memory with an impact as realistic as any other memory. The CGI in *Polítiki Kouzína* is deliberately and obviously oriented toward this more personal kind of authenticity, one that uses the power of memory as emotional leverage in the response it elicits from the audience. The digital manipulation of city representation is therefore the result of luring spectators into emotional attachment to the content, a moviemaking technique that, at least in the case of this particular movie, is both intended and, in the context of Burgoyne's argument, representationally legitimate.

On Objections to Realism
Inevitably, digital intervention in sensitive areas like representation of the past and authenticity of memory has been accused of rupturing the ontological link between image and its referent, which is the cornerstone of what Bazin understood as the naturally "ethical and moral dimension" that derives from the photographic nature of film (Burgoyne 220–221). Kayley Vernallis, for example, identifies the "referential function" of color in photographs as the source of their meaning, thereby claiming that the "faded photograph lies", because its original referential meaning has been compromised (462) and its aesthetic value has been reduced (467). For Vernallis, more than a simple alteration, fading inevitably entails a significant loss of meaning as it undermines the expectations that we have from color photographs to "mirror the world" (463–464). Under this scope, it is normal for Vernallis to view digital manipulation of images as a process which raises by default concerns about loss of originality (473). If one follows Vernallis's

line of thought, the use of digital technology in general, let alone to artificially produce a patina of fading that alters the original color, would indeed cause a severe aesthetic and semantic degradation to the image that should be met with skepticism. Nevertheless, in an argument such as this, in which authenticity is placed precariously close to a sense of accuracy, the CGI in movies like *Polítiki Kouzína* would easily be rendered as "inauthentic"; this observation, however, suffers greatly from the frailty of the concept of authenticity itself.

Arguments like Vernallis's assume the common but recently contested notion of the photographic (and thus also the cinematic) apparatus as a mechanical aid to human vision, an idea similar to aspects of Kendal Walton's concept of transparency, but should remain flexible and adaptable in cases where digital graphics are used to enhance layers of authenticity that supersede the strict tangibility of things, as is the case in *Polítiki Kouzína*. If anything, the purposeful manipulation of color and spatiotemporal parameters not only crafted with a specific narrative line in mind, but aiming at finding common ground between that narrative and a collective sense of historical reality, should be seen as a realistic technique in its own right. For example, Lev Manovich, commenting on William Mitchel's argument on the obvious technical crossover between painting and digital graphics, illustrates that CGI manipulation repositions cinema somewhere between painting and photography because of the practical similarities that exist between computational and painting tools (304).[7] Instead of this duality being a problem linked to issues of ontology and a proprietarily photographic sense of veracity, movies like *Polítiki Kouzína* demonstrate the ways in which CGI manipulation reflect experiential realities that stretch even further: the unprecedented financial success of the movie proves that the audience recognized a kind of reality that is infused with elements not limited to the tangible or the haptic. The manipulation of color in *Polítiki Kouzína*, instead of being a loss or a risk, elicits an emotive parameter that is an integral and indispensable part of the specific kind of representation intended in the movie, lying between the personal and the historical.

Color alteration should therefore not be charged with breaking the indexical relation between the original and its image, because, as Johnson rightly notes, colors in a movie are actually never identical to the original in

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[7] Misek also comments on the frequent metaphor between painting and digital colorization, starting from cinematographer Bruno Delbonnel's opinion and further extending the comparison between the two (169–170). Misek provides a number of examples from popular cinematic texts that relate to the various ways in which colorization has been used in specific ways to blend with the narrative.

real life due to the technical specificities of the medium of cinema (7), and this is true regardless of digital or analog manipulations. If this technical truth is contextualized in the argument which equates color with authenticity, this would essentially mean that all photographic color is already unrealistic from the moment the image is created. Since the reconstruction of Istanbul in *Polítiki Kouzína* is not a photographically transparent image of the city, in Walton's use of the term, but a virtual representation of memory, color is an essential carrier of information rather than degradation. As Johnson puts it, color "sharpens the viewer's perception of the screen image" in the sense of bringing additional details to the foreground (8). Additionally, it is the emotional response elicited by the fading of actual photographs of the past that actually prompts moviemakers to control color in the first place, in order to elicit a similar emotional response from their audience by enabling the underlying tone or mood of the narrative to extend to the visual level. The CGI image of the chromatically-enhanced or spatiotemporally recomposed city does not malevolently impose itself on reality. CGI imitates the way reality is composed in the mind of the spectator, as memory composed from bits and pieces of external stimuli; thus the CGI image of Istanbul simply enables a visual rendering of the bricolage process through which the audience already mentally reconstructs its understanding of urban space. The fact that this rendering on screen may be one of infinite possible representations, thus jeopardizing objectivity, is hardly a counter-argument, given the fact that there can be no claims for objectivity or a single way in which memory can or should be visually rendered. The aesthetic result is left at the creatively hit-and-miss discretion of digital artists. In fact, the massive and generally uniform positive impact that the movie had on the Greek audience could be an argument in favor of its objectivity rather than against it; the movie claims its aspect of truthfulness exactly via the fact that its CGI techniques confirmed a experiential truth for a significant amount of people.

Man and the City

The mystical spatial energy of Istanbul is enhanced beyond the geographical location itself, with the latter eventually succumbing to its own reputation, existing in the sphere of culture as a concept somewhere in between Fanis's story and the collective memory of both Greeks and Turks. A powerful symbol of past empires, Istanbul becomes the locus for the clash between past and present; the virtual city inside Fanis's mind becomes a battlefield of old promises and passions that rupture the city's continuity, claiming a payoff of guilt and his old debt to family bonds, the breaking of

which is partly his own responsibility. Through the strong connection Fanis has with Istanbul, *Polítiki Kouzína* presents the city as something more than the natural habitat of contemporary man in which he lives, loves, works and dies. In his study on inhabited space, Arnold Berleant notes that the distinguishing character of a place is affected by its physical or topographical identity, its physical coherence or architectural homogeneity, and, most important to the present discussion, its interaction with the human factor, or the people that inhabit it (43). In Berleant's view, therefore, understanding a place is inextricable from the experience one has of it. This cultural dimension ties the physical traits of a place to the human element; the distinctive meaning of a place is acquired through "the interaction of human sensibility with an appropriate physical location" (43), i.e. the meaning or importance that human actions give to a place. On the same grounds, Aušra Burns reads Berleant on the importance of the "experiential realm" that comprises an understanding of the city as lived space. This importance is revealed by the fact that the city can only be conceived as a continuation of the individual; consequently a complete understanding of urban space should incorporate the lived experience of it that one has (Burns 69).

In his own study of *Polítiki Kouzína*, Dimitris Eleftheriotis argues that this experiential dimension of the city, as portrayed in the movie by Fanis's memories and behavior, accounts for the commercial success and popularity of the movie. For Eleftheriotis, one of the main reasons the audience responded positively to the movie was because spectators picked up on the director's intention to use Fanis as an agent of nation-wide "past and present national anxieties, fantasies and aspirations". According to Eleftheriotis, the movie gradually constructs the bond between man and urban space by projecting a dual mobility, first a virtual one between the present and past as Fanis recalls his memories, then an actual one, as he travels to Istanbul (18-19). His arrival, just in time to bid farewell to his dying grandfather, as well as to Saime and to any chance he ever had of reuniting with her, is the culminating point of the movie using memories as building blocks to reconstruct the image of the city. After Fanis buries Vassilis and walks around the city trying to retrace whatever is left from his childhood, the virtual and the actual mobility collide in an overwhelming sequence that strongly emits loneliness and a sense of regret.

As the movie gradually progresses towards its foreshadowed melancholic resolution, Boulmetis renders the emotional ties between Fanis and Istanbul in the mixture of the bitterness of deportation, remembrance of lost love, and the unbreakable bonds of kinship, all of which are gradually interwoven with the beloved memory of home-made food. Boulmetis

creates a cinematic "placelessness" that is established somewhere between physical objects and personal experience. This place-in-between vividly illustrates the tormented memories of Istanbul that Fanis struggles to cope with throughout his life, the things and people left behind but who are not actually there anymore, except in the image of the city that his mind retains. This condition is a visual example of what Sarah Menin defines as the state of being *atopos*: an essentially negative condition, "a characteristic of an emotional, mental and physical nothingness that can accompany depression or sense of *Unheimlichkeit* – home sickness or not feeling at home, or a deep angst of unbearable emptiness", and is a condition remedied only by endeavoring to find a place again, even if the quest only remains spiritual rather than physical (2). Menin describes *atopia* as the consequence of encountering a place that is not there anymore, a re-affirmation of the fact that a familiar and beloved place is a positive factor in a person's healthy life. (2) As Fanis is trapped in the internal void of loss and the consequent experience of being *atopos*, the viewers follow him literally and virtually oscillating between neighborhoods in Istanbul and his imagination. He is not merely seeking to return to the place itself, which he easily accomplishes towards the end of the movie; from a wider perspective, he longs to reunite with the irrevocably lost worldview of his childhood.

In the very end of the movie, Fanis makes his peace with the past, closing the circle of memories inside his grandfather's run-down spice shop. Fanis's hope of return and reunion is frustrated, as he realizes that the Polis[8] of his youth is no more; the way the city is illustrated in the movie makes it clear that this happens because, for him, it had always been a mixture of memories, smells and colors which he naively thought he could regain. The actual city remains, but the representation of its emotional charge is inevitably lost along with Fanis's childhood years and, as he is coming to terms with it, he uses his imagination to recreate the mixed smell of the spices in order to help his memories resurface. Indeed, the final CGI scene with the various spice seeds composing a microcosm of Fanis's universe, both metaphorically and literally, is both intense and visually eloquent; it manages to escape shallow emotionalism by representing Fanis's internal world as a grown-up's game with spice dust, denoting the completion of his redemptive circle. As Istanbul floats quietly like an ark of history in the everlasting flow of Bosporus, Fanis makes peace with his regrets by listening to the city that bred him, seeing it moving on without him, and eventually, deciding to let go.

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[8] The abbreviation *Polis* is a common reference to Istanbul in Greek.

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"IT'S OVER 9000." APEIRON NARRATIVE CONFIGURATIONS IN CONTEMPORARY MEDIASCAPE

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Abstract

Recently, a peculiar narrative configuration has developed and is spreading through the internet culture and new media. Characterised by a specific representation of the individual growth process, Apeiron narratives find their origin in pen & paper role-playing games, but it is only after the development of digital games and the diffusion of the Japanese cultural codex through the contemporary mediascape that they have become a coherent, autonomous and viral phenomenon.

In the following pages, this narrative configuration will be described through a series of paradigmatic examples; its roots will be traced back to the peculiar traits of role-playing games, and the importance of recent digital adaptation will be highlighted. Finally, I will describe its diffusion beyond the domain of fictional text, hinting at possible environments for its diffusion.

Keywords: videogame, narrative, fiction, semiotics, aspectuality

1. Description
1.1. Introduction: memes and power level

"It's over 9000" is one of the first and most famous memes still used on the internet: it is generally used in messages as a reply to incredible values or numbers, often ironically or to imply an excess in forecasts or predictions. In recent years, its success served as a starting point for practices of meme remix-remake, which could be called a meta-meme.
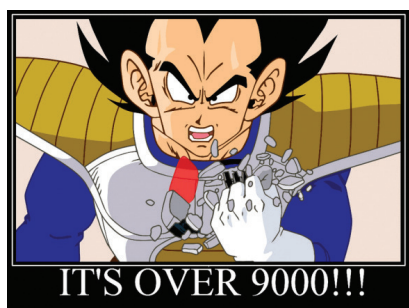
Figure 1: the original image of the "it's over 9000" meme

It is possible that this success is not by chance: the scene from which the meme is inspired can be considered one of the clearest representations of a recent narrative configuration, which has been spreading across different media platforms in the last years.

The meme itself is derived from a sequence of the American version of the *anime* (Japanese cartoon) Dragon Ball Z, created by Akira Toriyama and a sequel of the famous Dragon Ball series.

In order to define the paradigmatic elements of the meme, a brief resume of the plot of the DBZ series is necessary: the cartoon starts with the arrival on planet earth of the vicious race of the Sayans. They are equipped with a combat scanner (called *scouter*), which is able to precisely measure the combat potential of living beings, and assess it on a numerical scale. The aim of the Sayan Raditz is to convince his brother Goku (the main character of Dragon Ball) to join them, and conquer Earth. Since Goku refuses, the two fighters start to battle. Raditz knows he will win, since his combat power is 1500, while the two strongest fighters on earth, Goku and his friend Junior (who joined the battle) only have a power level of 416 and 408. By acting recklessly, however, he is killed through a stratagem by the

two earthlings. Despite this he is able to send a dying message to his much stronger comrades Nappa and Vegeta, who head for planet earth. Since the two aliens arrive one year later, the main characters have enough time to train and be ready to face them.

One year later, in the scene from which the meme is taken from, Goku joins the battle at a later stage, while his friends are being defeated by Nappa. Before stepping up, Goku gives a demonstration of his combat power, to show his enemies how strong he has become. Nappa, whose scouter got destroyed during the previous battle, asks Vegeta for the result. Vegeta, stupefied and overcome by anger, shouts "Unbelievable... It's over nine thousand", destroying the scouter out of rage. Nappa (whose power level is 4000)[1] does not trust the result, charging relentlessly: as a result, he is defeated with one blow.

1.2 Representing power and growth

Three main characteristics of DBZ's representation of power let us outline the peculiarity of its narrative configuration:

1) The measure of Competence: through the semionarrative framework developed by Greimas (1983), the measure of the scouter can be defined as a sanction of a specific performance. However, it is important to note that the scouter does not measure the actual fight (that is, the main performance), but only a virtualisation of performance of the subject, or it should be said, their competence. In the scene previously described, the Addressee Nappa refuses to acknowledge the Sanction, and as a result he is defeated when Goku's Virtual Competence translates into a Performance (an actual fight). The Sanction of the scouter, however, is conveyed through a numerical value on a specific scale, rather than vague guessing or judgment from the warriors themselves. This numerical scale translates every possible ability of the fighters (strength, speed, stamina, technique etc.) into a mono-dimensional axis.

2) Competence/Performance discrepancy: by extending the consideration to the previous episodes of Dragon Ball, a second trait is visible. While the main character's power level is 20 times higher than his previous fight (from 416 to 9000), this growth is not mirrored by a change in the representation of fights: fighters' movements, punch feedback, and spiritual energy are substantially comparable if not identical in the two battles, both in the anime and in the manga.

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[1] For a list of power levels with sources, http://dragonball.wikia.com/wiki/List_of_power_levels (last visit 27/09/17)

DBZ "grammar of fights" was mainly created at the beginning of the series, and aside from specific events (such as the fighters' transformations), remains constant within the series. To simplify, there is no way for the reader to discern the actual power level of the fighters involved in a battle without knowing beforehand. After all, the author of DB, Akira Toriyama, explicitly said the scouter was designed as a simple plot device to make the readers aware of the relative strength of the fighters, without having to rely on different visual cues and exhibition of strength for every battle.

3) Exponential growth: right after destroying the scouter, Vegeta asks himself how it is possible for the weak Goku to develop so much in only one year. His doubts do not regard his enemy's current fighting competence (he is still stronger than him), but Goku's competence in growing. The incredible development in power of the main characters becomes increasingly clear as the story proceeds in the following narrative arcs: Goku beats Vegeta (power level 18.000) with a quadruple *kaiohken* (his special attack, which multiplies his power per 4). In the next arc, Goku's power is 90.000, and grows further during the episodes. In the subsequent one, during the fight against Freezer, his power raises from 3 million to 150 million thanks to his transformation into Super Sayan, surpassing his enemy's 120 million.

By describing the process of growth in DBZ through its aspectuality traits (Fontanille 1991), it can be defined as durative (the process of growth is continuous), iterative (constituted by multiple cycles of growth) and progressive (the process is oriented through hierarchically growing Sanctions, following units of measurements on a growing scale).

To summarise the previous observations, the process of growth is characterised by three main elements: 1) the subject's Competence, which is directly represented and sanctioned through a numerical value and scale, linked to the value of a virtual Performance. 2) The growth process, as represented through the different numerical Sanctions, is characterised by the following aspectuality traits: durativity, iterativity and progressivity. Using a visual metaphor, this could be represented by an exponential equation, developing through a higher order of magnitudes as the story develops. 3) This growth in competence is not balanced by a comparable change in the representation of the actual performance related to the competence (the battles), which seem to follow a static visual and narrative style.

1.3. Apeiron configuration in comics

The elements described above are not limited to the Dragon Ball series, but are a key part of multiple contemporary narratives, starting with Japanese and Korean comics (*manga* and *manwa*): by expanding the analysis

to the presence of these elements in *shounen* and *seinen*, it is possible to define the constitutive parts of a common narrative configuration, which will be referred to as Apeiron from now on. In addition, well-known comics, such as *Tokyo Ghoul, Naruto, One Piece, Bleach, Claymore, Tower of God, Re:Monster, The Gamer,* and many others can be used as examples to describe variations and expansion in the configuration described below:

1) The unit of measure for Competence (and thus of the process of growth) can be represented directly or indirectly. For instance, in *One Piece,* the pirate threat is measured through the bounty assigned to them; in *Tower of God,* characters' ability is measured through the number of floors of the Tower they have climbed; in *Claymore*, each soldier is ranked through its number on a general leaderboard for all the soldiers of his/her generation.

2) The measure of Competence can also be represented through hierarchies, ranks and titles: in *Tokyo Ghoul*, the anti-ghoul police ranks its enemies in classes ranging from C- to SSS (and maybe more); the investigators are divided into 4 levels (second class, first class, special class 1, special class 2) predominantly according to their combat prowess. In *Bleach*, *shinigamis'* Competence is based on their rank number in the respective corps (1° captain, 2° vice-captain, 3° lieutenant, etc.). While the unit of measurement seems to not be as precise as a numerical value, the growth in competence correlates with the same exponential rhythm through titles and hierarchies: the main character in *Bleach* defeats a vice-captain, then a captain, then the strongest captain among the army corps in only three days, despite his enemies' decades of training to reach those positions.

3) These leaderboards, numerical values or ranks/hierarchies can be combined together to create complex representations of the levels of strength, in order to avoid the confrontations to be too predictable. Furthermore, plot devices can be devised to make the circumstances more nuanced (multiple characters teaming up, unknown special powers revealed etc.), acting as specific "calculations." As a result, the readers start to perceive the inherent logic behind the values and measurements, integrate it into the narrative development of the story, and use it to "compute" the possible narrative outcomes for the story.

4) Among the specific narrative plot devices used for "calculation", a key role is played by limit-break processes: transformations (*Super Sayan* in *DB*), alternative forms (*Kakuya* in *TG*), all-out special attacks (Bankai in *Bleach*). Almost all the comics listed above feature one or more limit-break processes, in which previous numerical values or ranks are suddenly crossed and overcome, acting as a quantum leap in Competence. These

plot devices are generally used in the most climatic battles, in which the difference in competence among the enemies is too high, or too low, acting as a trump card to produce (and justify) specific narrative developments.

1.4. The original traits in role-playing games

The *Apeiron* configuration, while common in eastern comics and cartoons, is not limited to Japanese/Korean cultures, nor can it be fully said to originate in the traditional domains of the narrative. On the contrary, it is the result of a complex process of intermedial translations, in which abstract narrative structures spread, change and diffuse through multiple media and cultures.

However, this should not be seen as the result of an actual genealogy or direct imitation (which could be proven with difficulty) so much as the result of the spread of specific abstract narrative structures through the contemporary mediascape (Appadurai 1996), a process further encouraged by the social development of the digitalisation, and by the key paradigmatic role achieved by games as a medium in the 21st century (see Idone Cassone 2017).

For this specific configuration, it is possible to highlight the role of traditional and digital games in its origin and development, specifically role-playing games, the game genre most based on the development of player Competence.

1) As a general pattern in role-playing games, both traditional (*Dungeons & Dragons*, Vampire) and digital (such as the Japanese *Final Fantasy* or *Dragon Quest* series, the Western *Dragon Age*, *Divinity: Original Sin* and *Fallout*), the characters played by the user are defined by a character level and other statistics, directly dependent on the level achieved. As per the units of measure described in the previous paragraphs, levels acts as a Sanction of the character's Competence, and only indirectly of its performance. Each time players fight, characters gain experience and increase their level, gaining new powers and increasing their stats, which in turn increase the damage they do, their health points, their magic points, etc.

2) While new visual effects are sometimes employed to represent characters' strongest special power, the main difference in the performance is limited to the display of attacks' damage output, or of the health points and the magic points available. A specific attack will always trigger the same animation, regardless of whether the character's level is 1 or 100; it is only through the damage counter that it is possible to perceive the difference in Performance.

3) The individual progress is once again tied to narrative development, and shaped through an exponential-like curve: as players progress through the story, the quests and fights cause their characters to gain levels, while new and stronger enemies appear in the next narrative arcs, including the so-called Boss, the strongest and last enemy of a narrative arc, whose power and level is generally superior to that of the main characters. While the level range vary according to each game (from 1 to 100 in *FF*, from 1 to 20 in *D&D*…), the difference in the other stats usually highlights the quantum leap from early to peak levels.

However, the roots of this system of exponential growth can be traced back to analogical games, such as the forefather of pen and paper RPGs: *Dungeons and Dragons*.

Figure 2: a chart describing the increase in power of warriors and magical classes in D&D

The mechanical issue later labelled as "linear warrior, quadratic wizard" has been visible since the earliest versions of *D&D*. It refers to a difference in progression between the fighter classes and the magic ones: while the former gained points of damage in a linear manner (rolling 1 dice, and adding X), the latter gained damage points of damage by multiplying the dice roll (rolling X dice); in addition, magic classes gained further spells, and new dice for each one of the previous spells known, while fighters progressed in only a limited number of attacks.

As a result, the perceived exponential growth in traditional RPGs is not due to a single quantum leap in a comprehensive unit of measurement, but to the sum and accumulation of multiple powers at a rhythm far greater than the standard one; in a similar way to what Vegeta witnessed in the "it's over 9000!" scene, described above.

Therefore, the general paradigm of role-playing games embodies the three main traits defined in the previous paragraph: measure of Competence, Competence/Performance discrepancy, and Exponential growth. 4) However, they also feature various examples of the limit-break process described for the Apeiron narratives, paradigmatically implemented in the *Final Fantasy* series. In *Final Fantasy*, power limits do not exist within narrative arcs; instead limits are imposed on the maximum level (99) and maximum damage (9999) obtainable in the game. However, it is possible for players to surpass this limit through special powers called Break Limit (or sometimes special moves called Limit Break), that enable characters to surpass the limit and inflict a maximum of 99.999 points of damage (provided the character is skilled enough to reach it). The same limit and limit break is often applied to Health points, Mana points etc. In the Italian adaptation, these abilities have been called "Apeiron", from Anassimandro's concept of the infinite, boundless and endless, from which this narrative configuration takes its name.

A less explicit limit-break process is featured in the progression systems of MMORPGs (massively multiplayer online roleplaying games), like *World of Warcraft*. The main difference in WRPG is that the limit break does not result from special attacks or a single power, but consists of the possibility to surpass multiple limits dictated by the game (limit caps). In WOW, players have a maximum level cap of 100: when they reach it, 'it is the equipment that starts "levelling up." Divided into different tiers, virtually infinite (from T1 until the actual T21), the main five pieces of equipment represent a new "leap", and set a new power boundary tied with frequent updates of the game. With respect to the model of the fairy tales, in which objects grant specific Competence on a simple dichotomy, here all the objects have the same function, but the competence is made discreet by the difference in numbers in protections, damage, weight etc.

The Apeiron narrative configuration, formerly described only through contemporary manga and anime, seems to be deeply rooted in the traditions of roleplaying games, and also manifests in their new digital manifestations, both in Japanese and in Western video games. After describing its main four traits and game-related origin, it is now necessary to highlight

the semiotic outcomes of this configuration, how it interacts with "traditional narrations", and how it is spreading in the contemporary mediascape.

2. Analysis
2.1. Micro-level aspectuality

As a result of this interaction between value measurements, hierarchies of power, narrative arcs, limits and limit break, Apeiron narratives create a complex effect of aspectualisation (Fontanille 1991) out of the aspectuality of the process of growth. The structure and the development of the individual narratives deeply interact with the grammar of Competence and the progress of growth of the characters, both in games and in traditional narratives.

The process is the result of two interacting levels of aspectuality: the micro-level (in which the reader/player's point of view is within the narrative flow), and the macro-level (the phase of re-elaboration, in which the reader/player's POV is beyond a single narrative arc, or the whole series).

At the first level, the development of Competence is represented both through durativity (through phases of training) and punctuativity (the measurement of competence through numbers and ranks). Only in the first case is it possible to discuss a real representation of "progression" for the microaspectuality, since viewers experience the character through the process of growth, while in the second case the process of growth is only re-elaborated at a macro-level, by comparing the actual Competence value with the previous value and inferring the evolution.

However, the limit-breaking moments, represented through a punctuative aspectuality (a sudden change in measurement) make the reader aware of the immediate growth in character Competence, through the sudden shift in measurement and in performance. 'It is during these moments that it is easier to witness a change in the non-numerical representation of the performance.

2.2. Semiotic boundaries and thresholds

As a result of the punctuative vs. durative micro-level aspectuality, a peculiar structure of semiotic boundaries end thresholds (Zilbelberg 2001) is created: these boundaries both affect the narrative development (separating the different story arcs) and the Competence measurement (separating the pre- and post-limit break). As explicated in the Dictionnaire (Greimas and Courtes 1979, entry "aspectualisation"), boundaries and thresholds are linked to aspectuality, since the macro-level points of views on the process

are the result of the positioning of the observer with respect to specific narrative boundaries/thresholds.

In the case of Apeiron narratives, the process of growth is represented through two main complementary points of view: the first centred on the subject/ anti-subject relationship, the second centred on the relationship between narrative arcs.

In the first acts in a narrative arc, the main characters are placed at the lower level of the power scale, while their enemy/ies are put on the upper boundary of the power scale. By assuming the POV of the main character, growth process is perceived from a "bottom-up perspective" in which the final goal is not simply to reach the limit, but to surpass it. As noted by Fabbri and Sbisà (1985), boundaries and thresholds are tied with the specific result of *debrayage* and *embrayage*: in this case, the distinction in narrative arcs is strengthened by limit-break events, which settle a new degree in subject Competence and act as the ending of the previous bottom-up perspective. As a result, a new narrative arc, a new perspective and a new aspectuality on the process of growth are established in the following arc.

If the story had been written from the point of view of the anti-subject (a "top-down" point of view), no development or growth in Competence would have been possible: the resulting aspectualisation would be that of a continuously stagnating anti-subject competence. But since the narrative configuration is built on following the main subject's path from a bottom-up perspective, the moment in which the limits of the Competence and the limits of the narrative arcs are reached necessitates a new arc.

However, due to the exponential growth increase that characterises Apeiron narratives, the new arc will need to develop exponential growth through the replication of the bottom-up POV. The boundaries of the new narrative arc behave in the exact same way: new anti-subject, new limit, new limit-break.

This second arc/arc point of view shapes the general aspectualisation of the whole text: aspectualisation not limited to explicit actions, but referring to the general positioning and interaction of the reader/player with all the narrative horizons, within and beyond the boundaries, in relation to virtual processes (growth), actual processes (limit break), and realised processes (continuous acts of establishing and surpassing limits). These forms of aspectualisation result from the use of units of measurement within the narration, and the separation into narrative arcs.

2.3. Perspective and retrospective
When the reader moves from macro-level to micro-level aspectuality, another outcome of the Apeiron dynamic becomes apparent. The reader/

player will try to synthetize the text, integrating the narrative development and the growth-process grammar into a coherent shape, through the micro-level points of view and aspectualities used in the text. However, due to the above-mentioned dichotomy between the punctuative and durative representation of the growth, and the iterative nature of the growth across different narrative arcs, two main types of narrative inconsistencies can be observed in Apeiron narratives:

a) The passage from one arc to the other causes a retrospective paradox. Due to the exponential representation of growth, and to the use of limit-break as narrative endings, everything that a character has been experienced becomes insignificant when a new arc is reached. The previous enemies, challenges, and power balances are now meaningless, since the new arc follows the same bottom-up, progressive point of view, in which new limits and anti-subjects shape the power balance. In this regard, Apeiron narratives can be considered the opposite of classical Epic narratives, in which the meaning of the action is defined only in a retrospective way, as an obligation and valorisation of the Past.

b) The passage from single arcs to the interpretation of the entire text produces a discontinuity function paradox: since growth is experienced mainly through discontinuous punctuative measurements and limit breaks, it is the reader who must translate it into a continuous, progressive process, "connecting the dots" and filling the narrative gaps in power balance and competence growth. But since the process is represented through an iterative, bottom-up view, a multiple perspective incoherence may arise (character overgrowth, different "curves of power", implicit imbalances between characters, etc.).

As a result of these two narrative inconsistencies, a conflict between the narration and the progression is produced: on the one hand the story needs to progress through specific successions and coherence; on the other, the aspectuality created through numbers and ranks develops its own coherence, pacing and logic. Some typical results of these inconsistencies can be briefly described:

a) In the *DBZ* series, the main enemy of the Freezer Arc has a power level of 530.000, threatening to make a planet explode by triggering its nucleus. Several narrative arcs later, the devil Darbura declares that a power of 200-300 *kiri* (a new unit of measurement introduced in the series) is enough to blow up a planet. However, by a *Q&A* in the 2004 V-Jump review this power should be equal to 15 million in the traditional unit of measurement, but both Vegeta and Freezer are able to destroy the planet while having only 0.36 and 10 *kiri* respectively.

b) Many digital RPG feature grinding dynamics: players can (and should) repeat simple tasks/fights over and over to gain experience points and level up. As a result, in games such as *Final Fantasy, Dragon Age* or *Pokémon* it is always possible to continue training indefinitely, without needing to follow the story. The consequence is that by spending a huge amount of time, players can reach a power level high enough to destroy any sense of challenge in the game, making every enemy weak in comparison. However, these enemies will still be described and presented as the strongest character so far, producing almost comical results. As in Final Fantasy X, in which the final boss *Braska* triggers a moving dialogue with his son *Tidus* (the main character), but then could be killed with two normal attacks if the party has the Limit Damage Break ability.[2]

c) American comics and fantasy TV series do not entirely follow the Apeiron narrative configuration: generally they do not feature systems for measuring competence, despite following iterative narrative structures and occasional limit-break events. As a result, due to the huge cast of heroes in the Marvel and DC comics universes, and the long (almost 10-years' worth) narrative plots, it is difficult for readers to interpret the power balance of heroes and their development.

Figure 3: a comparison between the Captain America and Iron Man power level

It is probably for this reason that readers attempt to elaborate unofficial ranks and leaderboards of characters strength, trying to systematize the logic of power in these fictional universes. As a retrospective attempt to satisfy readers, Marvel created a Power Grid of Marvel Heroes in the *Official Handbook of the Marvel Universe*. For each hero, the power grid measures strength in 6 attributes, divided in seven tiers, ranging from one (weaker than common man) to seven (god-like power).

However, due to these described retrospective inconsistencies, intensified by the number of heroes and stories and the relative low granularity of tiers, the Power Grid created more debates and incoherence than it solved. As an example, the character Captain America, believed to be one of the most important heroes of Marvel, and

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[2] As recorded by this player: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=URTwowYgSWw&t=354s (last visit 27/09/17)

who has defeated several key enemies, is technically only a low-tier character, and should have been crushed by many of his enemies, rivals, and allies.

3. Extensions and conclusions
3.1. Non-fictional Apeiron configuration

Until now, the Apeiron narrative configuration has been described and analysed through texts that could be labelled as "fiction." However, it is also possible, due to its adaptability and its compatibility with the digital culture, that the fictional boundaries could be crossed and that it could become an abstract discursive configuration, used to represent several processes of growth in the digital age, even non-fiction ones. Two examples partially support this hypothesis:

a) It is now a common trend for the producers of IT components such as NVidia, Apple or Arm, to officially present their new products during specific conferences, aimed at the tech-savvy public. The structure of the discourse used during this presentation seems to follow the key traits of the Apeiron narratives, even in a rough and imprecise way:
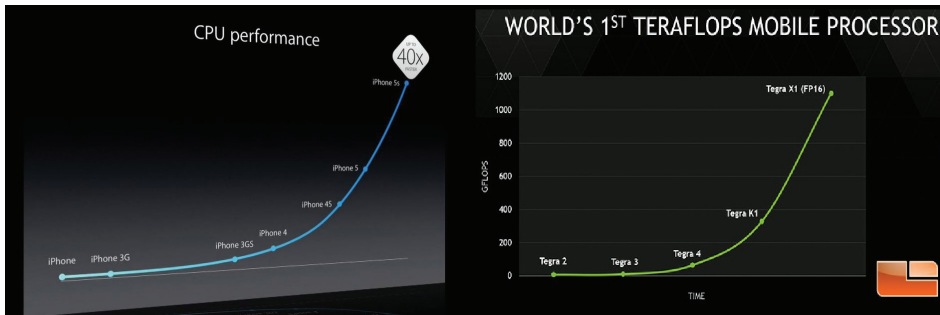
Figure 4: the graphs of Apple (left) and NVidia (right) SoC increase in Competence

As can be observed in the image, the power curve used for both Apple A and the NVidia Tegra Soc (system on chip) line is an exponential curve. However, the values that determine the curve are taken from benchmarks or flops in terms of theoretical performance. Both these units of measurement are the results of virtual measurements, which do not correspond to an actual performance increase and cannot be translated into real-case scenarios. Technological leaps, while possible, are the result of complex relationships between research conducted in production systems, raw materials, physics, and software development, which of course do not

necessarily produce exponential progress at each new stage. However, the culture surrounding the technological evolution of "trending" technological artefacts seem to be fascinated by this narrative configuration: it is not casual, maybe, that in video-game online forums, the speculations about the raw power (in flops) of consoles is often compared to 'Dragon Ball's power level scale.[3]

b) Applications, such as *Stackoverflow*, *Classcraft*, Steam and other digital platforms, employ elements of gamification intended to quantify elements of game design in a non-game context (see Deterding 2011). Not casually, the same game design dynamics of progress described above are used to shape the progress of users: the acquisition of experience points, the increase in levels, and the use of leaderboards (or eventually missions and trophies). As in the case of *World of Warcraft* and *Dungeons and Dragons*, while single elements of their systems are structured through linear growth, the accumulation of several dynamics (badges, experience points, missions, powers) grants the impression of an exponential progression. This model is generally applied to specific activities (coding solutions, school learning, digital shopping) considered to be repetitive activities, without inherent meaningful progression. These gamified elements are designed to change the perception of the traditional routine through the impression of continuous growth and increase in competence, even if the iterativity of the performance remains (as in grinding dynamics).

3.2. Satire, parodies and references

The dissemination of this narrative configuration can also be observed in a further process: the development of full-fledged parodies and satires targeted against the configuration itself. The development of these counter-discourse could prove the Apeiron narratives are starting to be perceived clearly among the main cultural narrative structures and configurations, marking its spread in the semiosphere of internet cultures as a result of its strong ties to the culture of digital games and contemporary animation.

a) *Onepunch man* is a Japanese manga and anime, whose narrative structure is based on a 1 on 1 parody of the Apeiron configuration. The main character is (inexplicably) the strongest man in the universe from the beginning, to the point of becoming incredibly bored, since he can defeat any enemy with just one punch. While the other heroes struggle to gain ranks and fame in the Hero association, he saves the world almost invol-

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[3] As in http://www.neogaf.com/forum/showthread.php?t=1379817&page=2, post #23, #48, #163 and ss. (last visit 27/09/17)

untarily. Since he is so strong and fast, no opponent is able to watch his performance (except for the reader), so he is still considered a third-class hero, and most of his epic deeds are attributed to other heroes passing by, or to inexplicable circumstances.

b) *Tengen Toppa Gurenn Lagann* is a Japanese anime in which the Apeiron configuration is made explicit through a figurative reasoning (Lancioni 2009): a visual metaphor that acts as a paradigm for the narrative logic itself, being validated or criticised by the main characters.

The main characters' progressive growth is represented through the metaphor of the spiral power: the spiral shape, the drill (the miner's tool), the double helix of the DNA, and the class of spiral galaxies are all manifestations of the narrative structure's main attributes: a drive that moves forward by repeating over and over the same movement, accelerating in the process, combining the human struggle for growth in the biological chain of the DNA and the desire to achieve evolution of all life in the galaxy.

The only noteworthy enemy of this drive is the race of the anti-spirals, beings which seek balance in the universe, and believe that the spiral drive is the origin of the entropy of the universe, and of its future death. Since the anti-spiral strategy is to win the fight by being just as strong as its enemies, any limit-breaking power is useless, highlighting the inconsistencies in the Apeiron narrative. The only way for the main character to win is conciliating the Apeiron narrative into a double-spiral shape, connecting both the perspective point of view to a retrospective one, able to bring together the past and the future of human growth as a single entity.
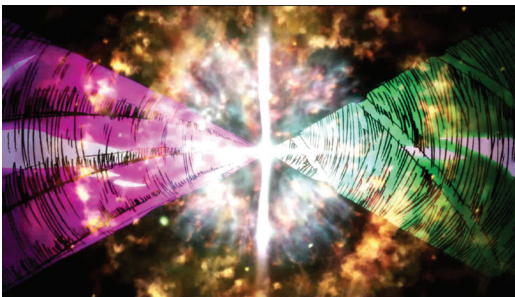
Figure 5: the spiral figurative reasoning in Tengen Toppa Gurenn Lagan

Conclusions

While not enough to completely prove the hypothesis, these examples seem to confirm a possible extension of the Apeiron configuration to non-fictional discourse, and supports its development as a recognised and clear narrative structure in the current mediascape.

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CONSTRUCTING THE CORPORATE INSTAGRAM DISCOURSE – A CRITICAL VISUAL DISCOURSE APPROACH

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Abstract

Since October 2010, the Instagram app has provided its users with means of visual communication that previously were reserved for professional photographers. Simultaneously, the Instagram Corporation's official blog has offered suggestions on how the features of the app could be applied. In this manner, the corporation has established a norm of Instagram use. Norms of technology use, i.e., socially learned ways of behaving and communicating with technology, are well-researched in technology and science studies, but thus far these studies have only included social media, e.g., Instagram, to a minor degree. Furthermore, it remains largely unexplored how these social rules are represented multimodally in discourses about social media technology. Through a critical multimodal discourse analysis, this paper describes how the aforementioned corporate regulative norms on the usage of Instagram were established on the corporate blog

from 2010 to 2014. The findings show that the discourse on the blog adjusts its focus. Initially, it dealt with correctional tools for the app, but it then progressed into presenting tools for experimental visual expression. At the same time, the blog confines the experimental uses of the application and, thereby, the possible perception of what entertaining imagery is. This way, the study demonstrates how the Instagram Corporation seeks to regulate the use of the app.

Keywords: social media, critical multimodal analysis, Instagram, normative discourse, semiotic technology.

1. Introduction

Since October 2010, the Instagram corporation[1] has provided its users with a means of visual communication previously reserved for professional photographers, along with a social network site for users to share photos and videos. At the same time, the Instagram corporation's official blog (blog.instagram.com) has offered suggestions, both visually and in writing, on how the app's tools could be applied. The blog also includes and promotes images from users that have made creative use of relevant tools, e.g. for a social event or particular use of a new filter. Thus the organization uses their blog and social networking site in specific ways as corporate communication to create a specific framework of knowledge or discourse.

Corporate use of social media remains an emergent field in discourse studies (Darics 2015; Danielewicz-Betz 2016). More specifically, further investigation is required of the ways in which businesses and organizations construct discourses through social media, and the applications of these discourses for the social practices of professional communication.

(Multimodal) discourse studies have paid attention to social media (Page et al. 2014; Adami & Carey 2016), but most studies center on Twitter and Facebook (e.g., Eisenlauer 2013) rather than Instagram. And, while discourse studies of Instagram have taken an interest in user groups, for instance, mommy bloggers (Zappavigna 2016, Zhao & Zappavigna 2016), politicians (Avedissian 2016), and location-based groups (Manovich 2016), no studies seem to have looked at the Instagram corporation and their communicative practices. This study seeks to provide more knowledge in this intersection of social media, visual discourse, and corporate communication.

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[1] Instagram was bought by Facebook in April 2012, but I shall refer to Instagram as an independent company.

Based on an ongoing study of the discourse on Instagram's corporate blog from 2010 to 2016, this article provides a critical visual discourse analysis[2]. The article seeks to demonstrate that the blog generates a special use of images, and from this basis, the study attempts to elucidate which visual resources the Instagram corporation uses to realize its discourse. By specifically centering on blog posts that encompass the use of tools in the app's user interface, this article shall study the construction of the corporate blog's discourse in addition to the discourse's corporate communicative context. As part of the research, this article investigates how the Instagram corporation frames uses of the app and notions of visual creativity through visual discourse. In doing so, the study demonstrates to what extent the Instagram corporation seeks to regulate the use of the app, and impose a norm that constrains other notions of visual creativity.

The article is structured in six sections: Following this introduction, I introduce the theoretical framework and methodology for the study in sections two and three. Sections four and five present the findings of the critical visual discourse analysis, with my concluding remarks in section six.

2. Theoretical framework

To investigate the ways in which Instagram constructs a normative discourse, this study employs critical visual discourse analysis both as theoretical framework and methodology (Kress & van Leeuwen 2001, 2006; Martin & Rose 2003; van Leeuwen 2005, 2008). In this framework, discourses are not understood as texts or speech, but "as socially constructed ways of knowing some aspect of reality" (van Leeuwen 2016: 138) that people use when they think, communicate and act. Thus, discourses are the frames people draw on in various sense-making social practices. In this case, I explore how the Instagram corporation makes meaning about the application and, thus, prompts its users to understand and engage with the Instagram app. Discourse is based on practices that are "context-specific frameworks of making sense of things" (ibid.) within specific social groups. This way, the study reconnects discourse to social practice, i.e., socially regulated ways of doing, "from which it derives (context-specific) meaning" in order "to analyze the processes of transformation, or recontextualization (Bernstein 1981, 1986), that occur as practices are turned into discourses" (van Leeuwen 2016, 139).

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[2] The analysis of the discourse realized in writing is explored in forthcoming work (Poulsen, in preparation); in this article, I will attempt to reconstruct the discourse based on the images.

It is a fundamental assumption that the discourse not only recontextualizes the social practice of making pictures, but also transforms practice in the process of representation. Van Leeuwen (2005, 2008a) suggests that transformations in discourse may include substitutions, deletions, rearrangements, and additions of elements to (representation of) social practice. Additions are subdivided into three important kinds: purposes, legitimations, and evaluations. Van Leeuwen has, to a great extent, shown how these transformations are expressed in texts. In this article I will use his analytical concepts slightly differently, to describe Instagram's use of their blog's constructed discourse. With inspiration from the concept of additions, I focus not on how such transformations occur in the visual discourse itself, but on how images, and the discourse they express, are used communicatively on the corporate blog. As shown by Wu (2016), a corporate blog combines different text types, which serve different communicative purposes and functional goals. Thus, a close inspection of discourse use indicates the social actors' interests and rhetorical strategies (Kress 2010) that form part of the communicative context of Instagram's corporate blogging.

Given that people use all available means to represent aspects of their reality, discourse analysis is concerned with the multimodal realization of discourse. As there is no generally accepted definition of mode (see Bateman 2008; Kress 2010 for discussions of mode), I provide a working definition for pragmatic reasons: a mode is a semiotic system that affords people with a bundle of resources for making meaning in social contexts. Thus, a discourse analysis must not only focus on writing but also on images, and on the interaction between these two primary modes used on the Instagram blog. In this article, which is part of a larger study, I primarily focus on images as a semiotic mode.

Since discourses do not exist independently of their expression (van Leeuwen 2016), by looking at the visual means employed by Instagram, one can characterize the realization of discourse in texts. On this basis, I can reconstruct which visual semiotic resources are employed to create (a) which parts of the discourse, (b) how viewers are established in relation to visual representations, as well as (c) how these two dimensions of meaning are organized. These three dimensions of meaning are termed the ideational, the interpersonal, and the textual metafunction, respectively (Halliday 1978).

In other words, to describe the kind of discourse constructed, the analysis takes, as its point of departure, a description of how discourse is made by means of visual 'grammar' (Kress & van Leeuwen 2006). By grammar I refer to an analytical description of how meaning making and visual resources are socially regulated.

Also, this study is critical. By critical I mean an analysis that investigates and makes explicit assumptions, justifications, arguments and rationale for discourse construction. In this way, the study is part of a critical tradition (Fairclough 1993; Wodak & Meyer 2015). The study seeks to contribute with knowledge that which otherwise remains unspoken, taken for granted, or thought of as common-sense by Instagram users. Following Machin & Mayr (2012), I assume that analytical description is a form of critique, and thus that analysis provides knowledge for people to question and debate. As a discourse analyst, my findings are not seen from a privileged position, and they are themselves informed by an academic discourse I must be aware of when identifying potential bias. 11

3. Methodology

In this analysis, I seek to answer two questions: firstly, what meaning is constructed visually on the Instagram blog, and second, what is this meaning used for the corporate blog? For the first part of this article, I will analyze the visual discourse and its realization in terms of different kinds of metafunctions. For the second part, I focus on the function(s) of visual meaning on the blog. I will divide the description of discourse into a grammatical level and a meaning level, cf. the division of strata in Halliday's (1978, 1985) Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL). The grammatical level concerns the way discourse is construed, while the level of meaning concerns the kind of discourse constructed.

This study introduces selected methods for the analysis of visual discourse on which Instagram draws when it blogs about tools for making, editing and sharing pictures and videos in the app's user interface. The specific analytical terms listed in Table 1 will be explained. The terms are selected for existing work of visual social semiotics (Kress & van Leeuwen 2006) and critical discourse analysis (van Leeuwen 2006, 2008). The listed terms represent only part of an exhaustive analysis; I adopt Machin & Mayr's (2013) tool kit approach where analytical concepts are included on the basis of their relevance to the analysis of visual data.

	Ideational meaning	Interpersonal meaning	Interpersonal meaning Textual meaning
Grammatical level	Transitivity	Social distance Social relation Social interaction Modality	Information value Salience
Meaning level	- entity - activity Inclusion/exclusion - Involvement - Categorization	Engagement Power	Periodicity

Table 1. Specific analytical terms

To study visual discourse, I look at texts (blog posts) about app tools in which Instagram uses images. Data for the analysis consists of 50 blog posts about tools, such as photo filters and editing and sharing functions, on the official corporate archive in 2010-2016 (blog.instagram.com/archive). These posts represent a small fraction of those that focus on specific topics as well as on individuals or groups of users. More specifically, I examine posts about the release of updated versions, the introduction of new tools, and posts on the use of photo filters and other editing and sharing tools. Images from these blog posts fall into two categories: user-generated images used with the users' permission to illustrate a feature or tool of the app; and images made by the Instagram corporation. Both types of images are used when Instagram shows visual examples of the tools presented.

By analyzing multiple texts that exist in the same context, I attempt to document the existence of and reconstruct the 'Instagram corporate discourse' based on my analysis and interpretation of blog posts. As Roderick (2016) puts it: "I strive to establish how such texts make tacit normative claims about the "nature" of technology and their uses through multiple semiotic modes such as language, images, typeface, and music" (p.5). This approach aims to document how 'Instagram discourse' is construed, changes, and shifts focus. I only analyze posts that explicitly mention tools in the app to focus on the ways the Instagram corporation itself chooses to construct a discourse. It could be argued that the analysis ought to include blog posts introducing how selected users apply in-app tools when making their photos. Such an analysis could arguably illuminate how In-

stagram 'imposes' a normative discourse about certain types of app usage by only showing feature usage of selected users that coincides with these norms. While this is a valid point, I seek to map Instagram's own semiotic sense-making, and not that of users. Yet, a future analysis of blog posts about these selected users could, undoubtedly, bring more nuances to the findings of the current analysis.

4. Visual discourse analysis of Instagram's corporate blog part 1: The discourse of images
4.1. Ideational meaning in blog images
4.1.1. The ideational grammatical level: Transitivity

To analyze the ideation of images on Instagram's blog, I want to describe meaning on the grammatical level in terms of transitivity, the system that manifests ideation experiences as meaning. Analyzing transitivity in the blog images enables me to describe how representation of core elements of the discourse, the social actors, their actions, and their circumstances are expressed visually. The representation of these elements indicates the ways in which actors' actions are constructed, and also to what extent actors and things are assigned agency in the represented social practices.

Regarding ideation in images, visual representations can focus on activities or entities (Martin & Rose 2003: 324). At the grammatical level, activities and entities are described in terms of processes that represent experience of reality as 'goings-on' – doing, happening, being, having, etc. (Halliday 1994: 106-8). Kress & van Leeuwen (2006) define activities in images as 'narrative processes', that is to say visual vectors (e.g., a line or a body part) indicating an action, actors doing something associated with a specific social practice. Entities are termed 'conceptual processes', which is defined as visual processes that realize entities and structures. The images on the selected blog posts are primarily conceptual processes and only narrative processes to a limited degree. For instance, in the blog "Instagram Tips: Using Lux" (11.2.2012) shows a series of simple things (a church, a street, and car) (Figure 1).

In a few cases, participants perform a 'reactional process', this means, the process is realized by the person's gaze and indicates an internal process of reacting to something. One example of this process is found in the post "Instagram's Newest Filter: Willow" (Figure 2). Two participants, a cat in one image, and a woman playing the guitar in another image, perform the simple act of looking, and their line of sight realizes reaction processes.

Of the conceptual processes, we find mostly analytical processes, or processes that manifest whole-part-relations, identity and attributes of

entities, and almost no classificatory processes. In other words, we find no processes that represent a class or group whose members share one or more properties. The only example seems to be images of a city (class) and similar-looking skyscrapers (members).
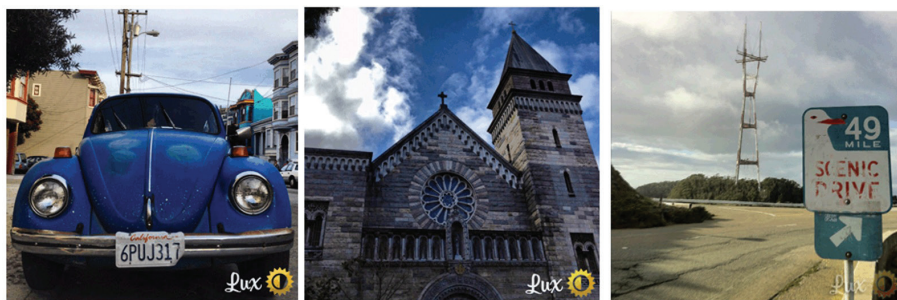
Figure 1. Examples of conceptual processes object on the blog post about using of the Lux tool. Source: http://blog.instagram.com/post/17436816889/ instagram-tips-using-lux (accessed 9.10.2017)

Figure 2. Examples of reactional process on the blog post about the Willow filter. Source: http://blog.instagram.com/post/37739409065/instagrams-newest-filter-willow-yesterdays (accessed 9.10.2017)

4.1.2. The level of ideational meaning: Phenomenon focus, inclusion/ exclusion, and categorization

In the previous section I analyzed the processes that make up the construal of grammatical-level image experience. I can now describe the

meaning these processes realize. The analytical processes represent single motives, primarily animals, buildings, cityscapes and nature (e.g., the sky, a horizon, or trees). Blog posts that exemplify these entities are "#hudson" (4.10.2011) and "Photo Tips: Straighten up!" (1.9.2011). Thus the images represent simple entities. It is important to notice that the pictures demonstrate the end result of a tool effect, that is, things users have taken pictures of; only in the cases where users take selfies, would one find representation of the social actions of mobile photography. But in the collected data, there are no selfies. Also, it is significant that in blog posts that launch new tools and/or reintroduce improved tools, people--both individuals and groups--are mostly absent. A reason for this might be that it is a legal matter. If so, it might be an attempt to draw attention away from the presented tool to the depicted motif. Nevertheless, Instagram's representation is focused on the pictures where people are excluded (van Leeuwen 2008). This exclusion can also be said to exemplify deletion as one way that the social practice of making mobile pictures is transformed (ibid.).

In the few cases, where people are depicted, they are represented individually, not in groups. And in these pictures of individuals, the persons are cast in generic categories, not specific (ibid.), for instance, a man, a woman or a baby, not particular identities. For instance, in blog post "Color and Fade" (7.4.2015), a woman is shown looking at something (realized by the reactional narrative process where the person's gaze indicates a vector) outside the picture frame. In a few cases, people directly at the camera are shown, as, for instance, on the blog post about face filters (21.9.2017).

On the basis of the visual represented ideation, one is able to identify an 'Instagram discourse': Its content consists of single, stand-alone things from an outside world. In this discursive world, people are almost not represented, while they, of course, exist and are present in reality.

4.2. Interpersonal meaning in blog images
4.2.1. The interpersonal grammatical level: Social distance, social relation, social interaction & modality

If we now turn to how representations are constructed in relation to the viewer, images can be characterized in terms of their social distance. Put differently, social distance is the distance between the represented participant(s), that is people and/or things, and the viewer. Most images show the motives from a removed social distance from which you view the whole participant. In some cases, images are taken from a close personal distance. E.g., the blog post "How I Shoot Macro Nature Photos with @rickyhead" (5.8.2012) shows close up photos of insects, water drops and seeds (Figure 3).
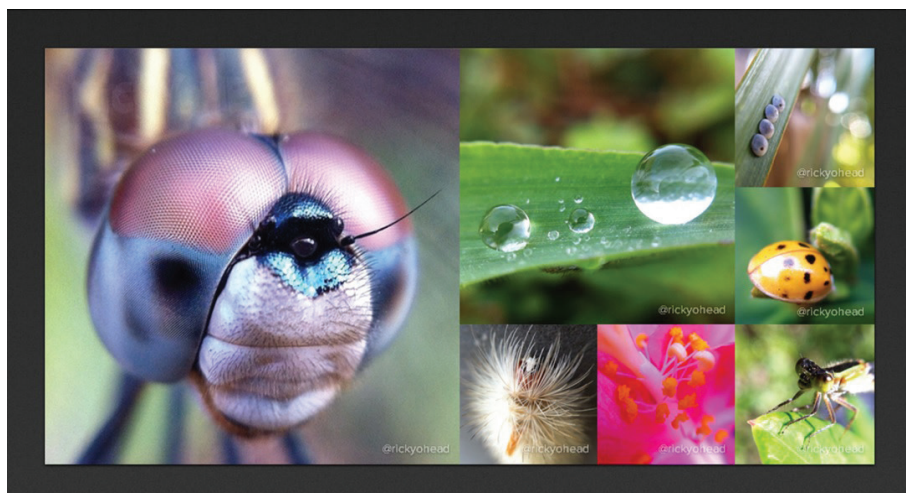
Figure 3. Examples of images with a close personal distance. Source: http:// blog.instagram.com/post/28766749799/macronaturephotos (accessed 9.10. 2017)

Since there are no people in most of the blog pictures, the social relation, i.e., the relation established between the image and viewer on the basis of image angle, can only be described on a vertical axle that determines whether an image is shot from a high, middle, or low angle. The horizontal axle that concerns the viewer's involvement in a depicted person's activity is irrelevant in the images. In the selected images, a simple description is that they are shot from a point of view that allows the viewer to see the motive from a neutral line of sight. Also, there is no social interaction, i.e., interaction between depicted persons and the viewer by way of a person's gaze.

As mentioned in the transitivity analysis, we only find a few photos depicting people and in those cases, the people mostly look to the side and thereby not at the viewer. In terms of social interaction, i.e., the interaction between the represented persons and the viewer, we would describe the interaction as an indirect address at the viewer.

The modality of the images, relating to the truthfulness or 'realness' of visual representation, is noteworthy. It is notable that all images appear impressive as a result of their colours. The modality of most images is high to medium. For instance, a blur or vibrance function creates a more naturalistic photo style. If we describe the images' modality markers (Kress & van Leeuwen 2006), the images modify their representation of the truthfulness of the depicted participants by (for example) saturation, temperature, brightness, focus (depth of field), and detail. These markers relate to the

resources that photo filters and other editing tools provide (for a description and discussion of resources of Instagram filters, see Poulsen 2017). What does this indicate? Each photo stands out and exemplifies that the discourse of Instagram makes photos beautiful, and this is also expressed in the blog's written text, for instance in the first blog post "Welcome to Instagram", 5.10.2010).

4.2.2. The interpersonal meaning level: Power, engagement, appraisal

In most images employed by Instagram, a vast social distance is used to create meaning that illustrates the visual effects a tool creates. The social distance that displays the motives in their entirety is combined with the neutral social relation, thus indicating an equitable power balance between the producer of the image and the viewer. The visual resources co-create an independent view. However, the indirect social interaction created in those images mostly without people also prompts a social encounter where the viewer either does interact or is invited to engage. The viewer is offered information and is positioned as a spectator rather than as someone who interacts. In this way, a discourse, that mainly centers on the viewing of 'things' in the world and only to a minor degree on viewing people who are absent, is constructed. From a critical perspective, this may seem like an odd choice since Instagram's mission is to enable its users to create engaging images and share them with their friends and relatives; in the blog post about introducing video from June 20, 2013, the corporation states: "Instagram has become a community where you can capture and share the world's moments simply and beautifully" (http://blog.instagram.com/post/53448889009/video-on-instagram). The selected images on the blog challenge Instagram's concept that the app should enable users to make images that are not only beautiful but involve people and bring them together. The invitation to view, but not to engage, is further underscored by the mixed coding orientation, that is, "sets of abstract principles which inform the way in which texts are coded by specific social groups" (Kress & van Leeuwen 2006: 165). The aptness to view the depicted subjects seems to be informed by a mix of two codes: one, a naturalistic coding orientation, where the judgment of the 'realness' of images is based on a naturalistic, common-sense representation of subjects. And second, a sensory coding orientation that supports the sensuous, pleasurable depiction of things. While the Instagram photos in the blog portray a naturalistic real world, the tools that the application provides enhance the colors, light, saturation etc. of these images. This photographic 'enhancement' creates more than

real or super-naturalistic images, which may prompt the viewer to be impressed and even astonished by the visuals.

4.3. Textual meaning in blog images
4.3.1. Grammatical level: Information value & salience

If we turn our attention to how the images are composed, the visual structures in the Instagram blog images can be described in terms of information value, meaning resources for organizing the visual information in the image frame, and salience, meaning resources for making participants significant in the image (Kress & van Leeuwen 2006). Of the selected blog images, most are built up of a center-periphery structure in which the depicted participant is placed at the center of the image, while other participants are positioned in the visual margin. In some cases, the images are organized in a top-button structure. For instance, these information structures are found in images with a horizon that divides the images into two parts, one part above the horizon and the other part below it. In the post "Color and Fade" (7.4.2015), one finds an example of both information values: on two left image, a single, centered entity (a woman with sunglasses), (Figure 4)
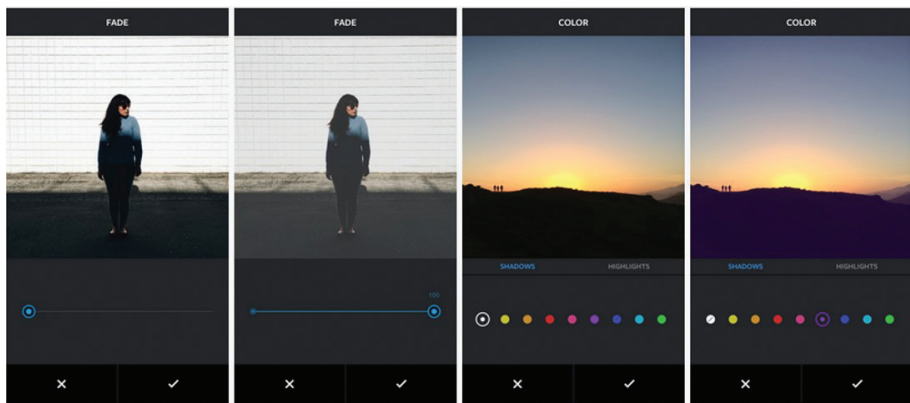
Figure 4 Examples of a center-margin structure (the two left images) and a top-button structure (the two right images). Source: http://blog.instagram. com/post/115772769267/150407-color-and-fade (accessed 9.10.2017)

Information organization resources co-create the visual meaning by making elements in the picture salient. As described by Kress & van Leeuwen (2006), images employ various resources to make certain elements in the image stand out. In the blog images, these applied resources include

focus, foreground-background, color, tonal contrast, and placement in the visual field.

4.3.2. Textual meaning level: Periodicity

Textual resources create a particular periodicity or flow of information. The center-periphery structure used in many of the blog images creates a textual meaning about the centered participant that is realized by the analytical process, cf. the ideational meaning level. Thus, the elements that inhabit the Instagram discourse, like buildings, nature, animals, are also placed center stage in the image. These centrally placed elements are further accentuated by salience markers such a tonal contrast and brighter color.

The top-bottom structure, on the other hand, is often used to bring out details of the photographed subject, e.g. leaves on threes or light and clouds in the sky. Again, this supports an aesthetics of the 'beauty' in things and the outside world that is depleted of people that the viewer simply looks at, but does not engage.

5. Visual discourse analysis of Instagram's corporate blog part 2: The function of images
5.1. Discourse as recontextualization of the social practice of making pictures

I will now turn to how the discursive meanings described in the above sections are used on the blog. To do so, I will describe the relation between discourse and social practices. The blog represents multimodally, in writing and images, the social practice of making mobile pictures. At the same time, blogging is a social practice within corporate communication that is enacted by the Instagram corporation on their official website. Drawing on multimodal social semiotics, the blog can be defined as a genre (van Leeuwen, 2005). As a genre, the blog recontextualizes the social practice(s) of mobile photography. It follows that the blog imports this practice from its own context into another context, that of the corporate blog, to represent it to the blog's audience and to use the represented practice of mobile photography to serve the purposes and interests of the Instagram corporation. Furthermore, the blog can draw on potential visual meanings made by users in their individual contexts.

Blogs are structured as a sequence of communicative actions, or speech acts (Martin 1992). In these sequences, images serve different communicative functions. Based on the selected data, I present three functions that I would argue can be identified: legitimation, purpose, and evaluation. This

line of argumentation is inspired by van Leeuwen's (2008: 104-5) concept of additive discourse transformations. However, I use the terminology slightly differently to describe the communicative and rhetorical use of images on the blog, rather than how discourse transforms the represented practice by adding elements to the images themselves.

In the following, I will elaborate on these functions in the context of corporate blogging. I will, however, not go further into the analysis of the blog genre, or how the sequence of actions is organized and the kinds of actions it contains. This is the subject of another article that focuses on the written text of the Instagram blog. Also, therefore I only describe additive transformations of the represented social practice, leaving out other kinds of transformations.

5.2. Communicative uses of the visual discourse

The 'corporate Instagram discourse' changes and transforms the represented practice under the process of recontextualization. These transformations relate to the blog's communicative functions, specifically the use of images relating to legitimation, purpose and evaluation.

5.2.1. Use of discourse I: Legitimization

By incorporating user images in their corporate blog, Instagram borrows some of the potential meanings created by users through their mobile photo practices. Instagram thereby incorporates meaning made by users into its corporate blogging practice. In doing so, the images become a way to legitimize the in-app photo tools presented on the blog. As users have already applied a tool to make 'beautiful' images, they function as ambassadors for the applied tool and 'demonstrate' that the feature is approved by incorporating it in their own photographic practices. This technique, in which Instagram exploits user "approval," is frequently used on their blog. An example could be the post "#Valencia" (13.10.2011), which shows images from users that have used this new filter, thus indirectly approving of it.

5.2.2. Use of discourse II: Purpose

Van Leeuwen (2005, 2008) argues that a common feature of discourse is to ascribe some purpose to the recontextualized practice. While in written discourse, this purpose may be expressed by adding a cause or an explanation in writing, e.g. "because …" or "in order to …", he does not offer examples on how such purposes can be represented visually. Yet I still find this kind of addition useful and relevant to the findings in this present analysis.

Purpose is not represented in the images themselves, but in the use of images. I would argue that the use of the same image, as in the case of "Instagram 3.2. -Improved Camera with a New Filter" (10.12.2012), serves as an example of visual purpose. The same image is shown in two versions: one without Tilt-shift (a blur tool), the other in which the tool is used. In this way the images illustrate a before and after state and therefore function as a visual explanation of a tool's effect. Another example is found in the post describing what the user must do to (re-)create a tintype photo (posted on 9.6.2012). The images illustrate the purpose in terms of what a tool can do and how a beautiful image can be created. The purpose of the tool is, in this way, visually documented or exemplified.

5.2.3. Use of discourse III: Evaluation

When an image is presented on the blog, it realizes an evaluation made by the Instagram corporation as a social actor. The images exemplify what the corporation values as beautiful (alternatively, 'stunning' and 'amazing'). The series of blog post entitled "How I Shot" could serve as visual examples of evaluation. These images make up a style, and that style manifests an aesthetics (Kress 2010) affiliated with specific social groups (Adami 2014; Poulsen forthcoming). On these grounds, the images shown on the blog are subject to a (positive) evaluation of Instagram. They are heralded as examples of what Instagram judges to be beautiful images. While supporting visual creativity, the blog also enforces visual norms in its endorsement and selection of images.

6. Conclusion

This article reports on a study of the discourse on Instagram's corporate blog between 2010 and 2017. Given that the blog makes special use of images, the study describes the visual resources for realizing discourse. By focusing on blog posts about (the use of) tools in the app's user interface, the study explores discourse construction and its use in the context of business communication. The study uses critical visual discourse analysis to produce its findings. The corporate blog of Instagram includes user images to create a discourse of a (super-) naturalistic, sensually depicted outside world. Furthermore, the blog facilitates an aesthetics of 'things' that are singled out and presented as beautiful, stunning and amazing in their mere appearance. At the same time, people are almost absent in the selected images. Thus there are no social activities depicted and no social engagement depicted. The visual resources enact a neutral, indirect, and disengaged point of view, whereby the blog's viewer is positioned as a passive observer

offered visual information, and who simply looks at the images presented. This study thus critiques the discourse for departing from Instagram's articulated company mission, a wish to enable sociality and the sharing of photos.

Instagram uses visually constructed discourse to attribute purpose, legitimation and evaluation to their social practice of corporate blogging. Firstly, the blog images illustrate what new and/or relaunched tools can do; in other words, they illustrate the tools' functional purpose. In this way the images become part of an explanation of tool usage. For instance, we are shown the same image in two different versions, before and after a tool's effect is applied. Furthermore, the images legitimize Instagram's new and/ or improved tools. The rational for this could be that the images 'document' the (beautiful) effects of the tools, while implying that the users who have already applied the tools in their mobile photo practices approve of them. It follows that the users and their images function as ambassadors for the app and the tools it provides. In other words, the tools have already been put to use by the Instagram community, and the Instagram corporation simply reports on the fact that the improved or designed tools enable users to make better images. Finally, the images facilitate an aesthetics of 'things'. When the images are embedded on the blog, Instagram endorses this aesthetics and indicates their approval of user-made images.

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FORMALISM AND DIGITAL RESEARCH OF LITERATURE

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Abstract

The relation between the humanities and information technologies has become so strong in recent decades that it is no longer possible to see this relationship as a mere temporary phenomenon. Together with massive digitalization of books, journals and other texts, collected into extensive electronic libraries and hypertextual databases, it is now necessary to rethink and redefine not only the concept of reading, but to specify new possibilities for analysing literary and specialized texts. The aim of this study is to point at new approaches to reading large text collections in the light of Moretti's method of distant reading. This paper uses the methodological issues of relation between distant reading and Russian formalism as background for this consideration.

Keywords: distant reading, humanities, Russian formalism

Distant reading

The idea of "world literature" as a set of shared cosmopolitan values has been known since the time of J. W. von Goethe. The proposed methodology of literary science transcends the horizon of a complete work of one author, period or genre, appearing in Russian formalism. The idea of *distant reading,* i.e. reading mediated by IT tools, that was introduced by Franco Moretti in the essay *Conjectures on World Literature* in 2000[2], refers to both of these perspectives.

Moretti's approach to the idea of "world literature", as was understood by Goethe in conversations with Eckerman (1827), and twenty years later by Marx and Engels in the *Communist Party Manifesto*[3] (1848), is critical. He describes it as a contemporary intellectual gesture limited by the area of Western Europe, more precisely, by "German philologists working on French literature" (Moretti 2000, 54), which does not mean that he turns away of this concept. "World literature" is the main area of his interest, but not as a label for a set of literary works but rather as a methodological problem. In order to define the term "world literature", we need to find such a research method that corresponds to the current state of the problem; a method that exceeds a simple but unviable notion that it is enough to read more.

In *Conjectures on World Literature*, Moretti does not openly avow the thoughts and procedures of Russian formalism. However, he is so strongly inspired by formalism that for his theory of distant reading that he employed the title "new formalism without close reading" (Arac 2002, 38). Moretti then describes his method as "a little pact with the devil: we know how to read texts, now let's learn how *not to read* them. Distant reading, where distance is a *condition of knowledge*, it allows us to focus on units that are much smaller or much larger than the text: literary formation, themes, tropes – or genres and systems. And if, between the very small and the very large, the text itself disappears, well, it is one of those cases when one can

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[2] Essay was originally published in the magazine *New Left Review* No. 1/2000 and was later included by Moretti to the book *Distant Reading*, Verso 2013.

[3] With reference to a text: "In place of the old local and national seclusion and self-sufficiency, we have intercourse in every direction, universal interdependence of nations. And as in material, so also in intellectual production. The intellectual creations of individual nations become common property. National one-sidedness and narrow-mindedness become more and more impossible, and from the numerous national and local literatures, there arises a world literature." (Marx – Engels 1977, 151 – 152).

justifiably say, that less is more. If we want to understand the system in its entirety, we must accept losing something." (Moretti 2000, 57).

The enthusiasm for a new methodological approach is indisputable, as is the latent inspiration for formalism that can teach literary history the regularities of a literary field, as written in the study *The Slaughterhouse of Literature* (*The Slaughterhouse of Literature* 2000). In this study, published in the same year as *Conjectures on World Literature*, he adds: "Form is a repeatable element of literature – what returns fundamentally unchanged over many cases and many years" (Moretti 2013, 86). In this period, Moretti speaks very broadly about formalism and openly admits the inspiration by Viktor Shklovsky and his *Theory of Prose* (1929) five years later in his book *Graphs, Maps, Trees – Abstract Models for Literary History* (*Graphs, Maps, Trees – Abstract Models for Literary History* 2005). The work belongs to the founder's work in the field of literary science on textual analysis using IT tools, whereby Moretti represents three models of quantitative analysis. Using *graphs,* he analyses the history of changes in the complexity of the novel genre; through *maps*, he illustrates geographical changes in aspects of English "rural" prose; and genealogical *trees* enable him to analyse various mutations in the detective genre. A trinity of quantitative analyses represent three approaches to what was described by Eichenbaum as a goal of formal method in the text devoted to work of the Petrograd *Society for the Study of Poetic Language (Opoyaz)*, called *The Theory of the Formal Method* earlier in 1925: "We do not incorporate into our work issues involving biography or the psychology of creativity, assuming that those problems, very serious and complex on their own, ought to have their place in other disciplines. We are concerned with finding in evolution the features of immanent historical laws – that is why we ignore all that seemed, from this point of view, *circumstantial*, not concerned with literary history. We are interested in the very process of evolution, in the very dynamics of literary form, insofar as it is possible to observe them in the facts of the past. For us, the central problem of the history of literature is the problem of evolution outside individual personality – the study of literature as a self-formed social phenomenon" (Eichenbaum 1971, 50).

Besides historical patterns of the form, stressed by Moretti in both texts in 2000, we cannot even define a biographic author mentioned by Eichenbaum in his approach. Formalism thus reacts to an approach that reduced literary history to the psychological interpretation of works of "great authors". This movement did not perceive the literary work and its value framework as an isolated product; however, they perceived it on the background of other works and in connection with them. From the point

of view of literary form development, the most important aspect is the impact of work on work, which was the reason the formalists broadened the sphere of research from "high literature" to the popular and folk literature that played a significant role in the creation and development of literary genres and forms. This quantitative expansion of literary research field forms the basis not only for formalistic research but also the procedures in the field of textual analysis that are based on information technologies.

Moretti extended this deflection to a whole set of authors whose works are in a close dialogue with literary history: "Trouble with close reading in all of its incarnations (from the new criticism to deconstruction) depends on extremely limited criteria... we invest so much in individual texts only because we think that very few of them really matter."(Moretti 2000, 57). Moretti's version of "formalism without close reading" is primarily about creating abstract models for the development of literary forms on the ground of specialized text corpora, therefore shifting the attention from privileged authors and works to the level of individual changes in the whole genre.

False clues

An example of such an exploration is the use of indicia in relation to the development of English detective fiction from the time of their first occurrence, that is, from the end of the nineteenth century. The topic is discussed in the last chapter of *Graphs, Maps, Trees*, which is an extended version of the study *The Slaughterhouse of Literature* and, at the same time, best illustrates Moretti's relationship to Russian formalism. While in *Slaughterhouse* he does not acknowledge his inspiration by Shklovsky, in the study *Trees* he directly refers to him. In the *Theory of Prose*, specifically in his essay *Mystery novella*, Shklovsky analyses (along with other works) Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes stories from the perspective of genre construction, form and time sequence of syuzhet. At first, there is nothing extraordinary, though he is attracted by a special way Doyle works with clues: "Secondary data are the most important, integrated in a way, a reader will not notice them" (Shklovsky 1971, 142). From a schematic point of view, these are common short stories with a secret: "this scheme was not created by Conan Doyle, but he did not even steal it. It results from the subject matter" (Shklovsky 1971, 143). Speaking about clues (Shklovsky calls them "hints"), he writes: "Everyone intent on engaging in the creation of Russian plot-based literature should pay close attention to Conan Doyle's use of clues and the way the denouement emerges out of them"(Shklovsky 1971, 143).

In creating the genealogical tree of detective genre development, out-lined in Moretti's *Trees*, it is clear that the functional use of clues (present, visible, decidable, etc.) appearing in Conan Doyle's and some of his con-temporaries' work is gradually becoming the main developmental branch of detective genre fiction. The outcome of these investigations is that only works of that period that contain the right variants of clues – and Moret-ti proves that it is a really small percentage–are brought into the literary awareness of the present time. In the case of Doyle, Moretti suggests one possible hypothesis as to the success of Sherlock Holmes stories could be based on the fact that they had been posted in the prestigious *Strand Mag-azine*: "But why should form be the decisive reason for survival? Why not social privilege instead – the fact that Doyle was writing for a well-estab-lished *Strand Magazine* and his rivals were not?... So, I went to the library, where I discovered that, in the course of the 1890s, over one hundred de-tective stories by twenty-five different authors had been published in the *Strand Magazine* alongside Sherlock Holmes. Since so many authors had access to the same venue as Doyle, the social privilege objection lost its force." (Moretti 2005, 74).

In this case, Moretti proceeded with data examination in the manner of Vladimir J. Propp in his pioneering work *Morphology of the Folktale* (1928), wherein he studied one particular variant of a tale based on one file, and without the use of IT tools. This enabled him to identify thirty-one functions that make up the basic building blocks of every "magic folktale" (Propp, 1971, s. 35-72), or a fairy tale which contains a magical object (for example "self-setting tablecloths"). Propp worked with a precisely defined corpus of texts, with the "material" that contained folktales listed in the index of Aarne – Thompson, a folklorist and a collector of folk literature, marked by numbers 300 – 749. Propp then subsequently narrowed down this collection, analysing 175 total texts. Obviously, Propp had read all of these texts and extracted the individual variants of the whole collection himself. At first, Moretti carried out his research on much larger set of texts using digital tools, but the results' verification principle remained the same as in Propp's case.

Quantitative results reveal much more about the development of form, but by reading all the short stories of one particular collection of texts Moretti also revealed something more important than just confirming Conan Doyle's *status quo*. "Secondary" and forgotten detective stories, that no one paid attention to, create two new branches of the genealogical tree of detective fiction with regards to plot and storyline construction. The en-thusiasm for this discovery was so great that Moretti summarized this ex-

perience in words: "The more one looked in the archive, in other words, the more complex and "Darwinian" became the genre's morphospace."(Moretti 2005, 74). This language is not coincidental. In the preface to the second edition of *Modern European Literature: A Geographical Sketch* (Modern European Literature: A Geographical Sketch) included at the beginning of the book *Distant Reading* (Distant Reading 2013), Moretti admits that one of his most powerful inspirations was the evolutionary theory of the origin of species by Ernst Mayr which he wanted to apply to the evolution of morphological (genre) transformations of literary field (see Moretti 2013, 1 – 3). Similar to Propp, Shklovsky and other formalists, also in Moretti's "quantitative formalism", in the pamphlet of *Stanford Literary Lab* he called morphological (genre) category a presumption of quantification analysis. This makes it a necessary aspect of distant reading: at the beginning of the research, it is used to set up a typological "spectrum of variations" (Mayr), and at the end, it is used to set up the genealogy of morphospace with all its developmental branches.

Another necessary aspect of distant reading is *a distance* that makes it possible to "read" quantitative data from the point of view of form: "we must step back from quantitative field and look for solution in a completely different one, and it is a field of form (morphology)" (Moretti 2005, 24). Distance from data is what enables their "reading", or interpretation. This aspect is also observed by Sean McCann in the article *A Few Quibbles about Moretti's Graphs, Maps, Trees* (A Few Quibbles about Moretti's Graphs, Maps, Trees 2011): "It is wonderful to see the graphs and to get a sense of the vast range of material that still needs to be discovered and understood ...but as Moretti notes, all this is just data until hypotheses are generated (produced, by the way, via "interpretation") (McCann 2011, 109).

After clarifying Moretti's formalistic resources, we are getting back to the distant reading, metaphorical description of quantitative formalism that Moretti on mentioned in *Graphs, Maps, Trees* once. He describes it very briefly as a reading that does not put emphasis on details but on the distance as a specific form of knowledge that "reveals broader interconnections. Shapes, relations, structures. Forms. Models" (Moretti 2005, 1). In the final texts, he even introduces a distinction between "explanation"–that falls more within cognizance of quantitative formalism–and the interpretation of a text, as if he was already aware of the risk in working with a great deal of material, and that the hypothesis is likely to prove true (concerning the size of the text archive). In other words, the outcome of quantitative formalism, for which the morphological category is a presumption of analysis, is that which had been expected at the beginning. Moretti's study of

clue occurrence in detective genre was also based upon the same assumption. He explicitly focused on clues as found in Doyle's work, as he considered them a dominant evolutionary shift within the genre. He focused beforehand on the apologetics of the Western European Detective canon in order to create a model for the whole genre tree. Such a procedure resulted in tautology, and tautologies seem true in every possible interpretation.

Conclusion

It has been thirteen years since the first publication of *Conjectures on World Literature* (2000) until its re-publishing in the collection of all Moretti's texts devoted to *Distant Reading* (2013). The range of digital archives has grown enormously during that time, eliminating the old barrier to literary research represented by the unavailability of texts. However, new barriers have emerged, such as the impossibility of identifying a great deal of forgotten, secondary texts, so called *The Great Unread*,[4] problems that have also occurred in other areas of textual analysis. Nevertheless, the use of IT tools has its future in literary and broader humanities research. The oft-mentioned crisis of the human sciences is also caused by their procrastination, and is accompanied by a sort of a priori mistrust towards new technologies. In defence of our approach, it can be said that if humanities are losing their attractions at present, they should not hesitate to seek new approaches to find meaning and use.

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[4] A term *The Great Unread* was introduced to literary science by a narratologist Margaret Cohen (see Cohen 2009).

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ENCHANTED OBJECT: INDIAN SARI, NEGOTIATING THE ONLINE AND THE OFFLINE SPACE

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Abstract

This paper is an attempt to understand the intersections between the internet, global cultures and technology, and the material object, the Indian sari. The Indian Sari, like other ethnic clothing, has always acted as a means of affirming position and agency for Indian women. Even today it is a significant part of the communicative grammar for its offline avatar. But its online presence makes this garment even more discursive. Typically online communities, in linguistic terms, are 'cultural communities' (paradigmatic) where knowledge is shared to deepen expertise, and offline communities are 'communities of practice' (s yntagmatic) where people share concerns, passions, and problems to deepen interaction. But as Umberto Eco says, more and more paradigmatic communities are becoming syntagmatic, and the Indian Sari is in an interesting intersection of offline and online contexts as the wearer, the garment, and the transactions all create discursive spaces

that implicate the global and local in identity formations. It also forces us to relocate the Sari as a signifier and reexamine its materiality in relation to its floating presence.

Keywords: Global cultures, technology, material object, online space, online communities

1. Paradigm of Online Cultures

The intersection of global cultures, technologies and markets has created new paradigms of consumption in the digital world. The Internet and other digital technologies comprise a complementary set of communication with a three-prone objective: inform, recall, & persuade (Nyeck, 2004), characterized by an original interactivity since the user is interacting with the media and with the product through the media. Digital technologies have offered a new distribution network to companies, through so-called e-commerce. A very basic characteristic of the digital world is that it has neither physical nor technological boundaries (Okonkwo, 2009); this means access to a limitless space. And with the emergence of social media, consumers become empowered and gather themselves in eco communities, still without any geographical or cultural boundaries (P. R. Berthon, Pitt, Plangger, & Shapiro, 2012) when successful digital strategies set long-lasting relationships with consumers, via the creation of global and cross-cultural brand communities, with easier, more accurate identification of their desires and needs (Chen, 2001)

Most online communities are created between people who have something in common. They usually do not know each other, but are aware of being part of the community. As Anthony Cohen (1985) would describe it, such communities are 'entities of meaning', founded on a shared conglomeration of normative codes and values that provide community members with a sense of identity. The structuralist terminology of 'paradigmatic' and 'syntagmatic' applied here to the two types of community further clarifies the two as 'cultural communities' (paradigmatic) and 'communities of practice' (syntagmatic)[1]. Online communities are typically cultural communities, where members share expertise of some kind. In communities of practice, members share concerns, passions, and problems and deepen their knowledge by interacting on an ongoing basis. But a lot of paradigmatic communities are becoming syntagmatic communities as they

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[1] The application of the two structuralist terms has been referred from Tardini, S and Cantoni, L. 2005

become more and more interactive. Umberto Eco (1983) would call these interactive objects co-constructed by their publishers (writer, designers, engineers etc.) and their users. The former develop a sort of language – with basic elements (nodes/lexias, or sub-node items) and link rules, while the latter choose which paths to activate.

1.1 Digital as a Space

Calling the digital a space and recognizing its communicative and social power has also led to investigations about the nature of manifesting and traversing this space by both individuals and social groups. Humanistic geographers have called 'Space' a wide open and continuous area of action that individuals understand by experiencing movement, while place, they say, is a discrete space devoted to the ideas of staying, resting, engagement aspects, that relate to 'value' and a sense of belonging' what Yi-Fu-Tuan called 'topophilia (Tuan 1974: 4).

What then is the nature of dwelling in the digital? The digital is a complex, fluid and pervasive space as Maggi[2] conceptualizes and is not bodily based but has a strong cognitive connotation. To understand the nature of dwelling in this space, Maggi (2014: 90) turns to Bullnow's (1963) theory of Space that is anthropological and not physical or mathematical. Bullnow calls it the 'Hodological Space' a space of movement. The familiar, the units that are part of our cultural knowledge, are 'Safe' in a hodological sense, Maggi says. The act of moving through space is therefore a continuous act of reinterpreting as safe or as hostile what surrounds us. Streets become networks, a safe way to move into the world. What lies beyond the street is experienced from the 'safe street'. The digital experience, according to Maggi, is compared to the motorists' experience on the safe street. Hence exploration of the digital moves first along the safe trails already set by others, trails that become conventional over time. These conventional schemes are semiotically part of a larger cultural organism. 'We learn to move within the digital by observing the behaviors of the social groups we get in touch with, and by following their movement schemes they are used to.' (Maggi 2014: 90)

The digital world is seen as an ecosystem that includes, for example, the websites and apps that manifest the digital place, not any single one of them, nor their sum. It also includes the human interaction and the narration that spans all these channels. This first person experience is identification with the digital self and makes us actants[3] of a story articulated through

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[2] Maggi in Resmini, A (ed), (2014, P.90), Reframing Information Architecture
[3] The concept of 'actants' is inspired by Vladimir Propp's (the Russian Formalist) and sub-

the digital channels. This narrative attribute of the digital space means that the space is a textual manifestation of narrations. It confers us with roles and the grammar for those practices of interaction we will be a part of. The forces of the digital space have consequences for the way people move and interact within them. This is an algorithmically controlled environment encouraging people to perform actions in a pre-coded system. Umberto Eco (1979) proposed a theory of textual cooperation that, when applied to a digital space, helps to understand the movement within a digital space as purely interpretative rather than a bodily movement. Umberto Eco says the textual strategy implicit in the digital space requires a model reader who must fulfill the requirements to actualize the text's potential content; the reader interprets the content on the basis of what it allows the reader to do. So, how then do spaces such as Facebook and Twitter construct the identity of their users and their social interactions?

Maggi proposes three formal traits that Facebook and Twitter have in common:

They both allow individuals to go beyond their 'real' social networks of family, friends, relatives, and colleagues, and to touch unreachable groups.

Built into both are two dimensions to express their identities. The Synchronic dimension that constitutes a fixed identity of the self which forms the core information–a name, a short bio, a picture etc., and the diachronic dimension that includes all the content posted over time and eventually becomes a log of the person's evolution on the site.

The identities constructed by these two dimensions happen in three ways according to Maggi: a) 'Self telling', or ways and mechanisms for telling one's story for personal and public benefit; b) 'Pervasiveness', or ways and means to link one's real identity to the one represented in the digital world; and c) 'Intersubjectivity', or ways and means to represent and expose the relationships between individual and others.

The task of representing the self on Facebook, Maggi says, essentially relates to the 'exhibitionist narrative program', or the posting of biographic information, content, and performing actions such as shares or likes. Our identities are clearly linked to stereotypical knowledge that Facebook

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sequently A.J.Greimas's theory of 'actants'. Propp began by linking spheres of actions to characters offering an important insight into the dramatic text and to look for patterns in folklore – also referred to the 'deep structure'. Greimas went further to assign 'roles' to characters and once a character assumes a role; he becomes an 'actant'. For further reading, see Propp's 'Morphology of the Folktale' (1928) and Greimas, 'Structural Semantics' (1966). The concept of 'actants' here essentially aims to highlight the digital text and the interactions within its coded system. The reader in this case is guided by the codes and accomplishes his/her role as an actant through participation and interpretation.

already possesses – so we identify with traits such as movies we like, places we visit, etc. We declare some indicators about ourselves, and comply with some pre-existing elements that we are forced to choose, like the relationship indicator. So in narrative terms, finding an adequate element in the Facebook list ensures that we attain a sanction, and if we do not, then we find ourselves in violation of the 'normality' of Facebook.

'To be on Facebook means to flatten our personality to the stereotypical person template available on the platform: whoever is not willing to do this will not fully get in tune with the place and its genus loci' (Maggi 2014: 91)

Maggi confirms this when he says that at the discursive level the synchronic profile information is shown through a static layout pre-designed for us.

1.2 Objects on the Internet

Digital spaces have most certainly compelled us to think about a 'narrative of objects'. Alexis Lloyd (2013 puts it succinctly in this post:

> As more of our objects and environments become actuated, connected, and data-enabled, these enchanted objects are developing the capacity to contain their own stories. An object can remember its history, can understand how it is used, can talk to other objects around it to understand its environment. As these capabilities evolve, objects no longer become inert backdrops to our experiences, but active participants in our world that can share stories about themselves and us.

Alexis goes on to elaborate on the narrative potential in this framework that is borrowed from David Rose's (2011) term 'enchanted objects':

> 'The first is the construct of objects as portals -- objects that can be used as totems or touchstones to draw you into a story, to transport you to another time or place through the locus of that object. We currently infer the history of our things in broad and abstract ways, through the quality of scratches and wear, through the patina of age, through markers and labels and signs of personal possession. But what if that history became more literally inscribed, either recorded by the object itself or written to the object by an author?'

Does the internet as a space privilege the object to the extent that the Indian Sari thrives as many other objects, ridiculous, mundane (like a toaster) and profound, become the frontiers of web-based technologies?

Is it a case of overreach or a demonstration of the fact that the 'internet of things' is the next big thing in human lives? As Doug Thomson (2013) says,

> And much like Facebook has become, for many, a kind of ambient social backdrop in their life, the happiness of your toaster or the temperature of your living room will be a kind of mesh that underpins our feeds and pokes, a humming kind of ambient noise that auto tunes itself based on mood or location.

What does it mean for those narratives to exist? Who gets to author those stories? Who wants to listen to them and in what contexts? Do objects become storytellers themselves or do they require human authorship and interpretation? What do these questions foretell for the Indian Sari, both offline and online? That the Sari as a mode of negotiating physical and cultural inter-subjective spaces and relationships is indeed a compelling argument. But with the sari shifting its inhabitation between the physical and the digital, it is even more compelling to see the impact of the digital as a space on women as actants in the digital narratives that surround the sari. Does the sari retain any of its material power, or does it get embroiled and tangled in the identity of the digital self? What do we experience of the sari in its online avatar?

2. Anthropology of the Sari in the offline world

The manner in which it is draped, parts of it used to express identities, cultural rules, and emotions, has made the Sari a significant aspect of being Indian. The cut fabric or the sari is the symbol of totality and integrity; it symbolizes the whole of manifestation. But the sari begs an anthropological understanding particularly because it is a 'living costume': it is witness to several costume changes and influences, and yet is carried forward by millions of women who have an intensely private relationship with the sari amidst changing times, changing aesthetics, and changing buying and selling formats. These are certainly big issues to contend with, and also a significant cultural juncture in India. There exists, however, a fundamental relationship with the sari that has acquired cultural overtones over a long period of time. The Sari takes the role of mediating the relationship between a person's sense of self and the outside world. Banerjee and Miller call it the 'fellow actor'[4] whose presence must always be remembered.

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[4] ibid

2.1 'Elevated Sari'

But, 'the Sari forces a continued engagement, a conversation between the wearer and the garment.'[5] These conversations, so aptly described, include a 'subtle alternation between actions that become almost unconscious or automatic and others that are highly self-conscious'. The effect of the sari it has been well documented, and experienced, is to give a heightened sense of themselves, and that makes them believe that the sari makes the body more beautiful and womanly. In a detailed anthropological account of this relationship, Banerjee and Miller have given several accounts of the degree of intimacy between the two. They recount a very dominant metaphor of 'feeding the Sari', to prolong its life through proper starching, that is traditionally made from water used for boiling rice. A villager is quoted to have said that the sari has to be fed in order for it to have 'blood in its body', just like us human beings. And hence the life of the sari is comparable to the bodily needs and strength of the woman, who withers with age and wear and tear.

The Sari accommodates demands of rationality and modernity with ease as Banjerjee and Miller talk about the defense of the Sari by women, for its practicality for manual work, as well as its role in managing the complex contradictions in the world of Hindu religion. The pallu of the sari protects from the sun and from the male gaze, and the Sari as a cloth is in constant motion akin to the female body. The aspiration towards higher dignity, maturity and a sense of indian-ness is what makes the Sari 'elevated' according to this account. Wearers of the Sari aspire to reach this position that they feel can be achieved only through the Sari.

2.2 Grammar of the Sari: Syntagmatic relationship of the parts with the whole

The Sari is characterized by the display of the three main parts – the borders, the space-in-between that constitutes the length of the sari, and the end-portion, or the Pallu. For centuries, the aesthetics of the Sari has been expressed in these three spaces and the Pallu has always been the final reckoning that Indian women use in a variety of ways as a means of connecting with the world around them[6]. The Sari has always been bought for the beauty of its Pallu, and weavers and artists across the country painstakingly labor on this part, giving the sari its distinct identity.

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[5] Banerjee and Miller, 2004
[6] Chui, D, 2011

The anthropological significance of the parts of the Sari have been well captured in research on Indian cinema (Dwyer and Patel 2002,)[7]. These works have shown how the personalities of the actresses have been articulated by the manner in which they either 'control' the sari, or let the sari become their shield from the outside world. The veiling and the unveiling of the Sari as a metaphor has been beautifully captured across cinema; notable among these is the Bengali film maker Aparna Sen who has shown transitions in a woman's life, from being a devoted wife, to taking a lover outside her marriage. In both cases, the way she drapes her Pallu (first veiled behind the Pallu, and later unveiling it to convey intimacy with another man), is the central signifier and demonstrates that there is no need for words to express herself[8].The notion of power and control associated with the Sari are like subtexts; idioms of self-worth and self-confidence in their relationship to the body. Indian women feel empowered in the act of controlling and rearranging their Pallu. This is particularly interesting in a modern context, when women use Sari as a mode of power in professional spheres. The Sari becomes a very strong tool in the communicative grammar of the woman's persona. She can actually take time to think, reword, and mull over what she has to say, while adjusting her Pallu, that can prove to be distracting to the observer, thus serving as a respite and interjection in a situation that she might have lost control over otherwise. Men, on the other hand, do find the Sari's Pallu very distracting – whether it stays, adjusted, or is falling off the woman's shoulders, because eventually it gives away a lot about who the woman is – confident, strong, self-assured, or meek, under confident, or even sexually open and comfortable about her body. Unlike most Western clothing, the sari, and in particular the Pallu, constantly moves and corresponds to various situations a woman may find herself in (Miller 2004). To hold the end of the Pallu particularly tight signifies anger, and to use it as cover hides an embarrassed face, making it a valuable non-verbal form of communication. A woman may have to cover her head after marriage as a sign of modesty, but she can equally use this to her advantage so that those around her are completely unaware of the feelings that lie behind the veiling. However, the pallu can also unintentionally portray a woman in a certain way, especially in an erotic light through its accentuation of facial features such as the lips or eyes (Miller 2004). In this sense, the pallu is an ambiguous object which is only at times completely in the control of women. By veiling one's face, a woman is able to hide her

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[7] The descriptions below have been extracted from Dwyer and Patel's work on the visual culture on Indian Cinema

[8] ibid

emotions, but she is equally able to make them apparent to all those around her without uttering a word.

Interestingly, the culture of wearing saris also creates 'syntagmatic communities' as they are a network of relationships, hierarchies and part of the grammar of getting it right. The interactions over the Sari that take place offline create social relations and could be seen as 'syntagmatic communities. The online interactions are paradigmatic in the sense that these communities share something 'similar', in terms of interest etc. But these online paradigmatic communities are turning syntagmatic over time, as interactions between the members are creating networks and combinations of different elements during the process.

3. Sari in the Digital Space

The digital version of the Indian sari opens up an array of narrative perspectives, and embeds its collaborators as actants of a story articulated through pervasive information architecture across different channels. The digital space is creating new cultures of fashioning the Indian Sari in everyday life. It is undoubtedly a whole new imagination that is creating a 'new wearer' of the Indian sari, but is at the same time interacting with and reproducing the old, traditional wearer.

Digital space is not cohesive or closed; as Deleuze and Guattari (1988) suggest, it is a 'Spatial Striature', suggesting pathways to cross it and escape from it, encouraging individuals to let themselves be seduced by the possibilities of these actions. Unlike analogue spaces, digital spaces constitute the possibility of being acted upon and thus imply a strong human presence. The digital space for the sari is a textual manifestation of a narration. Conversations, expressions and descriptions characterize the online narratives of the sari. The tactile experience of the sari is carried forward through the verbal power unleashed on the user. The discourse is powerful enough to lure even the unsure, the uninitiated into its hypnotic dialogues. The internet is a predominantly expressive space, and everyone who is there feels compelled to articulate and address an audience that is largely unknown and unexplored. This is a paradigm that digresses from the known, the obligatory, and the traditional expectations for a sari in everyday life. The subtle semantics of the traditional sari and the articulations that go with it are altered on the internet, creating communities of wearers who are constantly sharing and conversing with one another, prodding, encouraging, and talking design, colors, textures and shapes. The object draws them into stories; the sari transports women beyond their physical realm and their immediate relationships. Women evolve their

personas through these online expressions. The digital space allows the women to narrate for themselves and for the public, and they gleefully play between their real identities and their digital selves. They become willing 'exhibitionists' as the digital space seduces them and exposes the narratives.
Storytelling and Imagination of the Online Sari

The online presence of the sari is a 'photographed' ideal. When you see it out there, you can relate to it through the flash-light, settings: the idealized image. It takes a leap of the mind to imaginatively drape it around oneself. So the sari is a source of myths online, it is all about the power of our imaginations and our ability to project our self-images. For example below is the extent to which women can transcend the material discomfort in order to project an easy inhabitation of the sari:

> "I grew up in a middleclass household where women had a catchphrase for what they wore at home. Mothers and aunts would call it 'ghawrey-pawra sari'. In an unhappy translation, it would mean the sari meant to be worn inside the house; in other words, a sari soft and comfortable enough to accompany a woman's housekeeping movements. This was in contradistinction to the stiffness of the sari worn outside, one that did not lend itself to easy movements. In a Byloom sari such as this one, I find that the distinction has evaporated: it is possible to live in this cotton sari.[9]

Another example of mythical imagination that can take it to heights of poetic essence is this woman who compares the sari to the myth of Scheherazade, and weaving the complexity of the colours and lines into a climax:

> "This is my favorite shade of blue, which, for want of a name, I call 'condensed blue'. While I could spend an afternoon talking about my love for this color, the truth is that its beauty could only be revealed in a fabric and texture as beautiful as this one. It's one that does not leave you at visual pleasure alone. I chose this sari from a photograph I caught in a newspaper. All the news in the day's paper was forgotten. [10]

> This is Scheherazade's sari, I tell my niece: a story is waiting to be told. The colors seem to be engaged in a random conversation. In school, our art teacher once gave us a lesson on colors – how they were different and related at the same time. In this sari I see

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[9] Quoted from https://www.facebook.com/byloomonline/?fref=ts
[10] Ibid

the colors broken into lines and then, like the circular disc in the Physics lab which, when turned rapidly, brought all the colors into the climax of white, this sari dissolves and remains indifferent to mixing at the same time.[11]"

It is almost like a poetic license unleashed on the fabric of the whole six yards of unstitched material. The written word takes over what was once discussed between women orally, and the written word 'insists', further entrenching the mythical realm of the Sari into the life and hearts of the women. And that is the enormous success of the 'Online Sari'.

"My friends have a word for this sari: 'Nilambari'. However it is not only the blueness of the sky that I find in it. I find this sari mysterious: I've never felt – and perhaps looked – the same on the various occasions I've worn it. I grew up in Himalayan Bengal, and when I look at this photograph, taken by a young girl whose hamlet I'd gone to visit, I find it almost emerging, as it were, from our blue mountains. That is a reminder to me, again, of how organic the relation between what we wear and what we live is."

The whole tactile and sensorial appeal of traditional sari buying is replaced with struggles in one's mind about possibilities and hopes, and in the ways the mannequin or mannequin-like bodies that wear the sari entice the viewer. The shapes of these bodies can be enticing and distracting, making it an out of the body experience. But nobody complains, and ultimately the mannequin wins the attention. What is even more interesting is that women are becoming blasé and very confident about their bodies when they send their picture for posting to the designer on their sites. It is an interesting way to overcome the 'mannequin block' and show up for what you are, how you look and for one's own body. But the sub-text is clear, 'show and flaunt', don't get left behind.

3.1 Narratives of Arbitrations: Online avatars

Expressions in the online space are mediated through 'avatars'[12]. In the digital context an avatar could be the representative of an individual user within a virtual space. According to Meadows, avatars are created according to the interaction between space and user, and may represent different world perspectives much as people themselves do (Meadows 2008: 13).

'Avatars may come in different sizes and shapes; they could simply be profile images used in a social media platform or advanced animated

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[11] From https://www.facebook.com/byloomonline/?fref=ts
[12] The term avatar is originated from a religious context of Hinduism, and the Sanskrit origin of the word defines the worldly apparitions of divine beings (Partridge, 2005, p.148).

character models inside a video game. The avatar is a sub-medium of online communications and expressions.' (Sengun, S: 150)

In the context of the Sari, the women who buy and the women who arbitrate are avatars, constructing an image of themselves much beyond who they are. The internet makes the buyer vulnerable and exposed to eyes that see her, evaluate her, and create expectations of their self-image too. She is the center of a different kind of a 'gaze' that is materialistic and commercial, as well as objective and critical. The designer, who creates these saris and presents them online, is also at the center of the entire gaze and is the mediator who ensures a parity and acceptance which makes every woman feel good about her image.

The avatar can become a more intimate construct of self than the physical self itself. Lacan observes that "other is the one who sees me" (Lacan 1992: 19) and through this gaze one feels the desire which cannot be fully realized in the physical. However in the virtual the user has the ability to create infinite linguistic representation of his or her self and fulfill each desire by phasing into the avatar and matching the gaze'

The Sari's designer is deeply conscious of the gaze on her and must become the avatar of the arbitrator, who does not allow for any unfortunate exchange between her viewers and buyers and creates an ambience of 'win-win' for all. Both merge into their 'avatars' to match their 'self-gaze' and the 'gaze' of the others, in an interesting fusion of a spatial condition orchestrated in and through the digital space. Below is a reproduction of dialogue taken from Facebook, an exchange between the designer and her online friend.

> Na Lalidi. This was specifically made for someone. Planning to do a similar one in olive (instead of orange) and brown instead of ivory[13]...

Here the designer panders to the gaze of the viewer and her own self-gaze -

> Sohini- as I browse your Fb shop, I kept wondering who you are. Ur vision is so clear, Ur passion is so reflective, Ur creations r sooo unique, Ur values r so deep, Ur communication is so simple n Ur connectivity to one n all around you is so straight! I had to write this note to you n say 'you r Blessed' indeed by ur Lord Ganesha".....
> and with these lovely words Shiva Bhowmick becomes a part of

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[13] Quote from https://www.facebook.com/DorDesignsBySohini/?fref=ts

the DOR family.....Thanks so very much for the sweet message...u surely made my day..:))[14]

The Gaze also involves co-opting of family and friends..and thus grows and perpetuates online….

> Kshamani–we are so happy that you and your ma are now parts of our family :) love the fact that she wore her saris for her birthday, which means a lot to us. Huge hug to ma and you :)[15]

This in itself is a big boost to the women, who are essentially competitive and aspirational. The effect of images of other women who might look better and more attractive in these saris is mitigated by the designer ensuring the women that everyone looks lovely. Women have also expressed that they overcome their inhibitions after the initial mental blocks and go all out to flaunt their new saris and their new selves. It is a space for experimentation of not just new fabrics and textures, but also for who they are, and what they can look in new designs and new aesthetics.

> Udd is a happy textile brand, we at Udd encourage the Bohemian Spirit and get inspired by folk -tribal art, which is then transformed into beautiful art fabrics!! We encourage artists at heart whether they be from rural India or young urbans!![16]

> We are designing a SPECIAL UDD Lengha set for an even More SPECIAL UDD woman- for the most important day of her life- we are thrilled- honored- excited- nervous!!
> We worked on a special SHIV- PARVATI ON NANDI art work for her Lengha !![17]

They get views and comments that make them feel elated and liked, and help them to take the next step, and get bolder in their experiments with the sari, making this space utopian and free from the constraints of a typical offline space.

3.2 'Titled online Sari'

Traditional Indian Saris have always been known by their titles which correspond to their weave, the region, or the style of design and printing – Kalamkari, Kanjeevaram, Paithani, Tangail, Bomkai, Madurai Cotton

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[14] Ibid
[15] ibid
[16] ibid
[17] Quoted from https://www.facebook.com/Uddstories/?fref=ts

etc. Designers on Facebook have created identities for their saris in continuation with this tradition, but in a metaphorical realm. 'Dor', UDD, Anga Chhaya, ByLoom, Nextiles, Raw Mango[18]….these are some of the titles that create individual identities for the designers and are umbrella terms that subsume the designer's intent. The metaphorical titles allow for unrestricted experimentation and expression for the designer, and allow her to borrow aesthetics from traditional prints, weaves, designs, textures and weaves. 'Inter-textual' and ambiguous title semantics fosters curiosity, and allows for a flexible attachment to the designs. Some designers like to maintain their personal name as the identity of their creativity; these belong to a different class who do not like to be in a competitive zone like most others. They create designs as their personal ideology, their belief in fabrics, traditional weaves, textures, colors and designs. They are in no hurry to arouse curiosity and their presence is deliberate, slow and easy. They make no announcements of their forthcoming creations, nor do they call out to their potential customers, they are happy being admired and liked for what they create by a few. Their designs are a carry forward of the original designs, and are presented as time-tested traditions, unlike the others, who create new forms and new aesthetics, experimenting and creating excitement around their forthcoming designs.

Black self-patterned supernet jacquard with rich embroidered border with contrast jamevar pleats in green n gold with matching blouse fabric... with elegant green gold latkans hanging from the pallu ends...[19]

3.3 Digital Sari and democratic alliances

The image of the object in the digital is the final image, without the experiences of the fabric, the wearing of it, the stitching of the blouse, the accessories, or any other live feeling that is mandatory with the purchase of the offline Sari. The conversation that surrounds the stitching of the blouse with the tailor is one of the most significant aspects of the traditional Sari culture. Some of this is attempted on Facebook, when the designer discusses this with her buyers and gives her options of how the final product will look. Some designers attempt to seal the transaction by offering to get the blouses stitched for the clientele, and identity is fostered by creating specific kinds of cuts and designs for the blouses.

The client on the other hand has a different relationship with the local tailor, with whom she shares a much more direct dialogue and even engages in almost a duel over the design, the delivery date, and the cut,

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[18] Names of the online designer sari pages on Facebook
[19] Quoted from https://www.facebook.com/DorDesignsBySohini/?fref=ts

and expresses her displeasure if something goes wrong. The tailor, in this case usually male, shares a familiar relationship with his client, given that as an outsider 'male' he is allowed to measure and comment on her changing body aesthetics, a sanction that he acquires over many years of transactions. The tailor can also be dragged into revelations of the new designs, or competitive aesthetics of other women, and co-opted into cultures of rivalry and envy. He tends to give them a sneak preview, a sneak peek at other's fabrics and designs and thus becomes a co-conspirator in their desire to look the best.

Online, this conspiracy angle gets all mixed up in articulations of 'democratic alliances' between the designer and the client. The designer has to ensure that none of her clients are betrayed, sometimes even fails to reveal any special designs made on 'customized' orders. It is a distance and a hard attempt to maintain parity between all her existing and potential clients. Her image is much more at stake, as her business depends on it. Like local vendors who claim rights over their territory, the local tailor, too is not looking actively for new clients. He exists in an oasis that he has created over years and years of personal interactions. The relationship he shares with each of his clients cannot be replicated online, because there are rules and codes of behavior that disallow any discussions beyond professional boundaries. Also, the terms of endearment online are very universal and applied to everyone equally. The terms of address usedare very similar, and though some of these designers do try (admirably) to include personal statements in their conversations about the designs, it is after all an 'open arena' that is being witnessed by others at the same time. The designer has to play a balancing act between making personal and endearing conversations with some and ensuring that she doesn't sound aloof and distant with others. Unlike the local tailor, she also has little access to the person's life, or real persona, so it is all in her imagination and her creation of this person that she addresses and can only hope that the person really is as 'wonderful' and 'amazing' as she imagines her to be.

> Don't have any more of the fabric left. Besides this I am making another one with this same kalamkar[20]in pleats on brownish mustard jute silk with real hand painted kalamkari work on the pallu...that will be ready soon.[21]

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[20] Kalamkari or Qalamkari is a type of hand-painted or block-printed cotton textile, produced in parts of India and in Iran. The word is derived from the Persian words ghalam (pen) and kari (craftmanship), meaning drawing with a pen (Ghalamkar).

[21] https://www.facebook.com/DorDesignsBySohini/?fref=ts

She does not have the luxury of being the relaxed, like the local tailor who knows that he has loyal neighborhood clientele for reasons beyond his competence and tends to get complacent in the knowledge.

> Hello my lovely DOR peeps, a very bright n happy good morning to all of you. Just so you know, I will be away on vacation starting Thursday till the 22nd. During this time I will have limited access to the page, so if you have any queries, questions, concerns, do drop me a line and I will get back to you at the earliest...and once I am back in Mumbai, I will be back with yet another range of exclusive saris from DOR!!! So see y'all then...love n hugs... :)[22]

> See you all today evening. I will start Uploading around 7.30pm IST and will respond to all queries once the entire batch is uploaded. Please bear with me till then... :)) and all queries will be responded to on a first come first basis...there are 14 saris in the current batch... please do leave your email id as well. I am in the process of creating a DOR mailing list and plan to do catalogue from next batch for streamlining the entire process... :)) thanks once again and my apologies for not keeping my promise of uploading yesterday. See y'all then in a few hours...much love...[23]

3.4. 'Mirror Mirror': Self-Image in the online Sari

An aligning theme is the 'dramatis personae' that women like to portray. Most women are seen smiling, very happy in their attire, posing for admiration, or are shown as 'communities of women', together in their aesthetics, walking the streets like cult queens to stake a claim on the space. So the women display personas like – 'articulate art aficionados', 'history buffs', 'art collectors', 'conservationists', etc.:

> Grids appeal to me in a way that is difficult to explain. Whether it is in the paintings of Paul Klee and Pete Mondrian, the alpana patterns around the tulsimawncho or the game of dots and crosses, there is something about them. To quote my niece again, this is an 'Arithmetic notebook' sari. What marks this sari out for me is the surprise that comes in the red border. [24]

> I think one of the charms of a Byloom sari is that it is always quoting something or someone: a memory, a person, a period in

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[22] ibid
[23] ibid
[24] From https://www.facebook.com/byloomonline/?fref=ts

history, even a mood. As someone who likes negotiating with the past in various ways (the tanpura in the background belonged to my mother-in-law, and when I framed it into a table, I thought it was one way of ensuring that she was in the living room whenever we had guests visiting), this is something about Byloom's aesthetic that appeals a lot to me.[25]

Just as the sari is the most beautiful 'anti-fit' garment we know, so is the Byloom sari's way of playing with it. Nowhere is this more apparent than in this sari which has a remarkable elasticity that lends itself to a wonderful drape.[26]

Truth be told, this is the most comfortable sari I've worn in my life. And in the villages where I visit on work, a female jute cultivator once asked me, 'Can you wear this sari to sleep? It looks so soft'.[27]

As with other Byloom saris, I can wear it in classrooms and under the sky.[28]

Conclusion

The traditional, offline sari can be folded, molded, non-starched, un-ironed, and unkempt, yet it still remains a 'sari'. Does this serve to achieve a sense of mastery or comfort with the sari? It is said to vindicate the sari's iconic status and the potential difficulties of inhabiting the garment. With 'elevation' comes the potential for a fall. The sari is not a 'rational' garment in the same sense as the other popular 'salwar kameez'[29] has become over time in India[30]. The sari is far more flexible in its appearance and in its symbolism, and is far from the rational enterprise of modernity as Banerjee and Miller assert. It does not belong to the realm of science, efficiency, utility and output and is on the other side, where there is beauty, radiance and womanly glow. The two most popular garments in India straddle the platforms of the 'practical' and the 'symbolic'. In the midst of all this is the online sari that serves to create a dialogue of expectations, dreams,

[25] https://www.facebook.com/byloomonline/?fref=ts
[26] ibid
[27] ibid
[28] ibid
[29] Salwar Kameez is popular attire originating in the north of India and Pakistan. The *shalwar* are loose Pajama -like trousers. The legs are wide at the top, and narrow at the ankle. The *kameez* is a long shirt or tunic, often seen with a Western-style collar; however, for female apparel, the term is now loosely applied to collarless or mandarin styled collars.
[30] See Banerjee and Miller, 2004 for further discussion on the Salwar Kameez and the sari

aspirations and linkages. It has become a dialogue on the art of imagining, dreaming, wondering, and posing questions about the sari. In a strange way it seeks to remove the 'symbolic' from the essential sari and borrow imagery from the 'practical', in an attempt to make the sari more conversational. This online discourse seems to create the first few steps that the uninitiated, the curious, and the excited onlooker require to inhabit the sari in future. In a quirky manner it has replaced the maternal voices that surround the sari in Indian homes and is bringing in a soft, cajoling, convincing approval for all those women who dare to try it on. The online sari can be termed as a resounding success, its technological buffering notwithstanding, due to its 'narratives'.

The 'story' of the sari is being retold in multiple ways in the digital space, and it is this telling that is attracting the women to participate and 'retell' it further. But the essential sari remains where it is, steadfast, multi-functional, articulate in several spaces, and is still seen as the most coveted symbolic garment for a woman's beauty. It is the people around the sari who change, re-invent and celebrate the length and breadth of the same. The online space for the Sari plays a major role in reinventing the fundamental relationship of the object with the user. By making the Sari more accessible the online space breaks the constraints of physical space (be it of the house, the courtyard, the market or the tailor shop) and encourages an altered interaction with the object. The fluid typology of this online space, allowing users to connect different data sets to create instant representation, goes a long way toward de-mystifying the Sari and reinventing it as a cultural idea.

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PART III Digital Age in Corporate Communication

ENGAGING BRAND COMMUNICATION IN FACEBOOK – A TYPOLOGY OF THE BRAND PAGE USERS

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Abstract

Facebook offers great opportunities for brands to connect with customers and build relationships with them in order to increase their loyalty and the company's sales. In regards to these goals, one of the most important key performance indicators is the customers' activity – liking, commenting, sharing, recommending, expressing love, etc. On one hand, there is a lot of research on customers' engagement, behavior and motivation. These studies provide valuable information for marketers to understand the way in which individuals use the social network and interact with others as well as the reasons behind their actions. Based on this knowledge they can develop their communication strategies and create content which has impact on the target audience. On the other, there are still some research gaps which can be further explored. One of them is related to the impact of one of the most important company assets – the brand culture, on the custom-

er's behavior and willingness to become part of the digital brand story. This paper presents a Facebook brand page users typology, developed by using a semiotic approach, which is based on their brand culture adoption and brand narrative engagement.

Keywords: Facebook brand communication, brand culture, applied semiotics, digital communication

1. Introduction

The customers are the core of every marketing strategy – in digital media as well as in more traditional ones like television and radio. On the Internet, rich information is collected about every step of the user's online journey – websites visited, time spent on them, actions, interest, etc. Companies can buy or find every piece of the digital footprint of the target audience, and use it to craft their communication strategies and send highly targeted messages. But this is just one part of the knowledge they need to create iconic brands which build loyal relationships based on love with their customers. A quantitative survey of more than 10 000 marketers from 92 countries, conducted by Harvard Business Review, reveals that brands are distinguished by their ability to integrate data on what consumers are doing with knowledge of why they are doing it, granting new insights about consumers' needs and how to best meet them (Arons, 2014). Facebook provides detailed statistics about their customers' characteristics and actions. These numbers are really valuable, but marketers need to combine them with deep understanding of customers' behavior, the way meaning is conveyed, the way customers interpret the brand messages, the motivation behind their actions, etc. This way companies can create value for the target audience and build relationships with the prospects.

By clicking on the Like button, Facebook users become fans of the brand, and if the algorithm of the social network decides that the content published by the company is relevant it appears on customers' newsfeeds. The trend over the last couple of years is that Facebook limits the brand content, or the so called organic reach. Experts believe that only 2% of brand fans see its posts if they are not sponsored. One of the main reasons is that the number of brands on the social network is increasing, and as Facebook wants to show relevant content which will engage the users, its algorithm focuses on the personal publications. That is why organic (nonpaid) visibility is becoming one of the main challenges for companies. One possible solution is to promote posts. The other is to create content which

engages the customer and inspires interaction. The third one is to motivate the users to change their settings and choose to see every brand post – this is also related to building relationship with the target audience by creating meaningful content which leads to action.

The creation of engaging content, and building relationships with the target audience, are currently one of the main marketing challenges for companies. Although there is a lot of research related to this topic and their numbers is constantly increasing, there are still some gaps which are of importance for the development of successful corporate communication. One of them is the impact of a brand culture on the target audience's actions. This article aims to present a typology of the Facebook users of brand pages, based on their perception of the culture elements (values, rituals, hero, symbols) and their impact on customers' behavior. It will help marketers to segment the target audience, to create valuable and relevant content which drives customer behavior and which is valuable for the brand. Although it can be applied to other social media, our research focus is on Facebook since it is currently the most popular communication channel used by customers and companies. This study is related particularly to brand pages because that is the official place where a company can tell its mythological story, present its culture, and motivate users to become part of the brand story by developing it.

2. Facebook and brand communication

It has become a common truth that Facebook has changed the way individuals interact. The main goal of the social network is to connect people and give them a digital platform where they can communicate, exchange information, and most importantly develop their personal digital story and build their identities. The word "friend" has changed its meaning – on Facebook people connect not only with their strong ties (close friends and relatives) but also with their weak ties (acquaintances, even strangers with shared interests). This way they can create a large network of connections that can be extremely valuable for brands. Since 2009, posts from brands have begun to appear in the news feed. This way they become part of individuals' digital daily routine. By then the need to check the newsfeed on a daily basis had become a habit for individuals all over the world. Facebook states that people are interested in brands and use them to express themselves and build their identity. Mark Zuckerberg's team bases its decision on Marshall McLuhan's idea of a global villages connected with one universal communication platform (Kirkpatrick, 2011). In this way Facebook changes the relationship between a customer and a brand by offering on-

going two-way communication in real time – something that is impossible in traditional media as well as in some new media formats.

With this new opportunity the brand experts face a new challenge – how to create criteria for the success of the corporate communication on the social network. At the beginning marketers followed the same logic as in other new media channels – at that time advertisers payed for the number of impressions. According to this method, the number of fans becomes the main KPI (key performance indicator), as they are the potential receivers of brand messages. Marketing budgets are invested in increasing the number of brand page fans, and experts are trying to find a correlation between their number and the increase in sales. With time marketers came to understand that the quantitative factor cannot be the only indicator for success, and it is difficult to prove there is a direct link between an increase in fans and an increase in company sales. With time, communication experts changed their approach and started paying more attention to interactions with the fans and their feedback. They evaluate not only the immediate results such as the increase in sales but the long term benefits related to customers' behavior (building relationships, loyalty, etc.).

With the development of social media and improved tools for data analysis related to customers' behavior and pages' performance, communication is now focused on the engagement of the brand page's fans (Kleine-Kalmer 2016:12). More and more companies realize the opportunity to understand the customers' way of creating meaning and thus to build relationships with them, to exchange signs directly with the customers and thus influence their interpretation and brand perception which will lead to decision making. Currently fans' engagement rate and the number of people reached are the main KPIs for the success of brand pages on Facebook.

3. Existing research
3.1. Customer engagement
Customer engagement is defined as a contextual psychological state with cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions that have different levels of intensity and play a major role in the relationship between the company and consumer (Brodie et al., 2011). This is related not only to purchase, but also to recommendation, active sharing of the positive experience with the brand (van Doorn et al., 2010), and repeat purchase and loyalty (Verhoef et al., 2010). Customers' engagement can have different value for the company depending on the following 4 components (Kumar et al., 2016):

- Brand purchase;
- Recommendation;

- Influencing the opinion and behavior of other prospects;
- Feedback.

A study on customers' behavior (van Doorn et al., 2010) defines engagement as a "behavioral element which is not limited only to purchase", and is related to motivation (on a cognitive, behavioral and emotional level) to interact with the brand (ibid:253). The scientists based their survey on previous research on sales, word of mouth, recommendations, and publications, and take into account the preconditions and consequences of the audience's actions. As a result, they identify 5 aspects of consumer engagement (ibid: 255):

- Connotation: the way the customer sees the brand;
- Form or modality: the type of interaction the customer chooses to communicate with the brand;
- Reach: time (sporadic or long-term) and location (global or local) of the engagement;
- Impact: refers to the effect that the engagement has on the brand. It may be immediate or postponed in time, strong or weak, affecting many people or not, etc.;
- Consumer goals: if individual goals match and meet those of the brand, their engagement increases.

Based on Van Doorn's research, the marketing professor Gummerus (2012) analyses the customer engagement in the Facebook community. She believes that given the specifics of the social network, experts need to take into account the passive reading of posts which can also impact their behaviors. In her study Gummerus defines two types of customer engagement in a Facebook community (Kleine-Kalmer 2016:20):

- Related to the group: interactions with the other members and satisfying individual needs (likes, comments, etc.);
- Related to the brand: activity related to the brand.

The researchers discovered that most users are passive members of the group, but did not find the reasons behind this behavior. When building their corporate communication on the social network, the company must take into account both types of engagement–passive and active (Schau et al., 2009). The first is related to consuming and experiencing the brand's content by watching and reading. The second one inspires action in the form of liking or expressing other type of emotion, sharing the brand's content, generating one's own content related to the brand, etc. The main difference between the two is the user's decision to share her opinion with others or not. In regard to this, one of the biggest challenges for companies

is to inspire active engagement, as it can have an impact on the opinion and behavior of the other prospects.

The most reputable research companies also conduct studies on customer engagement and share some important conclusions and definitions. Customer engagement is defined as the emotional bond between the company and its target audience, and has serious impact on the customer behavior (Gallup, 2014). According to the same study there are three types of customers – fully engaged, neutral, and actively not engaged; who are classified according to their answers to three main questions:

- The company always delivers what it promises;
- I am proud to be a customer of the brand;
- The brand is perfect for people like me.

In this regard, in order to motivate he customers to be actively engaged, companies need to focus on meeting the customer's expectations, on connecting with them on an emotional level, and on paying attention to the social factor and the user's need to belong to a group of people with shared interests. Companies need to inspire meaningful and relevant conversations and to match and even predict the dynamically developing needs of customers (SAP and Forbes, 2015). Customer engagement is the ongoing meaningful dialog between the brand and the individual, and is based on knowledge about the behavior and the needs of the target audience. The main challenges for companies is to effectively use social media and to meet customers' needs. Facebook is seen as the most effective social network which allows brands to connect with their customers, and therefore is one of the main important communication channels through which brands have the opportunity to communicate with the target audience and increase its engagement in order to build a strong brand community. This is accomplished through an ongoing process of delivering valuable and relevant content (Pulizzi, 2012).

3.2. Brand communities

Building a strong brand community is one of the most powerful marketing tools. Muniz and O'Guinn define the brand community as a specialized, non-geographically bound community based on a structured set of social relations among admirers of a brand (Muniz and O'Guinn, 2001:412). These are groups whose online interactions are based on shared enthusiasm for and knowledge about consumption practices (Kozinets, 1999). They are of different sizes and their members interact with each other in order to achieve shared as well as personal goals (Dholakia et al., 2004). One of its

most important aspects is that the brand community creates subcultures with its own myths, values, rituals, hierarchy, and tone of voice (Cova and Pace, 2006). In modern society, different forms of subculture unite individuals through shared experiences based on common beliefs, lifestyles and consumer behaviors (Cova et al., 2012). Despite the possibility of different motivations for participation, members of the group certainly share one thing–the creation and negotiation of meaning (McAlexander et al., 2002). Brands evolve in the digital space and increase their value in the ongoing process of sharing meaning among individuals (Patterson and O'Malley, 2006). Customers who are members of the brand community feel more connected with the brand compared to the others (Kim et al., 2008). Building a brand community in social media could have a positive impact on the relationship between the brand and the target audience, as well as increase the company's sales (Kumar et al., 2016). In summary, users can create value for the brand by participating in the brand community as they:

- Contribute to the interaction between members and increase their engagement;

- Create positive brand content;

- Improve the brand usage (Schau et al., 2009).

Some researchers consider brand communities and brand pages to be similar things as they are both related to positive customers' attitude (Dessart et al., 2015). "Since brand fan pages are organized around a single brand, product, or company, they can be seen as a special kind of brand community" (Kunz and Benedikt, 2012:347), though there is no scientific proof that brand pages are equal to a brand community. The expert Melanie Zaglia (2013) conducts a netnography research on the two ways to create a brand community on Facebook – brand pages, and groups. She concludes that the page is the weaker form of community, and differs significantly from the group. Other research proves that a very small percentage of a brand page's fans are active on it (Kleine-Kalmer, 2016:53-54), which is opposed to the idea of shared rituals and behavioral practices intrinsic to community. Creating a Facebook brand page does not necessarily lead to building a brand community, and the two concepts need to be distinguished. Companies need to create and develop a successful communication strategy in order to transform the group into a community. This success is based on shared values and the brand culture, represented by the brand story. In order to convey meaning in a comprehensible and effective way, the company must explore and understand their behavior, which is related to their moti-

vation and emotions, which are both in turn affected by culture (de Mooij and Hofstede, 2011:186).

3.3. Customers' motivation

The relation between brand content and customers' motivation leads to engagement and positive attitude towards the brand (Van Doorn et al., 2010). A great part of the research on brand communities aims at identifying the customers' motivation to participate in them. Motivation is an intrinsic desire to satisfy a need or a desire (Deci and Ryan, 1985). From the definition becomes clear that motivation is related to action. In brief, there are several motivations for liking a Facebook brand page:

- Connecting with others, satisfying the need of belonging to a group of like-minded people (Bosch, 2009; Sheldon, 2008);
- Building identity, self-realization (Joinson, 2008);
- Sharing and searching for information, learning new things (Raacke and Bonds-Raacke, 2008; Bosch, 2009; Pempek et al., 2009);
- Entertainment, hedonistic motivation (Lewis and West, 2009; Joinson, 2008; Sheldon, 2008).

In order to build a successful corporate communication strategy on Facebook, companies need to understand not only users' motivation for liking the brand page but also the factors which influence their activity and engagement. Although most studies focus on the reasons for joining the brand group, some researchers study the motivations for interacting with brand content. Kunz and Benedikt (2012), for example, study the impact of brand pages on the relationship between users and the brand, and outline some important conclusions (Kunz and Benedikt, 2012:354):

- The activity of the others motivates users in the group to be active too;
- Shared values are one of the most important factors for building a relationship and increasing customer engagement;
- Interaction between the members of the page increases their engagement;
- Companies must deliver value to their fans, or they will be passive and may even unlike the page–the more the brand page satisfies the consumers' needs and delivers value, the greater the opportunity for its fans to be active.

Another study on the customers activity provides interesting findings (Wirtz et al., 2013):

- Relationship with the brand: the more the individual recognizes the values and identity of the brand, the more he feels connected to its members.
- The value of participating in the brand community: it is related to the relevance of the information and the special incentives the company offers;
- The structure of the community: the size and the development of the page affects the engagement of its fans.

In brief, researchers outline several reasons for users' activity: liking the brand, interaction, obtaining practical incentives, entertainment, and image building.

On Facebook, customers use brands as symbols for certain meanings, social status, interests, etc. On one hand they use Facebook as a tool to build their desired image, and on the other they indicate whether other users have similar values and beliefs. The desire to connect and build an image are the main reasons for active engagement (Dholakia et al., 2004:259). Trust is another important factor which influences a user's activity level. That is why if the company publishes content which shows the individual that it shares her values and corresponds to her lifestyle, it can decrease feelings of insecurity and increase the feeling of community. If the company helps the user to express herself, it increases her love and her willingness to share it (Wallace et al., 2014). From a cognitive point of view, social identity is related to the awareness of similarities between group members and differentiation from others (Dholakia et al., 2004: 245). This is why companies need to align every post with their brand culture and focus on the shared values of customers in order to increase their activity and engagement.

3.4. Limitations and opportunities

Although there is a growing body of research on brand communication and its impact on customers' engagement, there is still an opportunity to gain more knowledge on customers' behavior. The main gap is a study which shows how brand elements affect engagement. Most studies aim at clarifying the motivation of users, as it impacts their decision to be active or passive and is an important factor for building a brand community. However, there is no research which studies how the brand culture affects this motivation. "Motivation is an assumed force operating inside an individual, inducing him or her to choose one action over another. Culture as collective programming of the mind thus plays an obvious role in motivation. Culture influences not only our behaviors but also the explanations

we give for our behaviors " (Hofstede et al., 2010: 327). In regard to this, a typology which takes into account the willingness of different types of fans to connect with the brand story and the impact of the values, rituals, brand heroes and symbols on it, will deepen the knowledge about the customers' behavior in Facebook. It answers important questions related to the motivations of different users to engage with the brand mythology and the role of the shared rituals, connecting the brand and the role of brand culture with the purchase intent. The answers will help experts build corporate communication which builds brand communities and actively engage their fans.

4. Facebook brand page users' typology

Individuals intuitively classify other people as "we" (part of their community) or "they" (not part of their community) (Hofstede et al., 2010:16). They make this judgment based on their culture (values, beliefs) which impact the way they create and interpret meaning. "Most people most of the time are busy being good members of the groups to which they belong" (ibid:17). This logically determines their behavior. Hofstede believes that technological developments and digital media are a mirror to the customer's behavior, but while they affect the outer cultural layers (symbols, heroes, consumption practices) they do not have an influence upon the values which remain more or less the same (ibid:19). Values are implicit, which is why they are not affected by fashionable trends or by the dynamic development of new media. This is the main reason they could be the core of a successful communication strategy which brings value and powerful meanings to customers. Nevertheless, cultural elements have a different impact on the various types of users of brand pages in Facebook. That is why marketers need to study their specific influence in order to create targeted brand messages.

The typology of Facebook band page users proposed in this paper is created after conducting various kinds of research – a brand page semiotic analysis, a netnographic research, a qualitative study, and a quantitative study.

The purpose of the typology is to classify Facebook fan page users into categories which are valid for all brand pages; but in order to collect the necessary primary data for the analysis, the study began with a specific study – the brand page of Johnnie Walker www.facebook.com/ JohnnieWalkerBulgaria/). This page was chosen because the brand has a powerful mythological story and a well-recognized hero, and the company states that the culture of the brand and its customers is at the core of its

communication and success (Epstein, 2014). The Facebook page of Johnnie Walker is aligned with this marketing strategy and develops the brand story. Every post is part of the coherent brand text and conveys the brand meanings, thus creating the brand myth. The great myths are based on the empathic understanding of the greatest human desires and fears because they have an impact on the whole society (Holt, 2004:212). As a result, companies can create cultural texts which reflect the existential concerns of the society. The posts of Johnnie Walker can be classified into 5 main types:

- Company values: the brand posts motivational quotes on a weekly basis related to the customers' and brand's values. They reflect the personal desire to develop and self-realize. The brand becomes a signifier of personal growth and inner strength. These posts are the most engaging as they motivate users to be active – to like, share, comment and express love with emoticons, etc.
- Lifestyle symbols: the second level of meaning of some posts creates the ideal lifestyle for the target audience by using symbols such as an expensive watch (professional success), camera (travel), skyscraper (high achievement), etc.
- Ritual of exchange: some of the brand posts initiate meaning transfer and present the product as the perfect gift.
- Symbols of consumption: the most recognizable communication codes related to the whiskey category are ice and the specific glasses, which are aimed at increasing the desire to consume the product.
- Symbols of heritage: other strong symbols used by the brand are related to its historical heritage because consumers associated it with quality (for example the barrel).

After identifying the different brand posts based on its culture, a netnographic study was conducted in order to identify the behavior, motivations, culture, values and norms of the Johnnie Walker Facebook page fans. Netnography is the use of ethnographic approach to study online culture and societies (Kozinets 2010:6). It studies ideas, social practices, relations, languages and symbol systems. In order to identify different types of fans based on their reactions and attitudes towards the brand culture, all the posts and actions on the Johnnie Walker Facebook page from the brand and its users were studied. This analysis was followed by a qualitative study. 8 fans participated in semi-structured in-depth interviews conducted to find out more about their perceptions of the brand culture and its impact on their passive or active behavior. The research questions were:

- What is the motivation of the users to like a Facebook brand page?
- Is this motivation linked to the user's expectations for the brand content?
- Is this motivation linked to the user's activity on the page afterwards?
- How the brand culture elements impact the user's activity?
- Does the image on Facebook, built by the user, affect her activity on the brand page?
- To what extent the motivation for active behavior is influenced by the other brand page fans?
- Is there a correlation between the user's activity on the brand page and the intention to use the product/service?

Besides the questions, the respondents were shown different types of brand posts in order to collect data about their reactions and perceptions.

Then a quantitative study with 100 respondents was conducted in order to verify the primary data and the research hypothesis formulated during the previous stages (see Appendix 1). The research questions were:

- To what extent the different types of users are willing to link their personal story on Facebook to the brand story?
- To what extent are the users willing to participate in brand rituals?
- To what extent do the users tend to learn the whole story of the brand narrated in the various new media channels?
- Do the users identify with the brand and its values?
- Which elements of the brand culture (values, hero, symbols) impact the user's activity?
- What are the reasons for their active and passive behavior?
- What would motivate the different types of users to interact with the other page fans and create brand community?

As a result, 4 types of Facebook brand page users were identified based on their willingness to share the brand story and their attitude towards the brand:
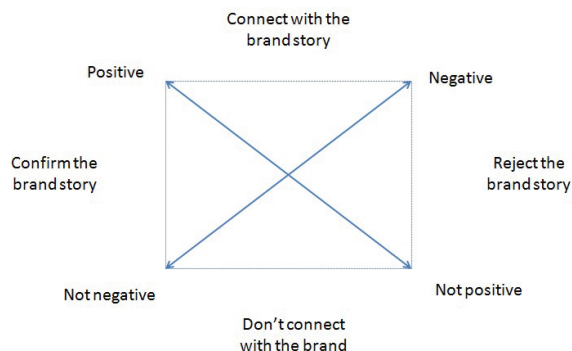
Based on the impact that brand culture elements have on users' willingness to share and develop the brand story, 4 main types of users were identified: seekers, influencers, supporters and detached storytellers.

- Seekers: their motivation to like the page is functional and related to the individual desire to win/to get an incentive: "If the prize is attractive enough for me, I would like any kind of brand page". At the beginning they are active only if they see the opportunity to receive an incentive. However, if the brand values appeal to their personal values, they are willing to follow the brand story on other digital channels and even to share it.

- Influencers: they love the brand and want to be part of its digital life and story. They appreciate not only the functional benefits of the brand but focus on the emotional connection: "I just feel like receiving updates from a dear friend and I do not want to miss anything". They want to join and share not only the digital brand story but want to participate in offline events. The influencers identify with the brand values and build their image based on them.

- Supporters: the largest group of the brand page users. The brand expresses their lifestyle, they like it and they use it to build their online image: "I want the others to see that I have unique personality". If the brand gives them value, they feel engaged and they share and develop the brand story.

- Detached: they like the page because somebody has asked them to, or Facebook has suggested a page for them. At the beginning they are passive, they do not recognize the brand values and culture: "I noticed that a lot of my friends with similar interests have liked the page and I decided to give it a chance". If the brand succeeds in delivering value to this type of customer and, most importantly, they identify with the brand values, they could become supporters. Otherwise they are likely to unlike the page or remain passive.

Below is a table with a brief summary of their profiles:

	Seekers	Influencers	Supporters	Detached
Main reason for liking the FB brand page	The incentives, offered by the company	Love the brand and want to be part of its digital story	Feel positive about the brand	No prior expectations – because a friend has asked them or many other friends have liked it, etc.

Main motivation	Pragmatic	Emotional	Emotional and pragmatic	Emotional and pragmatic
Reasons for active behavior	Posts which appeal to the users' identity. Posts with brand ambassadors.	Want to share their love. Want to build and image of a brand expert. Use the brand as a symbol of their identity. Seek appreciation from the brand.	Relevant brand information (new products, interesting information, tips on product usage, etc.) Posts which appeal to their identity and values	Relevant and useful information for the brand's category. Posts which appeal to the users' identity. Posts with brand ambassadors.
Reasons for passive behavior	Content which is not interesting and does not bring excitement. Advertisements.	Advertisements.	Content which does not appeal to their identity. Advertisements.	At first they are not active because they do not know what to expect from the brand, they do not connect with the brand story before they get enough information about its identity and image. Advertisements.
Main motivation for interactions with the other brand page fans	The desire to share their knowledge	If they have met them in person on a brand event. To support them. To connect with like-minded people. To share the same values. To feel part of a group.	Share their knowledge. If they have met them personally on an event.	No motivation.
Impact of their activity on the willingness to use the product	Medium	High	High	Medium

Main actions on the page	Like. Share. Rate the product. Invite friends to a brand event or game. Join a cause, supported by the brand.	Like almost every brand post. Share and comment. Express love with emoticons. Invite friends to a brand event or game. Rate and recommend. Post on the wall. Join a brand cause.	Like Share and comment. Invite friends to a brand event or game. Rate and recommend. Write a personal message to the brand. Join a brand cause.	Like. Share relevant information with a friend. Join a brand cause.
Interest in following the brand story on other digital channels	Follow a link to the brand website, download free content	Highly likely to follow the brand story on the other digital channels: the company's website, news related to the brand, other brand social media pages, download free content, download brand application, click on a banner, etc. Want to be part of the offline life of the brand.	Highly likely to follow the brand story on the other digital channels: the company's website, news related to the brand, other brand social media pages, download free content, download brand application, click on a banner, etc	Follow a link to the brand website. Read brand news. Download free content.
Impact of the brand rituals	No	React positively to posts which show the product as part of the rituals of exchange, possession and even grooming	Willing to participate in the ritual of exchange	No
Impact of the brand hero	No, they prefer famous people to be brand ambassadors	Build their image using the brand and want to be associated with the brand hero	React very positively to brand ambassadors and the brand hero if they identify with them	React very positively to brand ambassadors and brand hero if they identify with them

Impact of the brand symbols	No	Recognize the brand symbols and they increase their willingness to use the product	Recognize the brand symbols and they increase their desire to share value-creating practices	No
Impact of the brand values	Partially identify with the brand values, no emotional connection with the brand	Strongly identify with the brand values and they react mostly to posts related to the brand identity	The brand values are the most important element	If they identify with the brand values, they are likely to become supporters.
Consumption practices	No	Willing to participate in almost every consumption practice related to the brand	Yes	No
Willingness to share and develop the brand story	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

5. Conclusion

The cultural perspective offers great opportunities to the communication experts to understand individuals' meaning creation, which drives their motivation to feel engaged and to be active. Some of the main insights from the study of the different types of Facebook brand page users are:

- Brands can motivate every type of user to develop and share the brand myth if it helps them to build their own digital story;
- Values are the most important element which motivates action;
- People feel more engaged and as part of a brand community if they experience the brand story offline, not just online;
- People want brands which help them to build their ideal identity;
- People want to follow the brand story on other digital channels, etc.

Appendix 1

Questions for the quantitative study:

1.   Which statement is the most relevant for you? I like a brand page on Facebook if:

- the brand can offer me something useful: promotions/tips on product use/interesting events/rewards, etc.

- I love the brand. I want to receive information about it and be part of its Facebook community.

- I like the brand. I expect it to publish information that can be useful/fun/interesting/valuable.

- my friend suggested it for me/ I saw that my friends have liked it/Facebook offered me to like it.

2.   How likely would you do the following things? Please give an answer on each line on a scale of 1 (unlikely), 3 (neutral) to 5 (highly probable):

- join a group with other brand fans;
- publish results from a brand mobile app in your profile;
- write a personal message to the brand;
- like a brand post;
- comment on a brand post;
- mention your friend in a brand post;
- share a brand post;
- write on the brand wall;
- recommend or rate the brand;
- ask your friend to like the page;
- invite your friend to a brand event;
- invite your friend to participate in a brand game;
- mention the brand in a personal post;
- share a photo with/of the brand in your profile;
- use a photo with/of the brand for a cover photo;
- link your family status to the brand;
- use the brand name for your own;
- use a brand picture for your profile picture.

3.   How likely would you do the following things? Please give an answer on each line on a scale of 1 (unlikely), 3 (neutral) to 5 (highly probable):

- send a post to your friend;
- send a greeting/photo with the brand logo to a friend;

- send a virtual product to a friend;
- participate in a game, regularly organized by the brand;
- participate in an event, regularly organized by the brand;
- use an emoticon created by the brand for personal communication.

4.   How likely would you do the following things? Please give an answer on each line on a scale of 1 (unlikely), 3 (neutral) to 5 (highly probable):
- follow a link to the brand website;
- like/follow the brand on other social networks (eg. Instagram);
- subscribe to the YouTube channel of the brand;
- go directly to the brand website;
- subscribe to a brand newsletter;
- click on a brand banner;
- read a brand news;
- download free content created by the brand (e-book, white paper, etc.);
- use an app created by the brand.

5.   How would you describe the brand with one word? Please choose one answer:
- creator: crafts something new;
- caregiver: cares for others;
- ruler: exerts control;
- jester: has a good time;
- regular guy: ok just as they are;
- lover: finds and gives love;
- hero: acts courageously;
- outlaw: breaks the rules;
- magician: affects transformation;
- innocent: retains or renews faith;
- explorer: maintains independence;
- sage: understands the world.

6.   How would you describe yourself with one word? Please choose one answer:
- creator: crafts something new;
- caregiver: cares for others;
- ruler: exerts control;
- jester: has a good time;

- regular guy: ok just as they are;
- lover: finds and gives love;
- hero: acts courageously;
- outlaw: breaks the rules;
- magician: affects transformation;
- innocent: retains or renews faith;
- explorer: maintains independence;
- sage: understands the world.

7. What could motivate you to be active. Please choose all the relevant answers:
- the brand is like me (my identity);
- the hero (if any) is like me (eg. Johnnie Walker's striding man, Captain Morgain's pirate, etc.);
- a post with a famous person using the brand;
- the people used for the brand visuals/video are like me and do things which I like to do myself;
- the brand's symbols give me positive feelings (Apple's bite apple, Johnnie Walker's bottle cut, Coca-Cola red color, etc.);
- something else.

8. What makes you passive? Please choose all the relevant answers:
- the post is not interesting;
- the post is not exciting;
- the post does not appeal to my identity;
- I do not want the others to see what I am doing on Facebook;
- something else.

9. What can motivate you to interact with the other brand page fans? Please choose all the relevant answers:
- the desire to share my knowledge about the topic of the post/question/comment;
- nothing can motivate me to interact with them;
- something else.

10. Does you activity on the brand page increase your willingness to use the brand? Please choose all the relevant answers:
- yes, definitely;
- rather yes;
- rather not;
- no, definitely;
- I can not decide.

11. Your gender:
    - female;
    - male.

12. Your age:
    - 18 or under;
    - 18-24;
    - 25-34;
    - 35-44;
    - 45-54;
    - 55+

13. Your residence

14. Your educational level

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DIGITAL CULTURE OF THE REGULATED INDUSTRIES. FOCUS: TOBACCO SECTOR

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Abstract

Today the world is connected more than ever before and expectation is ½ of the global population to be digitalized till 2020 year. This remarkable development of internet technologies defines the way people live, including our work experiences, shopping attitudes and entertainment modes. Internet has defined corporate culture, as well. By tracking development of past, dominant and emerging codes and in the search-reach of proper consumer, companies nowadays have adopted digital marketing and trade strategies as one of the efficient ways for doing business. But does digital marketing work for all industries? There are sectors like pharmacy, alcohol and tobacco that are regulated and subjected to control due to implied business specifics. This article aims to review the digital culture of the regulated industries. Particular concentration is given on tobacco – cigarette sector. The paper will show a content analysis of the internet environment, by re-

viewing pro-smoking and anti-smoking activities, players, communication channels, level of marketing and most of all, the narrative and discourse across social medias, official web sites of enterprise, institutions and etc.

Keywords: marketing semiotics, digital culture codes, smoking, meaning

Understanding digital culture and context

Imagine that we search for associations representing today's modern living. Receiving in this search digitization and any forms composing it such as internet, computer, smart phone, online banking and etc. as most frequent top of mind answer, would not be a surprising result at all. Today, people and businesses live and function digitally as a result of an almost total global transformation brought about by digital technologies. It organizes and structures the lives of individuals and companies, making our being and development dependent on digitization. We see digitization in every aspect of the modern world (Gere 2008:13). This connection is present to such an extent and is so indispensable that, if we consider Maslow's pyramid and its update according to today's trends, many would not have any doubts to position internet/computer/smart phone directly below in the level of physiological needs.

Especially in economically developed countries, digitization is everywhere around us. Mass media, movies, music are produced and distributed digitally. Most professions are absolutely impossible without computers, internet and email, mobile phones, servers and rest forms of information technologies providing the (immediate) connection, creation of file documentation and database management/storage. Manufacturing is digitally organized, which is the means for mechanical control and monitoring. The surroundings are the same when one is in a supermarket, bank office, state institution, etc. All the job and service provisions go through digital technologies. The case is interesting with money and bank institution development. Its digital existence today is so changed and modernized that physical and juridical persons use and manage their money with no physical contact, instead just seeing the number displayed on a computer, tablet, smart phone. And there is no distrust or conflict with this in people' minds – digital technologies are incorporated in our lives to such a deep extent that we accept their existence with no conditions and thus feel calm in possessing our money by just seeing the number wrote out on the screen. It also worth highlighting the digital way of information availability and
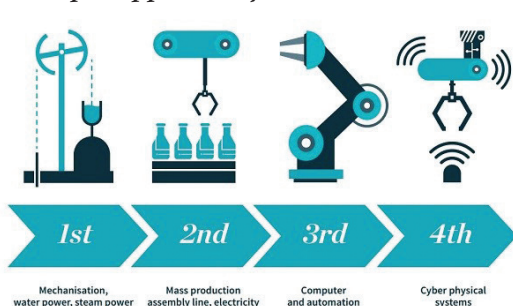
flow–a pure sign of global transformation. In these contemporary times, any kind of information is internet accessible, produced and searched for digitally (Bankov 2010). This is valid for education, employment, real estate, insurance, leisure and travel, entertainment and all other sectors we can think of (Gere 2008:13-4).

The facts in numbers

"The world is more connected than ever before", states Euromonitor International. According to the research agency, the number of internet users double during the last 7 years, reaching 3,2 billion globally in 2016. 43% of the population use internet in 2016 and based on forecasts, ½ are expected to be digitalized until 2020. This extreme development of internet services strengthens generational shifts in the way people live, work, shop and entertain today. Along with, it is observed a huge digital division between the developed and developing countries. As of 2016, 79% of consumers from the developed markets use internet against only 36% from the developing ones. However, the difference of each 43% is expected to be smaller in 2020 due to the anticipation that internet users from developing countries will augment 4 times more compared to developed countries.

More and more users connect to internet through devices from computer to smart phones, smart watches, refrigerators, and automobiles, reports the agency. This is the consumption leading to generational lifestyle shifts today. Speaking more generally, the world faces another technological revolution, called the Fourth industrial revolution. It is characterized with merging technologies that blur the lines between the physical, digital and biological spheres. Additional break-throughs in domains such as artificial intelligence, robotics, "the internet of things", 3D and self-driving automobiles will further accelerate the Fourth revolution.

"Between the geographies of the Sheffield City Region and Lancashire lies a unique opportunity. One which the UK economy desperately needs. Here lie the components required to equip the UK to deliver the vision of the 4th industrial revolution, Industry 4.0"

Professor Sir Keith Burnett, President & Vice-Chancellor, The University of Sheffield

1st	2nd	3rd	4th
Mechanisation, water power, steam power	Mass production assembly line, electricity	Computer and automation	Cyber physical systems

„Increased connectivity transforms the commerce experience", states Euromonitor International. The internet connection brings a fundamental change across all levels of commerce. Today's digital consumers search for and buy commodities and services in a different manner from past generations. Future consumers envisage brands to interact with them digitally before, during and after purchase. As a result, online sales have been developing in various industries and this digital rupture won't stop. Following prognosis, 58% from all travel reservations will go over the digital trade channel till 2020. This share to the retail will be 11%, and for foodservice – 7%.

Based on this, the agency also infers that the "Unprecedented digital shifts creates need for market prioritization". The need for digital strategy is no more in question. Companies should be clear with the digital attractiveness across markets and to offer the best perspective for future development of digital marketing activities.

Historically speaking, the last 40 years have been times of globalization and domination of free market capitalism. These are the times also of techno-science influence, communication technologies and information proliferation. Digital technologies form the basis for this new world set. Particularly, the computerization of bank institutions, international currency exchange and trade has greatly supported the progress of globalization and financial liberalization. An essential feature of these new developments is the pace at which they occur. In combination with other achievements, digital technologies produce outcomes in extremely short duration. Digital technologies on the other hand, and digitization they result in, do not stop progressing in a very fast pace which make us witness to the huge technological constant changes and novelties surrounding us (Gere 2008:14-5).

"This pervasion of digital technology through our lives is part of a broader set of phenomena", says Charlie Gere in his book "Digital Culture". The varied elements of digital culture we experience nowadays are a historical response of the modern capitalism while demands of the Second World War further brought these together. Experts define WWII as the catalyst for the emergence of modern electronic binary computing, and the Cold War as the context for its development. Technology has been a very important driver of today's digital cultural achievements, but not the only one. Other influential literature mentions and emphasizes this way the complex character of digitization is techno-scientific discourses about information and systems, avant-garde art practice, counter-cultural utopianism, critical theory and philosophy, and so on (Gere 2008:14-18-29).

If we try to generalize the result of digitization and created digital culture, then we could define it as:

"The annihilation of physical distance and the dissolution of material reality by virtual or telecommunication technologies, or the apparent end of the human and the rise of the so called post-human as a result of advances in cybernetics, robotics and research into consciousness and intelligence."

(Gere 2008:15)

Meaning of the term "digital"

In the narrative so far, the word "digital" was frequently mentioned and centered. Similarly, the importance of digitization to our lives should became obvious too, which certainly requires an understanding of the term "digital". On a technical language, "digital" is employed to signify data in the form of discrete elements. This determines the denotative meaning of the term. Due to dramatic progress of digital technologies, over the last 70 years, the word has become synonymous with technology as a whole, whereas it should mainly refer to computers. Because of this, other terms, "computer technologies" and "digital technologies" have become synonymous, too. Computers are digital machines because they deal with digital binary form, zeroes and ones. On the other hand, presuming all possible connotations with "digital", it signifies much more enriched meaning than the one deriving from the specific technical language – namely, discrete data or machines based on such data usage (Gere 2008:15; Oswald 2012:54-5).

"To speak of the digital is to call up, metonymically, the whole panoply of virtual simulacra, instantaneous communication, ubiquitous media and global connectivity that constitutes much of our contemporary experience. It is to allude to the vast range of applications and media forms that digital technology has made possible, including virtual reality, digital special effects, digital film, digital television, electronic music, computer games, multimedia, the Internet, the World Wide Web, digital telephony and Wireless Application Protocol (WAP), as well as the various cultural and artistic responses to the ubiquity of digital technology, such as Cyberpunk novels and films, Techno and post-pop music, the 'new typography', net.art and so on. It also evokes the whole world of wired capitalism dominated by high-tech companies such as Microsoft and Sony and the so-called 'dot. coms', companies based on the Internet, which, for a while, seemed to present the ideal model for twenty-first-century business, as well as, more generally, the ungraspable complex of corporate business which, enabled by high technology, operates on a global level and sometimes appears to wield

more power than nation states. It also suggests other digital phenomena, such as the new paradigms of computer-controlled and supposedly clean 'virtual war', or the computerization of genetic information as in endeavors such as the Human Genome Project, in which the transmission of inherited characteristics becomes a digital matter in itself. Thus the apparently simple term digital defines a complex set of phenomena."
(Gere 2008:15-6)

This definition allows us to think of the development of a distinctive digital culture. Peculiar for this culture is the use of high technology and virtual communication by group/s of people at a certain period in history, distinguishing them by earlier periods in which technology had not made for an up-to-date form of living (Gere 2008:16; Oswald 2012:54-5).

<u>The scientific discourse about digital culture</u>
According to Charlie Gere, the discourse of digital culture is motivated by two interconnected beliefs. The one claims that such a culture represents a decisive rupture with the earlier period, while the other advocates that digital culture derives from digital technology which is also a condition of its existence. Both viewpoints could be reckoned as true. Thus, the existence of a distinctive digital culture can be differentiated in parallel to previous cultures and has also been constructed purely by means of digital technologies. However, a more profound analysis and journey through the history of digitization would reveal that digital culture is neither new, nor its developments reliant on technological progress. In this light, Charlie Gere further suggests that digital technology is a product of the same culture rather than the opposite. This comes to infer that digitization encompasses a certain way of thinking and that any kind of technology and machinery is firstly a social achievement based on human mind, and after that a technical one as well. In the digital sense, this mode of thinking results in abstraction, codification, self-regulation, virtualization and programming that lead to digitization. These skills can be applied through writing by using the specific languages of programming. And "…inasmuch as language, written or spoken, is digital in that it deals with discrete elements, then almost all human culture may be said to be digital", concludes Gere (Gere 2008:17-8).

Digital communication of regulated industries
Creating attractive and innovative marketing campaigns is a challenging job. It requires a combination of science and art, while digital marketing and blooming social media in particular make it even more challeng-

ing. This is especially significant for highly regulated industries that should follow rules and bans in the varied processes of doing business, including trade and marketing communications. Marketers have to be familiar with respective regulative requirements in order to know what and how to communicate. They need to confront and deal with strong guidance coming from government, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and industry associations when deciding on the possible communication approaches. This market environment assumes professionals from regulated businesses to be more creative, keen and game to venture into new marketing areas, the better to remain competitive and attractive to consumers. "Highly regulated brands must play by the rules when crafting marketing and advertising campaigns, but that doesn't mean they can't have fun while doing so", says Matthew Schwartz, a partner at Sullivan & Cromwell LLP (Schwartz 2016; Muehlenhaupt 2015)

To follow requirements is important, because the cost of non-compliance can be harmful not only to the corporate and brand image but can be expressed financially, too. Failure to comply with defined regulations can result in heavy fines and sanctions. For example, the tobacco company R.J. Reynolds was fined $20 million for marketing to young audiences, and advertisers not respecting the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) could end up paying a fine of $16,000 per day/ per commercial (Cannon 2014).

<u>Defining regulated industries</u>

In fact, there are regulations in all businesses in order to ensure that certain standards are followed for the good of people and nature. The difference, however, is that some sectors are much more controlled than others, and some are so new that regulations have been still establishing. According to Regulation Nation, the mostly controlled industries are those which have the deepest impact on people's lives and could cause the most potential harm. This suggests that health care and concomitant industries in this context like alcohol and tobacco should be the most heavily governed (Livini 2016).

Besides the aforementioned, other sectors under high regulation discussed in the literature are finance, public companies, petroleum and coal products manufacture, electric power generation, transmission and distribution, motor vehicle manufacture, scheduled air transportation, fishing, oil and gas extraction, and others. Based on a number of restrictions, the McLaughlin-Sherouse List ranks petroleum and coal products manufacture the first mostly regulated industry for 2014. In TOP 10 of the same list, tobacco industry does not present (Hatwal 2016).

So, according to the Cambridge Dictionary definition, a regulated industry is "a type of business that is controlled by government rules: This applies to workers in regulated industries, such as teaching or financial services". Another source, dictionary of All Business, defines the regulated industry as "industry that is regulated by government to a significant extent. Utility industries are excellent examples; their pricing, profits, and, sometimes, production methods are regulated by both federal and state governments."

Focus: Tobacco sector

Going further and narrowing the discourse to digital communication and business sector of regulation, rules and bans vary from industry to industry. In this regard, one may have digital marketing restrictions imposed while others may not (Schaefer 2016).

Concerning the tobacco industry and cigarettes in particular, restrictions span from product manufacture to product sale and marketing. Tobacco is regulated by governments, the World Health Organization (WHO), the European Union (EU), the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and others. One of the most important international conventions in the area is the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC), developed in response to the globalization of tobacco and in force since February 2005. To fight the demand for tobacco and encourage its reduction, FCTC controls price and tax measures, exposure to tobacco smoke, packaging and labelling of tobacco products, tobacco advertising, promotion and sponsorship, illicit trade, sales to and by minors, and other sensitive topics. The agreement has 168 signatories, among which the European Community, as well. This makes it one of the most widely spread treaties in the United Nations (UN) (WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control).

Article 13 from the FCTC scrutinize the Tobacco advertising, promotion and sponsorship. Point 2 states that:

"Each Party shall, in accordance with its constitution or constitutional principles, undertake a comprehensive ban of all tobacco advertising, promotion and sponsorship. This shall include, subject to the legal environment and technical means available to that Party, a comprehensive ban on cross-border advertising, promotion and sponsorship originating from its territory."

In the case of a party that is not in a position to undertake a comprehensive ban, it has to apply restrictions on all tobacco advertising, promotions and sponsorship. Besides, there is a minimum that each party has to assure, according to the article. A portion of it concerns digital communication, namely that parties should: "undertake a comprehensive ban or, in the case of a Party that is not in a position to undertake a comprehensive ban due to its constitution or constitutional principles, restrict tobacco advertising, promotion and sponsorship on radio, television, print media and, as appropriate, other media, such as the internet, within a period of five years".

The EU itself has two directives dedicated to tobacco control – the Tobacco Products Directive (TPD) and the Tobacco Advertising Directive (TAD). TPD governs the manufacture, presentation, and sale of tobacco and related products. In terms of cigarettes, it prohibits production of flavored cigarettes, small packages, limits ingredients (maximum of 10 mg. tar, 1 mg. nicotine and 10 mg. carbon monoxide per cigarette) and prohibits their labeling, requires 65% health warnings of the front and back of packages that combines picture, text and information on how to stop, allows EU countries to prohibit internet sales and others. TAD on the other hand, bans the cross-border tobacco advertising and sponsorship in all media except television (the latter had already been prohibited). Particularly, TAD bans print media, radio, internet and sponsorship of events involving several Member States, such as the Olympic Games and Formula One (EU European Commission Tobacco). In order to realize even stronger restrictions on tobacco, we could also mention plain packaging, which refers to a totally unbranded pack with only mentioned manufacturer of the product. Australia was the first country in the world that adopted the plain packaging. And following during this year have been France, United Kingdom and Ireland (Framework Convention Alliance).

Tobacco companies have very strict marketing regulations. Regarding internet, Google and Microsoft have policies that restrict or outlaw the promotion of tobacco products on their advertising networks, as does Facebook. Same applies to alcohol marketing, too (Cannon 2014).

Hence, discussing tobacco we determine that digital marketing is a forbidden territory. It is meaningful on the other hand law and other decrees interpretation, scope and depth of bans and existence of possible exceptions. In this regard hypothesis of the following content analysis of the cigarette sector in internet is that digital space is not a marketing tool for cigarettes. Below, it is upcoming to understand whether the given hypothesis would be passed or traversed.

Content analysis of the cigarette sector in internet

<u>Methodological notes</u>

This content-analysis is based on a Desk research of the internet space. Its major sources are the websites of corporate, state and non-governmental organizations, social media companies, K-Message[1] research findings and online shops information. In more details, it reviewed content of:

- 10 corporate websites;
- 15 governmental and non-governmental organizations;
- 3 social media companies: Facebook, YouTube and Wikipedia;
- Brand dedicated information of 40 global and strong local players: web site, Wikipedia or Facebook page;
- 30 online shops;
- Reached a number of pro-smoking as well as anti-smoking Facebook communities (only a few were reviewed due to joining being required).

The content-analysis was implemented in November 2016.

<u>Content analysis findings</u>

There are two established branches of activities: pro-smoking and anti-smoking activities. Actors in the pro-smoking branch are the business world, smokers, and pro-tobacco communities. Those in the anti-smoking branches are state institutions, NGOs, non-smokers, and anti-tobacco communities. The internet has been popularizing across all age groups, but youths still remain the most active users. Because of this, and speaking for digital marketing in particular, young people appear to be the main target group for both pro-smoking and anti-smoking activities. For doing business in general, youths are attractive because they are trendsetters, idea creators, the source of dominant and emerging codes, and contribute to future market success. While for the institutions in this context, youths are the most vulnerable consumer group to prevent from the health risk of tobacco products, supposing this will impact the future consumption, as well.

What are the most popular digital communication means?

As methodological notes suggest, the pro-smoking branch mainly employs corporate web sites, online shops, and social media. And for the anti-smoking one, web sites of state institutions and NGOs, and social medias once again. Keeping in mind this article's subject, we should focus on the

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[1] K-Message is an independent personal initiation of a digital marketing professional, dealing with regulated industries.

further development in content created across the so-called pro-smoking branch.
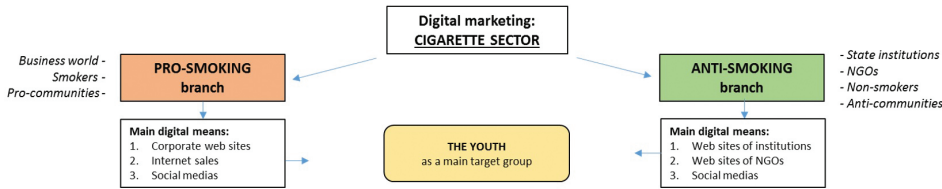
Graph 1. Digital marketing of cigarette sector: pro-smoking and anti-smoking branches

Corporate websites

Analysis of the global tobacco manufacturers, as well as regional and local players, uncovers two main codes that corporate digital communication is built upon. These are:

1. Responsibility
2. Sustainability

This communication is very typical for multinational companies that actively participate in debates and decisions concerning the whole cigarette industry. For instance, the corporate motto of Reynolds American is "Transforming Tobacco".

Concerning Responsibility, the discourse gravitates towards the following live questions:

- Regulations & Requirements
- Marketing
- Health
- Quitting smoking
- Youth prevention & informed choice of adults
- Illicit trade fights
- Research & Development (R&D)

We understand that corporations announce industry regulations and control imposed by institutions, state their respect and need in reducing harm effect of the tobacco products. For example, the position of Philip Morris International (PMI) is that the company supports the evidence for tobacco product regulation, following the principle of harm reduction. These companies share their principles and standards for marketing communications, conformable to regulative norms. According to this, minors cannot smoke and must be properly informed for the harm effects cigarettes cause. This is why cigarette and other tobacco products have health

warnings on their packages. Health warnings have become more and more rigorous by occupying more package space, adding pictures along with the textual warning or initiation of the total plain packaging. Advertisement itself has a lot of bans related to the place and mode of advertising. Because of this, we no longer see tobacco commercials broadcasted on TV, nor the faces of sportsmen or people under 25 advertising tobacco products.

Responsibility is also communicated through information sections about the chemical content of cigarettes, health consequences, addiction, and support of quit smoking, as well as links to organizations like WHO.

In today's consumer culture environment, R&D should be more important to the tobacco business than ever before. Manufactures are investing in new technologies and a new generation of products aimed at reducing the harmful effects of tobacco. Electronic cigarettes exemplify this development as an alternative solution to traditional cigarettes in this context. Part of R&D efforts is the support of medical researches, as well.

Concerning Sustainability, the discourse gravitates towards the following live questions:

-   Nature & natural resources
-   Climate changes
-   Agriculture
-   Corporate behavior
-   Society & consumers

Sustainability is related directly to the above analyzed code, since it is another form of responsibility. Part of corporate culture is doing business in a way that protects and supports the preservation of nature, natural resources and the climate. Multinational manufacturers interact with farmers in order to establish proper practices, guarantee qualitative tobacco cultivation, control child's labor, etc. Corporate behavior manifested through transparency and followed highest standards of business leadership should be a typical feature of sustainability, as well. All these practices bring consumer care to society.

With respect to the commercial opportunities from which corporate sites from various product categories generally benefit, we find that digital reality differs for cigarettes. Graph 2, a visualization of the present content analysis, marks "Without advertising activities" as particular advertisements or product promotions were not found across web sites. With regards to age control, local and regional companies request user age in order to prohibit minors from entering the site. In this regard, and involving brand discourse, two groups are formed – the global/ big companies, and the regional/ local companies. Global companies lack overall brand

marketing introduction. Permitted information is limited and concerns market results, product categories, product characteristics, brand logos. The websites of regional/ local players, on the other hand, appear to aim for commercial success. In this group, product portfolios display pack designs, logos, imagery, and emotional messages.

According to the 2015 Merrill Lynch Global Tobacco report, the volume share for global companies (PMI, BAT, JTI and IMT) is 83% excluding China. And since these corporations dominate the market, the main conclusion from this sub-section reflects their digital behavior. Thus, digital marketing across corporate websites performs responsibility and harm reduction in particular. Companies with stronger performance in this direction would enhance consumer trust and loyalty to their products.
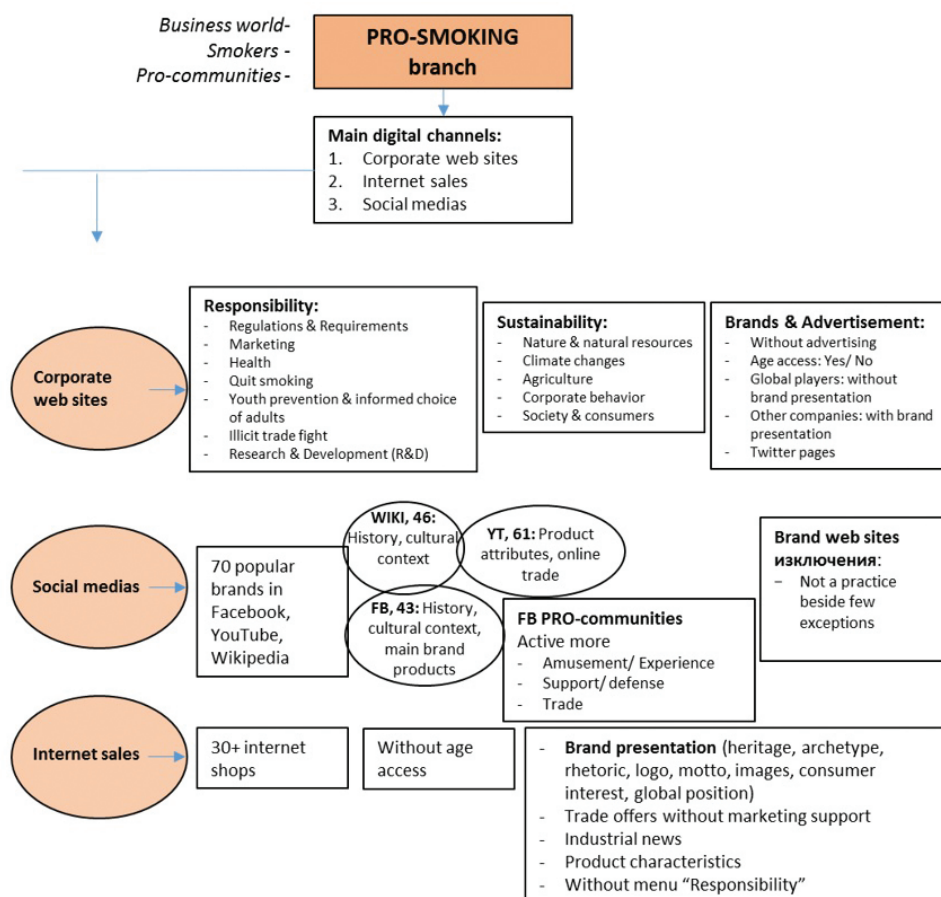
Graph 2. Pro-smoking branch communications

Social medias

K-Message traces the presentation of 70 popular cigarette brands on Facebook, YouTube and Wikipedia, which include Dunhill, Davidoff, Marlboro, L&M, Pall Mall, Camel, etc. According to research data collected in 2014, 43 brands out of 70 have a FB page, 61 have a YouTube channel, and 46 have a Wikipedia page. The assumption is that these are amateur activities. The narrative on Facebook relates to brand history, cultural context, and the main brand varieties.[2] Historical and cultural brand features prevail on Wikipedia, while YouTube content has a commercial purpose stemming from product and trade reviews.

It is interesting to know whether or not specific brands have dedicated web sites. Desk research shows that this is not a practice among cigarette brands, though a few exceptions that were detected. Marlboro, L&M, Parliament, Virginia Slims, and Gauloises and Winston have own official web sites in the USA, to which access is strictly controlled. Pall Mall and Camel also appear to have web sites but their access has been deactivated.

According to K-Message, pro-smoking groups have been more active than anti-smoking groups in digital space. This should be true assuming the nature of the two groups – the first is related to entertainment while the other is dedicated to fight and denial. There are a great number of pro-smoking communities in Facebook. Discourse there includes amusement (shared experience, photos of favorite brands, smoking moments, with a sexual context detected), smoker defense and support (smokers think that they have their rights, too) as well as commercial activity directing to online sales.

Internet sales

With key words "Cigarette online" and "Cigarette online sales", a Google Search finds over 30 internet shops selling cigarettes. There are almost no any shops with age control. This finding was not expected, bearing in mind the above specifics about regulations.

Across the shops there is brand presenting, and the scope in some outlets is richer while narrower in others. The richer brand narratives include typical marketing information, namely brand heritage, logo, motto, archetype, rhetoric, images, consumer interest, and global position. This analysis also includes commercial offers which are, however, not supported by certain marketing activities. Some sites are enriched by sections dedicated to industrial news. Expectedly, there is a detailed product presentation telling about cigarette format, strength, flavor, origin, and more. In contrast to the

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[2] For the online consumer rituals see Bankov 2014

corporate web sites, there is no "Responsibility" menu here. These findings allow us to say that internet shops are sites for primary marketing insofar as they present the brand, but do not engage in advertising campaigns.

Conclusion

Relying on the statements from digital culture and context described above, we infer that digital communications are a distinguishing feature of and condition for doing successful business in the present. This is due to the almost total global transformation of ways of life and business functioning by the digital technologies. With regards to regulated industries, and the tobacco sector in particular, there are strong marketing restrictions prohibiting almost all types of advertising channels, including the internet. The content analysis we performed, however, confirmed that cigarettes have not been advertised digitally in the way consumers know advertisement – namely, campaigns dedicated to new and existing products, supported by emotional visuals and promotions. This environment makes the communication of cigarettes sparing and very challenging. This is why, along with following the defined restrictions, marketers from the examined business sector should be more inventive in the way they communicate, and venture into new marketing areas in order to remain competitive and attractive to consumers.

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ITC: http://www.itcproject.org/

JTI: http://www.jti.com/

PMI: https://www.pmi.com/

RAI Reynolds American: http://www.reynoldsamerican.com/about-us/who-we-are/our-operating-companies/default.aspx

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PART IV Digital Age form Philosophical Perspective

THE EFFETENESS OF SOCIAL MEDIA

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Abstract

Social media are a new phenomenon attracting the interest of researchers from different fields–marketing experts, sociologists, anthropologists, even philosophers and semioticians. The problems related to them vary and many remain unanswered. The current paper analyzes the level of social media habituation, taking Charles Peirce`s evolutionary cosmology, and more specifically the concept of effete mind, as its milestones. Other important studies considered here are from the fields of anthropology and media studies.

Communication and the transfer of information have always been vital for living creatures, not only humans but animals, plants and even microorganisms. During the centuries of our existence and evolution we have developed complicated sign systems to satisfy the need for knowledge transfer among the members of our social groups. In the digital era many

questions about the new forms of communication arise. Here I will ana-lyze one of them: are these new media something totally new or do they follow some kind of universal tendency and predisposition? To answer this question I will consider Charles Peirce`s ideas of habit and habit-taking tendency, his concepts of living and effete mind, together with the studies of Robin Dunbar and Tom Standage

In his book *Writing on the wall. Social media–the first 2, 000 years* (2013) Standage examines the question of writing on the walls as one of the oldest methods of communication and knowledge transfer. It dates back to the age of cavemen, long before any of society's modern tools were even con-sidered possible. Over the centuries these methods evolved and became more sophisticated but it kept their essence and main function–to transfer information for the well-being of the group and its members. Centuries ago at the dawn of human kind, the necessity of survival shaped our pre-disposition for communication. Since then, the tools have changed but the necessity and the reasons for it remain the same. As such, the current state of well-developed digital social media could be considered a manifestation of the Peircean concept of habit-taking tendency, combined with human natural need of communication and information sharing stated by Stand-age and also by the evolutionary anthropologist Robin Dunbar.

Keywords: effete mind, habit, social media, Peirce, knowledge

Habit-taking as an evolutionary process

The problem of habit and habit-taking as an active force in the universe are vital to Peirce`s philosophical system. To be profoundly understood these concepts should be discussed in the context of his evolutionary cos-mology, and in relation to his categories, sign model, and method of prag-matism. But considering the limitations of the current paper I will present them only in their function of evolutionary elements.

Mentioned in many texts, the problem of habit is presented in-depth in the late metaphysical essays of Peirce. His project is to unite them into a book entitled *A Guess at the Riddle* (1887–1888), but this never happens. The metaphysical essays are often neglected by researchers because of their high degree of abstraction. But the idea of evolution of the universe from chaos to determinacy, with the function of habit and habit-taking tenden-cy, is fundamental for current research and could bring light to the ques-tion of the nature of social media.

In Peirce, the function of habit is not restricted solely to the organization of human life, but has a much wider meaning. It is a property of everything in the universe – a universe that is governed by laws and represents a boundless, developing mind. In *A Guess at the Riddle* Peirce considers its evolution and makes the following generalization: "(...) three elements are active in the world: first, chance; second, the rule; and third, habit-taking" (W6: 208). These elements bear the names of tychism, synechism and agapism. The first, pure chance, is defined as follows:

(...) an element of pure chance survives and will remain until the world becomes an absolutely perfect, rational, and symmetrical system, in which mind is at last crystallized in the infinitely distant future. (W8: 110)

The second element, synechism, denotes the tendency of phenomena to have duration and to exist together, while agapism is the creative love and compassion in the universe. The last term is devoid of metaphoricity and is to be understood literally, since for Peirce the universe is an evolving mind and love is its building element, a characteristic of the movement from living to effete mind. The development from chance to determinacy is normal both for the universe and the separate phenomenon. This is how he recognizes two other evolutionary elements called "living mind" and "effete mind":

The general laws of thought are the deep traces of the effete mind. Originality is provided by the living mind when it meets the patterns of the effete one. Very soon the searching thought (the supervenient self) falls into the track of the effete mind and takes the route of the cliché. (Mladenov 2006: 94)

According to Peirce, even before the existence of time, space and the objects, in its first phase of development, the universe was formless and indeterminate, an absolute chaos. Then, by the principle of pure chance and spontaneity, something emerges that we may call a "flash." This is a "completely undetermined and dimensionless potentiality" (CP 6.193). The flash happens simply because it is possible – it is a manifestation of tychism. After that, second and third flashes are generated, establishing a rule (law). The duration in time and the co-existence of the phenomena in the universe is a manifestation of synechism. "The tendency to form habits, or tendency to generalize, is something that grows by its own action, by the habit of taking habits itself growing". (W8: 387)

This generalization is valid for the whole universe, and habits are rules that grow and obey "their own action" (*ibid*). Thus the universe develops from absolute chaos to absolute order, becoming increasingly determinate

with time. Peirce calls the final point of this evolution 'crystalized mind'. This is the stage at which logical hypotheses for the understanding of everything will be created. But this last phase will not be reached in the foreseeable future, therefore the habit-taking tendency continues to work. Obviously the living mind and the effete mind can be taken as the two endpoints in the development of the universe. Then why is the effete mind named as the final point of the movement rather than crystallized mind? The view of reaching a stage of absolutely logical knowledge of the universe is too idealistic, and puts an end to evolution where spontaneity or habit formation is no longer possible. Although Peirce does not say it explicitly, in his philosophical system achieving a crystallized mind is the end of the universe as we know it. This is why, when we speak of evolutionary processes, the living mind and the effete mind will be used as the two extreme points. Between them Peirce sees the active elements – tychism, synechism and agapism, which build up the line of habit formation and determine the evolution of mind. The habit is a final goal, or a necessary link in evolution.

Peirce describes the process of movement from living to effete mind as a process which begins with a situation of hesitation when we are to decide how to act. After that, some actions are repeated, some are not. Gradual repetitions become habits that eliminate the irritation in further situations of hesitation. This direction, followed by all processes in the universe, is called the habit-taking tendency: "The tendency to obey laws has always been and always will be growing. (…) all things have a tendency to take habits" (W6: 208). Thus their number grows incessantly until, in the indeterminate future, it reaches the stage of complete determinacy. Turley points out that for Peirce, the habit-taking tendency is an evolutionary principle from which stems the formation of time, space, substance, and natural laws (Turley 1977: 75). As part the universe's evolution, habits create a ring of strong gravity which retains the achieved knowledge and orders the world of the separate human beings and their social groups. Habits are necessary because they establish models of behavior and save mental energy in everyday life. But despite striving towards establishing rules and laws, evolution itself is a growing process that can be found in all aspects of being.

Considering Peirce's evolutionary cosmology and his concept of habit-taking tendency, we can define digital social media as manifestations of our society's living mind, though they already show certain traces of effeteness. In his research on social media Standage tracks their development through the centuries, proving that they have existed in different forms since the beginning of human societies. It means that they represent a vital habit for the living creatures–to communicate in terms to satisfy the need

to transfer knowledge and information. This urge of communication first appeared as a spontaneous flash of the primitive mind, but fast obeyed the habit-taking tendency and became the beginning of social interaction and the development of social networks. If the act of communication was not habitual by nature it would be difficult for it to survive. Habit is the highest manifestation of synechism, or the ability of phenomena to last. Without the active force of habit and synechism, the knowledge in social groups would not have been able to grow, and the evolution of both human beings and the universe would be impossible.

Communication is a complex phenomenon and can be analyzed with different perspectives and semiotic approaches. Here I choose to analyze it from a Peircean point of view, as a manifestation of habit-taking tendency and also as an evolutionary element. This approach allows me to focus my attention on the new forms of communication (a.k.a. social media) and examine the question: what is new and what is already established and known in their structure and functions. The following parts of that paper will also focus on the question: can we consider social media to be living mind following Peirce`s concepts and terminology? And if we can, what does this mean for their future development?

Tendencies and forms

Studies on communication and its principles have been conducted since the beginning of the XXth century. Not only semioticians but biologists, sociologist and even journalists have discussed them. It is impossible to apply here all the contributions made on that question, so I choose to focus on research conducted by Dunbar and Standage.

In his book *Neocortex Size as a Constraint on Group Size in Primates (1992),* Dunbar describes the correlation between the size of a primate's neocortex and its communicational needs and skills. One of the most important contributions of his study is the "Dunbar number," which points out the average group size for the human beings according to the size of the brain. The number Dunbar specifies is 148, which he rounded to 150–this is the maximum number of people with whom it is possible for us to have reciprocal relationship. Groups of under 150 people are also considered by Dunbar to be self-regulated, which means that everyone knows everyone else personally, which naturally regulates relationships inside the group by decreasing the social deviations and the possibility of crimes or other misbehaviors. The Dunbar number is also considered by the military forces when groups do not exceed 180 people.

The research made by Dunbar stresses that people usually have up to five intimate friends and up to ten close friends. These numbers are very similar to the numbers we could find in the so called "grooming coalitions" in ape societies. More than twenty years after Dunbar`s research was published, in the era of digital communication, Standage decided to verify whether his contribution is also valid for social media and human behavior there. After analyzing users' habits on Facebook Standage discovered a lot of similarities with the numbers already drawn by Dunbar:

Interaction on Facebook (in the form of regular comments and messages) is similarly concentrated within a core group of intimates, with an average of seven other people for male users and ten people for female users. This core group is the digital equivalent of a grooming coalition (Standage, 2013: 14).
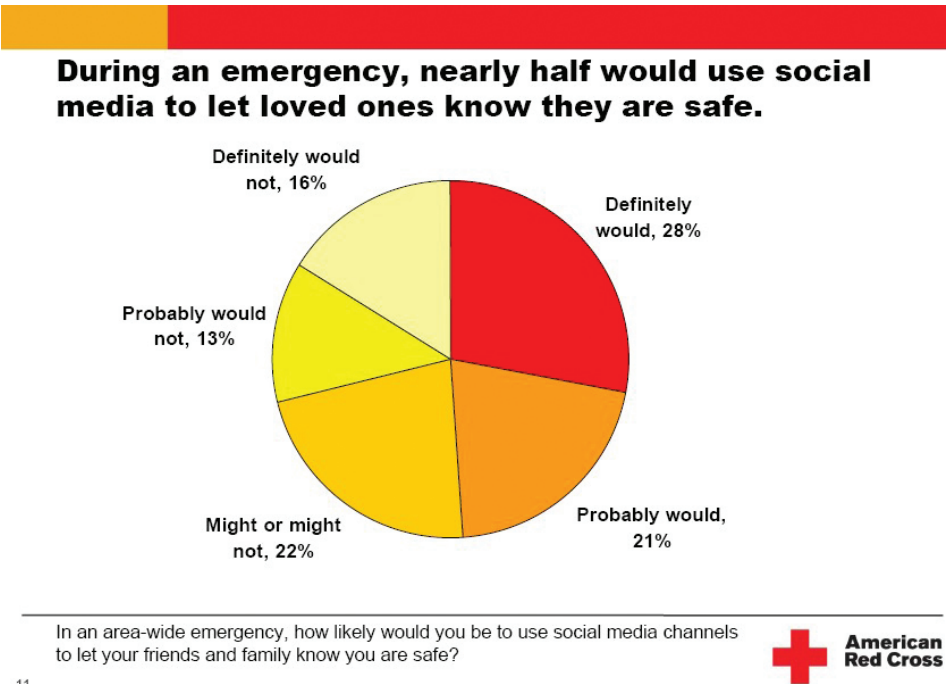
He also concludes that in digital environments human beings had to switch from physical "grooming" to virtual grooming using messages, likes, comments, tags and other new forms of communication. But the more important development is that even subconsciously they try to keep the habitual size of their intimate and close friend groups. It seems that social media facilitates interaction among the closest members of a social group, allowing them to express their positive intention for "grooming" others not only one by one but also by keeping the group together in shared chats or in multiple picture and event tags. Such kinds of online group "grooming" saves a lot of time and also allows the group to "stay together" if one or several of the members are physically far away from each other. Standage points out the advantages of online interaction as follows:

But speech has three big advantages over physical forms of grooming. It allows grooming of more than one person at a time, while chatting in a small group. Grooming can also be carried out while performing another activity, such as eating, foraging for food, or resting. And grooming via speech, in the form of the exchange of gossip, enables people to find out about events within their social circle that they did not witness directly. This provides more information on which to base judgments about whether someone is trustworthy or not (Standage, 2013: 15).

Considering the research conducted by Dunbar and Standage we can conclude that social media keep the habitual functions of offline communication on a social level, but expand the possibilities for the group to stay together longer and to exchange bigger amounts of information in a quicker and more efficacious manner. Social media guarantee the survival of these social groups in a dynamic environment where travel is faster and easier, living abroad is more and more common, and social and personal changes

(like loss of job, money, personal belongings and properties, etc.) can happen unpredictably. In the fast-changing offline reality human beings need to stay connected with the closest members of their social groups in order to deal with the insecure and more and more "unfriendly" environment.

It is a significant fact that since 2011 The American Red Cross started active work with social media channels to inform and educate users on how to act more efficiently during emergencies, social crisis, or natural disasters. Besides informing users on how to engage social media to protect others during crises, the organization also conducted studies to gather statistical data about the real usage of the digital technologies during such events. *Figure 1* shows the results which prove that nearly half of users will post on social media to send their closest social group members information about their well-being. This example proves the statement above, that the insecurity of the offline world and the technical characteristics of digital media provide social groups with new and more efficient tools for communication, helping them to stay together despite these events.

During an emergency, nearly half would use social media to let loved ones know they are safe.

Definitely would not, 16%

Definitely would, 28%

Probably would not, 13%

Might or might not, 22%

Probably would, 21%

In an area-wide emergency, how likely would you be to use social media channels to let your friends and family know you are safe?

American Red Cross

Figure 1: How likely would you be to use social media channels to let your friends and family know you are safe?[1]

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[1] http://www.redcross.org/about-us/news-and-events/publications

These social media represent two old, evolutionary habits of the humans–to exchange information inside their social groups, and to "groom" each other, not only to show a friendly attitude but to prove their own belonging to the group. It seems that a more dynamic and insecure offline reality also helps for the quick development of social media to preserve the evolutionary and survival habit of communication.

The effeteness of the social media–is it possible?

To consider social media as living mind in the terms of Peircean evolutionary cosmology does not seem problematic. Even being a stable digital environment, they participate in sign creation and sign exchange processes, meaning that they also allow the meanings of some signs to change and develop compared with their offline usage. An example of such expansion of meaning in social media is the word "like". The sign still keeps the traditional and already effete linguistic meaning; but in its transition into the social media context it is widened. Offline, "to like" merely signifies mental activity related to sympathy and approval of some phenomenon. But when used in the digital environment the sign supplements its meaning with the physical activity of pressing the specific button on the web site and displays an iconic sign for the other users. This visualization of the sign is an important transformation in social media because it is quite different in offline reality. In order for a sign which operates only on a mental level in the offline word to be manifested, a transition into other signs like smile, voice timber, etc. is needed. In digital media "to like" brings iconicity and transfers its meaning through it. These sign changes in social media are significant proof that they still operate in the state of living and developing mind.

But we already mentioned above that certain traces of effeteness could be recognized in social media. How can we explain this fact? If the effeteness means to follow a certain pattern and to bring the characteristics of well-established cliché, then social media certainly show a tendency to get more and more effete over time. Analyzing them as an overall phenomenon we notice that they become more and more habituated in time, meaning that their level of effeteness increases. For example, at the beginning of Facebook users` generated content was more heterogeneous and was dominated by discussions, shares of personal thoughts and experience, personal pictures and videos. Today these forms of communication still exist but are dominated by marketing content, political and social discussions, corporate profiles and advertising-oriented content. These types of messages are similar in their purpose, form, and language, and generate similar responses from the audience. They explicitly show social media's effeteness

on structural and functional levels. Even the time schedule of publication of corporate messages is similar (concentrated in two time ranges–in the morning around 9 a.m. and in the afternoon around 5 p.m.) due to users` habits and behavior online.

The rising number of corporate messages in social media, created and distributed according to commercial goals, turns them into cliché. Even if the topics and the content of these messages vary, the level of their structural similarity is high–their creation follows certain rules which guarantee success. For example, we can find specific formulations of the titles (Top 10; How to; Breaking news; etc.), few predominant formulations of the opening lines (personal stories; unexpected news; not very well-known fact; etc.), as well as some requirements on visual level–these messages are always accompanied with attention grabbing pictures or galleries. Video content is also recommended. All these specifics of corporate messaging on social media are easy to trace, and we can find many online sources providing directions for creating successful business content.

The facts above prove the statement that social media are developing in terms of the growing cliché. Following Peircean terminology and evolutionary cosmology we can conclude that social media are still in the phase of developing living mind, but the tendency of habituation and growing effeteness is visible, and we can expect this effeteness to expand in future. What will happen to social media if they become totally effete–and is such a state possible for them? These questions are still open for discussion–we can only speculate about these topics, as a single hypothesis is difficult to formulate and prove. So I leave these questions unanswered with the expectation that only time will provide the correct answer.

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