

PhD Dissertation

Book of Thesis

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THE NARCISSISTIC MAN OF SOCIAL MEDIA

The technological view of man in the 21th century

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1. Introduction

The aim of my dissertation is to present a possible approach of the view of the man based on social networking sites (SNSs) since their appearance. My main research questions are to what extent and how social media shaped our relation to the world. Specifically I will focus on the main features and notions of the discourse of 'technological idea of man' in the 21th century; and how we can have a glance at this discourse from an outside perspective.

Statement of the Problem

The number of SNSs and their users is exponentially increasing. In 2010 0.98 billion, in 2017 more than 2.46 billion people registered on different SNSs. Forecasts predict that the number of users will exceed 3 billion by 2021, thus 40 percentage of the population of the World will be registered to a SNS. On the one hand, this means a stable growth in proportion as well: the users' number grows faster than the growth of population, so an increasing part of people will be SNS user. On the other hand, the intensification of use (time-wise) is also noticeable, so not only the number of users is increasing, but also the time spent by a user on SNSs. Thus physical humans are increasingly represented in a digital world. The interaction of man and SNS is intensely researched by different disciplines, such as philosophy, psychology, management studies and social sciences. My approach will be from a socio-theoretical perspective.

2. Methodology

Rationale

The dissertation is a descriptive social theoretical study that builds on the empirical findings and results of former studies from the

fields of psychology, social psychology, communication and media theory.

My approach is more in the tradition of the philosophical ‘essay’, in the meaning that it is an ‘experimental’ and ‘open’ research, and not a definitive stance on the issue. As the phenomena is still evolving, I will not be presenting a singular theory, but introduce multiple, contradicting theories on the matter to the extent that these are underlining or adding to the integrity of the argumentation.

Aims

A: Overview of the theories of technology in order to find an approach through which social media as technology may be described.

B: Overview of the principles, procedures and notions of social media in connection to the individual.

C: Overview of the discourses on narcissism between 1897 and 2020, particularly in relation to SNSs.

D: Presentation of the individual through SNS, from an outside perspective on the discourse itself, with the emergence of SNSs.

Overview of the Chapters

In the first chapter I will present the definition of technology and a typology on theories of technology. The overview of the different social theoretical thinkers’ arguments on the relationship between man and technology will be based on Steve Matthewman’s (2011) and Andrew Feenberg’s (1999) typologies. My approach is humanistic in the sense that I consider man as the primary actor in relation to technology. The freedom of choice and the ability to choose will remain a human characteristic, even if SNSs have an impact on human behavior or worldview and thus producing

structural changes on the individual and societal level, with far-reaching consequences.

Secondly, I am examining the SNSs through the writings of Michel Foucault. The study focuses on his works relating to power written between 1972 and 1976. This dissertation will not be treating Foucault's whole writing on the topic of the power, solely his understanding of the relationship between man and social media is the topic of my dissertation. For the use of this theory, I draw parallel and use the word technology as per Foucault's definition of power. Thus the social media sites could be understood as power institutions such as they were established in the 18th and 19th century. The description was similarly made along the principles of panopticism in order to summarize the notions, principles and procedures in relation to man and technology.

In the second part, I will examine the term 'narcissism' and how its meaning evolved in the last 100 year, searching for the milestones of the phenomena in relation to man, especially the presence and manifestations of narcissism in social media.

In the final part, the dissertation is concluding with two chapters with the limitations of the study and analysis and presetting further areas of research related to the motive of narcissism.

3. Results

Research Questions

1. Technology and man mutually shape each other. Technology may have positive and negative effect on the individual and on society as well. However – presuming man as the principal actor – I also assume that the opportunity will always remain for the individual to bring the change it wants to see in the world.

Based on Feenberg's typology (1999), in accordance with critical thinkers on technology (including Ortega y Gasset, Lewis Mumford,

Herbert Marcuse, Hans Jonas and Michel Foucault) my argumentation is based on the view that man creates technology, that technology is without independent 'inner essence' and although it has an impact on the individual, the primacy of the individual is unquestionable – thus theoretically the responsibility of action remains on the individual's side.

2 The notion of 'technology' can be analogous to that of 'power' in Michel Foucault's works written between 1972 and 1976.

Power is something that is found and is operating through relationships between individuals, creating a unique 'surplus' (excess): power creates its particular system, socio-cultural milieu, manifesting through objects, activities, special forms of knowledge. In this regard power may be conceived as technology.

3. Social media may be interpreted as power institution, whose principles, procedures and techniques multiply knowledge collected from and by people.

Michel Foucault summarized the manifestations of power in the 18th century in the term 'panopticism'. In his view, people in the enlightenment's culture of ratio, technology, and its principles and procedures were created in the light of utilitarianism. Utility is upheld by normalization and docility, maintained simultaneously by measurement, inquiry and examination.

4. Social media – examining according to principles of panopticism – is an organizing force of place, time, activities and people.

On SNSs space is simultaneously isolated and transparent, time is liquid and prompt, presence is passive (following) and active (creation), while individualization and totalization of procedures and methods can be seen at the same time.

5. Panopticism creates a subjectivation which realizes itself at individual level as self-orientation and individualization, which creates in its character a narcissistic type of personality.

The arousal and awareness of narcissism is both an aim and a tool of the procedures, because this (attention) ‘surplus’ ensures the extension and the survival of the institution (SNSs).

6. For users social media is a space where they can get closer to their inner self, where their (at least online) personality can be created, represented and experienced.

Social media environment has an impact on users’ perceptions of themselves and others, their behavior, way of thinking and personality. In social media, sharing of activities and thoughts – and their representation and documentation – facilitates and rewards self-reflection and self-representation. The consequence is the valorization of the (online) personality for its owner and sustains the whole system. This has an effect on consumption habits and activities on SNSs, enforcing users to become more and more involved on the sites. This ‘self-representation spiral’ thus portrays a narcissistic man on SNSs.

7. Despite of this, there is no empirical evidence of a connection between culmination of narcissistic personality traits and social media use. The causality could not be grasped either.

In the light of former surveys, there is no clear connection between social media use and the presence or the empowerment of narcissistic personality traits; the causality is uncertain either. Without statistical evidence – although we usually speak about an undoubtedly existing phenomenon – the arguments against the online presence and activities seem to be weakening.

8. By examining the discourse on narcissism, the extending logic of psychological process may be illustrated.

Psychology empowers it by its focus on personality, the appreciation of the self and the care of self, by highlighting the experience and expression of personal feelings and inner obsessions. The procedure is ever-extending, and is advocating its own logic in other areas as well.

The term ‘narcissism’ originated from the Viennese psychoanalysts’ vocabulary and transferred to the medical canon by 1980, spread and became measurable (1979) in social sciences and then popularized in Anglo-Saxon countries. Since the Millennium, the normalization of narcissistic behavior has started. The scientific literature and the multitude of non-fiction books illustrate this trend.

9. The importance of narcissism is given by the fact that it sheds light on the tendency that the individual of our age defines itself by psychological terms.

Conclusions

The conclusion of my dissertation is that the appearance of SNSs contributed to the change of the individual’s storytelling of itself. Without expanding on the shift occurred in man’s personality, I argue that in relation to social media sites, our thinking is organized around and by the motive of narcissism.

The acceptance of the central role of the personality creates a radically individualist reference system and thinking framework, which both in theoretical thinking and in public discourse may lead to the fall of community-based thinking, or as Durkheim referred to the disintegration of society as well.

This issue raises the importance of conceptualizing some other reference systems which highlight the primacy of man to technology and stress the importance of community as an organizing principle of our thinking.

4. Research activities

Nóra KEPE (2020): *Narcissism and self-adoring man in social media - from here and beyond*. Philological Academy of Pest (PBA), lecture (delayed).

Nóra KEPE (2019): *Who if not me? The view of man in social media*. Philological Academy of Pest (PBA), 4 lectures.

Nóra KEPE (2019): *The psychologic discourse through the term of narcissism*. Spring Wind Conference, lecture, 1st award.

Nóra Kepe (2018): *Blessing or curse? The role of narcissism in the criticism of consumer society in the USA*. Molnár Tamás Research Center, paper.

Kepe, N. (2018): *Why not to forget Foucault? The relevance of the panopticism*. Interdisciplinary Doctoral Conference, lecture.

Nóra KEPE (2018): *What if it is #addicted to you? Factors explaining the spread of social media in the 21th century*. Spring Wind Conference, lecture.

Nóra KEPE (2017): *Narcissism as new form of surveillance*. National Scientific Students' Associations Conference (OTDK), lecture.