



Field : New Media

Type : Research Article

Received: 21.01.2019 - *Accepted*: 27.06.2019

The Evaluation of Social Media within the Context of the Silencing System

Kübra ERDEN*

*Orta Doğu Teknik Üniversitesi, Kurumsal İletişim Ofisi, Ankara

Email: kerdem@metu.edu.tr

Abstract

This study is done as a result of the belief that it is essential to examine the behavior of communicating with people, which is one of the basic requirements of people in the 21st century world, in the scope of digital media and within the framework of the concept of socializing. The aim of this study is to determine whether people socialize or not through social media in digital media environment which is a new field of study apart from traditional media as well as to find out whether they are excluded, alienated or marginalized from social life as a result of using social media and the evaluation of it.

In the study, firstly the academic publications in this area are examined and a theoretical study is formed in the light of the Spiral of Silence Theory. After that, a survey is carried out as a field study. The sample chosen for the survey consists of a total of 366 students studying in Gazi University and Başkent University, Faculties of Communication, in the year of 2016-2017, fall semester

According to the study data evaluated considering the time the participants spend in social media environment, it is discovered that social media does not lead to the socialization of the participants; on the contrary, it causes them to become antisocial by isolating them from their own environments. As a result of the study, internet users, categorized as heavy viewers, are considered to be not very social or antisocial.

Key words: New Media, Social Media, Socialization, Silencing, Anti-socialization



Introduction

In this work, the social media, which has primary role in the development of the digital media, has been explored with the influence of the silence system in the personal and social situations of people.

The effects of social media on the individual and social lives of people, whether they become socialized or not through social media within the concept of socialization, the effect of the communication between people who are in different situations and positions by way of several technological devices on socialness dimension from the theoretical perspective of communication are evaluated in this work.

Spiral of Silence of Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann that is composed in order to understand and explain the relationship of media and public opinion is used as a determinant source within the context of this study

In this work, silence that is one of the patterns of behavior and its theoretic framework are analyzed with the extent of socialization and sociality. The social media platforms are quite various and the concept of “sociality” varies from one to another so the limitation of this study arises from these subjects. People generally spend their time at sharing on social media platforms with the style of using different technological devices (mobile telephone, personal computer, tablet computer etc.)

In this sharing network, the people who become socialized are estranged from where they are with regards to spatial reality and they pass time in a world of their own. It is assumed that this pattern of behavior and the social media consumption that causes it move them to different dimension. In any event or whatever the communication channel is, the preferable world is a virtual world. Social media breaks off people from place and environment they are in. The hypothesis of this study is that the social media consumption makes people asocial and moves them to asocial position.

1. Social Media

In the 21st century, social media as a new communication area offers different alternatives to individuals. Social media is very significant as a communication area in terms of being intensive information flow, being updated perpetually and enabling people to share in all spheres. All people have freedom to find an area where they can share ideas on social media and even they can create this area by themselves. Social media offers a virtual area where people can make fellowship with others; share their ideas, photos and videos of everyday moments through live broadcasts. Due to these



advantages, social media turns into a center of attraction for people of all ages as days pass.

It is a fact that traditional media and social media that are improved by new communication technologies are interacted. Namely, the news which are publicized in the news bulletins, are also shared by people through social media platforms and social sharing networks.

Social media is actually emerged as a result of technology. Due to its structure and platform, it is unthinkable that social media is separate from technology. Social media is a platform that people share on several social networks through technological devices (computer, tablet, mobile phone etc.). It is the most important feature of social media that separates from traditional media. In traditional media, flat communication model described as feedback in the messages arriving from the source to the receiver actualizes much more quickly and effectively via social media.

There are a great number of social sharing networks that form virtual platform as a possibility of technology and that provide people to share data and photos in various areas.

According to Boyd and Ellison's article published in 2007, there are some features that a structure that serves in the Internet environment should have to be a social sharing network.

The first one of them is that it enables an opportunity to create a full or half-open user profile that everyone in the social network can access. The first measure of social sharing network is user profiles. The second feature is that it offers a list of user profiles that individuals have. Finally, the criterion of social sharing network is described as providing an opportunity people to reach profiles in that list. (Boyd and Ellison, 2007: 215)

1.1. Transformation of the Internet Web 1.0, Web 2.0, Web 3.0)

There has been a great transformation in the concept of network in the 21st century when the Internet comes into our lives. When the first systems emerged, content production based on one-way communication is named "Web 1.0". The users had produced contents on "primitive" platform in comparison to the present but bi-directional communication was impossible. "Web 1.0 was an exciting development but this was a closed harbor that only technology addicts and millionaires drop anchor". (Laughey, 2010: 162)

Users' sharing on social media actively started to become a current issue through Web 2.0. "Under favor of wiki, blogs, folksonomies and social sharing networks, Web 2.0 gives people an opportunity to write, send and publish content regardless of middleware software." (Laughey, 2010: 163).



Social media logged out monological platform through Web 2.0 and it offers an infrastructure that allows bi-directional communication. It has become possible for people to "talk" to each other, to send and receive data, and to play "mutual" games in the virtual environment. The technological implication of the user-centric approach has been with Web 3.0. The emergence of social media first with the discovery of The Internet and then Web 2.0 and Web 3.0 that started to be used in the world show us "individual orientation" on social media. The new technologies in informatics area are produced as oriented to find asked data and share it easily by users.

With the technology of Web 3.0, user-centered the Internet conception has evolved. Social media has shaped as a platform that offers proposals to users. "Even if Web 3.0 that contains revolutionary innovations as new information blooming at web technology is stated with definitional varieties, it is an adventure of making World Wide Web that is a pile of data that has no semantic relation between each other to be meaningful." (Yağcı, 2009: 138).

1.2. Environment and Social Media

At the present day, the Internet is not only a new media where exchange of information actualizes but also it is a consumed thing. One of the usage area of the Internet as a consumption thing is visual environment. The virtual world is built on a space frame that is independent of the physical, temporal, and temporal boundaries of the physical world".

It is now possible to access the Internet from many corners of the world. Through this access, the concept of locality has begun to become increasingly uncertain. The boundaries of the geography have started to decrease thanks to technology. "The Internet has developed a complex environment/space understanding to make rethink about the borders/definition of geography we live in by asking questions such as where local is, where general is, where national is. (Atabek, 2005: 71). In addition to this, the term of "virtual geography" is used as a generated oneiromancy. The term of locality started to lose its significance because it could be reached to local newspaper-magazine broadcasting in small settlements from all over the world by way of the Internet. Here, it can be given as an example of greying borders of locality.

1.3. Formation of Virtual Identity

Nowadays, there is the construction of virtual identities as a phenomenon that takes shape in the virtual environment apart from the identity that people have. The condition of joining social media actively is often to register a social network by creating a username and password. When users register, they have the freedom to create profiles with real or unreal identity information. There is usually no mechanism for questioning and checking the validity of the profile and the information contained therein. In this case, people are confronted with "virtual identity creation".



The opportunities of people to share unlimited sharing through social media offer them a free environment. This freedom, which takes place through social media, leads individuals to build an identity in the virtual environment. Statues, titles, and identities that are desired to have in real life emerge in social media unrealistically. Social sharing networks within social media present identities that users want to be in real life but they cannot.

In other words, users can make a virtual life in sharing networks. In this context, most of the profile features of the users' at social network are able to characterize the lifestyle they want but cannot reach. (Binark from Goffman vd, 2009:30). On the social media platforms, the socialization generated by the sharing of individuals usually creates the isolated conditions. This is the base contradiction. The individual is possessed with a social illusion on the social media. The ideas that emerge in this regard can basically be grouped into three groups. According to the first view, social media is regarded as an area where the socialization practices realized in the real life of the individual are carried to the virtual extension. According to the second approach, social media is bringing about a new kind of socialization by producing unique conditions. The third approach is that social media is largely dominated by being asocial not being socialized.

It is seen that most people are interested in social media channels they enter from mobile phones rather than being interested in people at cafes, cinemas and parks where the people socialize. It seems that the individual's life is now separated by a dichotomy that needs to be found both "there and here". "The start of communication through social networks by abandoning traditional forms of communication among individuals brings along social alienation and loneliness. Social communication becomes widespread and so modern people do not have enough time to communicate centrally." (Karagülle ve Çaycı, 2014:1)

2. The System of Silence

The studies of silence have an important difference in terms of communication sciences even if it is discussed by several disciplines. Communication sciences define silence and talking as two important dialectics. This definition reveals the necessity of explanation of soundness term in order to clarify silence in the strict sense. The important point here is "making effective communication" in interpersonal communication. According to communication sciences, soundness and silence should be in existence together. In the soundness where the message goes receiver from the source, if receiver does not listen actively -that means if s/he does not achieve the condition of silence- it cannot be said that there is an effective communication.

When silence and soundness are not in existence simultaneously, nobody listens each other even it cannot be made mention of communication medium. (Şehitoğlu, 2010: 2).

There are five dual functions of silence evaluated in communication sciences. (Pinder and Harlos, 2001: 338).



- Silence can gather people but also it can disconnect them.
- Silence can bring benefit to people but also it can damage them.
- Silence can provide knowledge for people but also it can hide information from them.
- Silence can direct people to deep in thought but also it can cause absence of thought.
- Silence can direct people to espousing and also ignoring.

It is clear that silence is a pattern of behavior that emerges under different conditions. That is why there are lots of studies that researches acquiescence behavior and its reasons. According to a study of Dutton composed in 1997, the situation a person that prefers staying at silent position or adopting talking is determined by profit and loss parameter. Passing to talking activity is a way of behavior that people consider how this action gains favor to them or what kind of losses incur. Before the individual begins to talk or silence, the mental process is active. It makes a benefit / cost analysis by imagining the possible cost of talking. Direct and indirect costs can be mentioned here. When a person takes a decision to talk and s/he does not gain favor, s/he loses time and energy and her/his image is damaged. (Dutton vd. 1997)

2.1. Spiral of Silence Theory

The theory of Spiral of Silence, which was developed by the German sociologist Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann in 1974, is a socio-psychological thought that arises from ideas of people about other people. The spiral theory of silence suggests that "the fear of individual exclusion or isolation is the prime factor explaining the need to constantly monitor and control the climate of impression in the political environment in terms of individuals." (Noelle-Neumann, 1984: 167)

"According to this hypothesis, the fear of isolation of individuals from society is due to the fact that human beings are social beings according to their nature." (Mutlu, 2008: 271-272) People are constantly observing the society they live in and, as a result of these observations, are behaving in accordance with what the most common opinion is. It is an important theory determining in which situation people express their thoughts in the viewpoints and debates. Individuals seem to agree or adapt consensus with fear of exclusion from society. Social life drives them out of society if they do not come around. People want to be accepted in society because people are part of social life from birth. But if they have an idea that is different from others' thought, they are afraid that they will not be accepted. With this fear, even if they do not share similar views, people agree with the majority's opinion.

The silent spiral process is based on four main assumptions and a fifth assumption that connects them:

1. Society threatens to exclude individuals who go beyond general reconciliation.



2. Individuals always afraid exclusion.
3. Individuals try to observe and evaluate their opinion because of fear of exclusion.
4. The consequences of these observations affect the behavior of the individual, particularly in public, in terms of expressing or hiding his or her views (speech or silence).

Neumann refers to fifth hypothesis as a complementary of these four assumptions and makes an inference about the formation, preservation and change of the public. (Neumann, 1998: 274)

Noelle-Neumann mentions that society is in general reconciliation, while explaining the assumptions underlying the spiral of silence theory. The whole issue is hidden in the practice of continuing this compromise. People lead their movements and shape their behavior in order not to be excluded from society norms accordingly because society excludes people who do not share common opinion.

If individuals believe that they are on their own while buying into, they are hesitant to say it clearly. However, if they think that their thoughts are worth seeing and sharing with other people, they make their point. People live under the threat of exclusion in social life consistently.

3. The Evaluation of Social Media in the Context of Silence System- Questionnaire Study

3.1. The Objective and the Scope of the Study

In this research, it is aimed to analyze whether they are in asocial position or not and the socialization practices of university students who are social media users. As an irreplaceable feature of our day, the social media penetrating into every aspect of our life has been analyzed in the selected sample by investigating whether it is part of the socialization system in terms of sociality in human life.

3.2. The Limits of the Study

The limit of the research consists of 366 people living in Ankara and studying at Faculty of Communication Field of Gazi University and Başkent University scanning was performed in the direction of the sample selected for this study.

3.3. The Importance of the Study

In this research, which is carried out to evaluate the social media in the context of the silence system, it is important to evaluate social media usage and socialization practices of university students.

In today's conditions, as a result of the development of technology, the increase of social media users day by day and the transfer of daily life to visual environment, it is necessary



to analyze the reality situation of the idea of “socialization” by individuals through social media.

In this context, this research has been carried out in the context of the question of what access instruments and access time are, in what circumstances people need it, whether they take social identity with their real identity and in which case they prefer silence.

3.4. The Method of Data Acquisition

In the fall semester of 2016-2017, a questionnaire of a total of 47 questions was made with 366 students that are studied at Faculty of Communication, Gazi University and the Faculty of Communication, Başkent University by face to face interview method. In the first part of the questionnaire, participants' demographic questions (university, department, age, gender, income situation, etc.) are taken part. Then, there are questions about the Internet usage practices that show how participants use the Internet and social media most, what social sharing network they prefer to use and these questions provide to measure that whether they use real or virtual identities while they are in these networks. In the third and fourth part of the questionnaire, the form of the silence system and reason for using social media determines how often the students use social media.

3.5. Data Analysis

The analysis is made by using the statistical data obtained as a result of the survey study conducted within the scope of the research. Confidence analysis was first performed on the data analyzed using the SPSS 19.0 package program and then descriptive statistics were analyzed for each of the expressions.

3.6. Confidence Analysis of the Study

The reliability value is an indicator of the measuring tool that gives same resultant degree in repeated measurements. It is expected that the reliability value shows the views of the people that they have same views as equal. For this, the way the questions are expressed is very important. In addition, confidence analysis provides information on whether the scale items to be used in practice are same as the serviceable items or not. Expressions that can be interpreted differently by different people reduce the reliability of measurement results.

For this reason, after the questionnaire survey is completed, the data obtained are subjected to Confidence analysis and the results of the reliability analysis show us the questions that led to such interpretation error.

The Coefficient of Confidence Analysis

Table 1. The Coefficient of Confidence Analysis of the Study



Confidence Statistics		
Cronbach's Coefficient	Alpha	The Number of Matter
0,935		26

The Cronbach Alpha value indicates the reliability level of the questions. At the end of the research, the level of the confidence is found as $\alpha=0,935$. It is seen that the survey research is reliable highly according to evaluation criteria of Alpha coefficient.

3.7. Findings

52.19 percent of the university students participated in our survey, are man and 47.81 percent of them are women. 358 of them stated that they have the Internet connectivity and 8 students expressed that they do not have the Internet connectivity. 97.81 percent of participants surveyed connect to the Internet from their mobile phones.

48.91 percent of the 366 university students participating in our survey are studying at Communication Faculty of Başkent University and 51.09 percent of them are studying at Communication Faculty of Gazi University. All of 366 university students surveyed use the Internet. The fact that the Internet usage rate is so high shows how young people in the university age integrate with technology and the digital world.

The 98.63 percent of the participants who provided access to the Internet said that they used any of the social networks. The usage rate of social networks such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram is quite common among participants. The 1.37 percent of them denied using social sharing networks.

56.83 percent of the respondents said that they use real identity in their social network accounts and 43.17 percent of them said that they hide their real identity information in social networks. On the social media, even though the percent of participants who use real identity information in daily life is high, the percentage of students who use do not real identity information is also high. This gives us information about creating a virtual identity. Individuals that do not want to use their real names on social media create virtual reality

A total of 57.38 percent of respondents reported that they did not meet face to face with the people they met through social net and 42.62 percent of the participants said exact opposite.

It is obvious that social media offers an opportunity to people that are in struggle for socialization according to participate rate. Individuals who meet on the Internet and carry this relation to their daily real environment are integrated within the virtual world and



social life. The 96.17 percent of the participants stated that they use the Internet when they get bored and the 74.32 of them stated that they do not get bored while using the Internet. They stated that they tend towards social media every time they get bored through mobile devices like mobile phones in daily rituals (at public transportation, during lesson, spending time with friends). This ratio is so high and it shows us that social media takes on a rescue mission in environment where people do not like it and it leads them off whereabouts.

When the answers of 366 students participating in our survey are examined with regard to factor 1;

The percent of people that said “If there are people that I do not like, I do not share and I prefer silence and reticence” is 67.21 (53.01+14.21) It can be stated that what drives people to silence is other people in the same environment. As a phenomenon that silences people, the social or virtual presence of people they do not like can cause the development of silence behavior.

The percent of people that said “When I do not like talking on social sharing networks, I prefer silence and reticence” is 72.68 (51.37+21.31). This value, which is quite high compared to the result of the research, shows that the subjects that are spoken in the environment are leading the factors leading people to silence. Individuals are embarrassed to comment on issues outside their areas of interest and they retreat into silence.

The percent of people that said “When I fear that people I follow in social networks will not like my sharing, I prefer silence and reticence” is 66.58 (43.56+23.01) People are able to communicate only through signs and symbols in social networks without putting their thoughts on paper. People can exhibit silence behavior because they are afraid that other people in social platforms will not like their sharing. Participants can become silent with the fear of disfavor and the fear of exclusion that carry the explanatory characteristics of the spiral of silence theory.

The percent of people that said “I express myself well at social media.” is 75.41 (43.44+31.97). The results show that people use social media as an explanandum outside of their real lives. The fact that individuals express themselves better on social media instead of expressing themselves by communicating face-to-face in daily life is concerned with the social media enabling written and non-verbal communication.

The percent of people that said “If I do not have a conversation with my friends and use social media, I think that I am excluded from their environment” is 71.86 (35.25+36.61). People think that they will be excluded if they do not share the synchronous and co-resident environment with other people they share in the real environment.



People live in a fear of exclusion of their friends if they alienate themselves from environment they are in and take part in social media platforms. Here again, we see that fear of exclusion leads people to silence and it causes the individuals to act and create pressure on them.

The percent of people that said “I prefer being in communication through social media networks rather than making face to face contact” is 77.05 (33.06+43.99). It is meaningful that participants prefer such a high incidence of virtual environment.

Indicators of the research results demonstrate that the social environment in which the individuals were involved was largely unreal.

When the answers of 366 students participating in our survey are examined with regard to factor 2;

The percent of people that said “I use social media because it falls into a habit now” is 92.08 (51.64+40.44). The “addiction” dimension of social media shows us the Internet and social media addiction. The Internet addiction that is one of the widespread problems of present-day is an addiction type that prevents social lives of youth as well as people of all ages.

The percent of people that said “I use social media because I do not have got better things to do” is 44.81 (25.41+19.40). The majority of the participants surveyed prefer using social media to do some things not having any better things. Individuals use social media because of that they feel it necessary not because of despair or gap.

The percent of people that said “I use social media because I wonder what my friends do on social media” is 85.79 (50.27+35.52). The willingness of people to maintain friendship relations they have in social life also in the virtual environment and the desire not to lag behind in the friend environment necessitates maintaining their connections through social media. Individuals share many situations, photographs and thoughts about the events that take place in daily life through social media and it is maintained by “following” and “be followed” by their friends who are in social life.

The percent of people that said “I use social media because I do not feel lonely” is 84.15 (39.62+44.54). Social media has even taken the place of people's loneliness. When people feel loneliness in their own personal world, they tend to use social media to prevent loneliness. In the past, the concept of socialization involves being together but not it is preferred by people in the virtual environment if they become lonely.

The percent of people that said “I use social media because if I do not use it, I will be excluded” is 66.94 (33.43+38.51). This situation shows that the most of the youth using social media are afraid of being excluded by their friends if they do not use social media. Being active in social media can be a choice but at the same time it can be seen as a necessity to maintain friendship in real environment. Here, there is attractiveness of



afraid. The afraid of losing something while people are not using social media creates pressure on them and it causes attractiveness of afraid.

4. Conclusion

According to survey results, all of the students that participate in survey use Internet. The 98.63 percent of individuals using Internet state that they use either of social sharing networks. The usage rate of university students does not differentiate as to their age. The amount of monthly earning and the ownership of personal Internet access do not have an important effect on the usage rate of social media.

The students of all ages and income situation also use social media. Individuals can exhibit silence behavior because they are afraid that their friends will not like their sharing on media. Participants can become quiet as a result of the afraid of disfavor and exclusion that carry the explanatory characteristics of the spiral of silence theory. The theory that Noelle-Neumann developed in the 20th Century shapes even the social practices of the 21st Century.

People think that they will be excluded if they do not share the synchronous and co-resident environment with other people they share in the real environment. Here again, it is emerged that the fear of exclusion gives a fillip to people and leads them to silence and reticence by creating pressure on them. Indicators of the research results demonstrate that the social environment in which the individuals were involved was largely unreal. Individuals prefer to express themselves by mode of communication that is used on social environment not by face to face communication.

Internet and technology addiction among young people is increasing day by day. The statistics rate correcting that social media becomes an addiction is 92.08 percent. The addiction dimension of social media shows us addiction of Internet and social media. In the age of university, where the youth are the most active and dynamic, the rate of those using social media because of “nothing better to do” was measured as 44.81 percent. In an era when they are so productive and fertile, it seems that university students are being directed to social media because they cannot find a better activity to do.

In the crowded world, people’s feeling of loneliness is one of the research objects that sociologists have searched. As individuals feel lonely, they tend to use social media.

As people feel lonely in their own personal world, they tend to use social media to preclude loneliness. The percentage of those who use social media to avoid being excluded and being abstracted from a circle of friends is 66.94 percent. This situation shows that the most of the youth using social media are afraid of being excluded by their friends if they do not use social media. When the results of the research are evaluated, it



has been determined that social media is an indispensable element of human life in today's world and that has many effects on people's lives.

Individuals are able to use social media in a highly active way, and they spare pretty much time to that in their lives. Given the time spent by participants in social sharing networks, 37.98 percent of them spends 1 to 3 hours on social media, 13.11 percent of them spends 5 to 7 hours, 12.30 percent of them spends 7 hours and above.

The point to be emphasized here is that the ratio of those who spend time in the social media for 7 hours and above is quite remarkable. They spend almost one-third of their days in social networks during their age when they are most productive and active and this will bring difficulties with it.

Findings in the research confirm the hypothesis of this study: "Social media does not socialize people, it makes them asocial." Individuals spend most of their time in the virtual environment with the illusion that they are free to use social media and communicate limitlessly. Social media isolates individuals from their surroundings and weds them to virtual space.

People reflect their common aspects that are suppressed with the area of freedom arising from virtual identity. Goffman states that social sharing network practices do not socialize individuals rather it maintains existing social relations in real life in contrast to common thought. (Goffman, 2009: 47) Social sharing networks can be seen as a new face of socialization. However, "social media does not socialize; it changes the definition of socialization. It can be called as being asocial if it is evaluated according to old norms." (Türkoğlu, 2013: 255).

5. Suggestions

Being productive and designing productive activities in social life can be instructed to young people. It can be provided young people to find better things to do instead of spending time on the social media. There can be studies that remove social media and the Internet addiction as one of the most important problems for young people. Social media habits of young people can be reduced by organizing fertile activities inside and outside of the university by academic staff. Today, online education models in many universities and educational institutions can be carried out in many courses. To enable students to use social media more efficiently and effectively, some of the courses can be provided as online training. It can be provided that students benefit from social media in proportion to high profitability.

Awareness-raising studies can be done to show the psychological problems caused by social media and physiological problems caused by long-term use. In parallel with it, public spots can be made and published. Educational conferences and student-centered symposiums can be organized. Students can be encouraged to produce ideas and information. Young people can be directed to productive activities at school campuses



where young people spend a lot of time. Physical sports activities, student clubs, libraries and student centers can be supported by national and international projects.

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