

CALL FOR PAPER FOR E/C

## **A JOURNEY IN SOCIAL NETWORKS**

**EDS**

**NICOLA BIGI**, OPERA RESEARCH UNIT, UNIVERSITÀ DI MODENA E REGGIO EMILIA

**ELENA CODELUPPI**, OPERA RESEARCH UNIT, UNIVERSITÀ DI MODENA E REGGIO EMILIA

**ANTONIO SANTANGELO**, UNIVERSITÀ DI TORINO.

If we wanted to give a trivial definition of the social network's phenomenon, we could say that a social network is a connection between people characterized by different types of ties: work, friendship, kinship. However, such a phenomenon is not simply an internet-based reproduction of the social relations we develop in everyday life. Web-based social networks extend the concepts of sharing and participating, and develop one of the most advanced forms of communication based on the mapping of relational structures. The construction of these ties is based on the so-called 'web 2.0' methodologies: Web sites and applications bring to final users contents directly generated by the consumers themselves.

There are many potential streams of research that can be investigated from a semiotic viewpoint. Let us summarize some possible ideas for a research.

- **SEMANTIC WEB**

One potential stream of research is represented by the theory of socio-semantic web (s2w). According to this perspective, the mass of information and cultural production is placed in an interconnected network producing an active link between the users who create online contents (e.g., StumbleUpon and Funchain). In this case, we can talk of hybrid forms of social networks, which posit themselves in the middle of a continuum in which, on one side, there are pure forms of social network and, on the other, web sites that allow weblog authors to publicize their posts (i.e. the aggregators). Moreover, there is also the interesting phenomenon of continuous translations of remixes and remakes within aggregators like Tumblr, where people can 'post' pictures, writings, videos, combining personal comments that enhance or narcotize some isotopies.

- **REMIX AND REMAKE**

An autonomous reflection must be conducted on the issue of remixing and remaking contents produced by other media or directly by web users. In a 2.0 web context, in fact, people who

participate in social networks use to build their identities through shared texts. These texts can be very diverse. For example, we could have short clips of TV shows that have caused a sensation and relevant discussions on other media, collections of the most significant moments in a famous football player's career, a rock star's videoclip, advertisings, sequences of a cult movie, and so on. In other cases, it is a matter of assembling these kinds of content, revisiting them from a different point of view (e.g., humoristic or critical), or of uploading original texts directly created for the web and able to attract people's attention. Sharing all these materials can determine direct effects on the aesthetics of genres; but there are also some pragmatics effects, as every musician who promotes her/himself through the web knows, as well as mass media professionals, who use the web to gain visibility for their products. In both cases, it is important being able to find an inner consistency between the final users and the contents they want to experiment.

- **MARKETING**

The advent of social networks (Myspace, Flickr, Facebook, Anobii, YouTube, etc..) contributed also to the implementation of new forms of marketing and advertising based on the word of mouth. In this scenario, the final consumer is no more a passive target, but becomes an active player, who contributes in increasing a brand awareness. New forms of marketing (i.e., Viral Marketing, Guerrilla Marketing, Buzz Marketing, Ambient Marketing) are becoming very popular and are all based on the involvement of customers in creating buzz on the web. However, some questions remain still unanswered. For example, how should contents be structured in order to increase their effectiveness in involving and encouraging final consumers to share something connected to companies? What kinds of contribution does the reader provide to the text? Which is the importance of passionate involvement in this type of marketing?

- **SEMIOTICS OF CULTURE AND MEDIA THEORIES**

Web-based marketing strategies are only one of the most evident examples of a wider phenomenon: the connections and the reciprocal influences between aesthetics, contents and communication practices of traditional and new media. As far as this issue is concerned, social networks could be very important, since they represent a more effective medium to diffuse information and messages that are not consistent with TV or other traditional media. Of course, there are other kinds of subjects that can be diffused through both TV and the Internet, but in this case it is necessary to implement different enunciational strategies. Finally, there can be also contents that shift from a type of media to another and viceversa, as showed by the case of

information exchange between newspapers and their on-line versions, or pay-TV channels dedicated to tourism, which exploit traditional TV channels to launch their web-tvs and where they broadcast user-generated videos that copy the form of television reportages. All these examples lead us to think about the cultural models that circulate through different media and on the practices that set up the rules of content exchanges between different media.

- COMPETENCE AND SHARED KNOWLEDGE

Social networks could also be interpreted as an effective organizational tool that facilitates cooperation and shared learning, which, in turn, enable knowledge sharing and facilitate innovation. The structure of horizontal and informal relationships among individuals who are members of different communities of practices allow the dissemination of experiences and represent an important example of social learning. How could social networks affect the organizing of knowledge within companies and communities of practices composed by professionals working in different organizational contexts? How could the practices of learning be affected by the model of social tagging?

- SOCIAL NETWORK AND LOCAL GOVERNEMENT

Local governments (i.e., municipalities, provinces, and regions) are experimenting different models of social networks in order to increase the involvement and the commitment of both citizens and employees. However, it is still not clear which the more effective ways to experience could be and which different results they could lead to. Furthermore, the relationship between social network and public administration is strongly linked to the creation of consent and the management of different constituencies (not only during election campaigns). Thus, it is important to address this issue by investigating the role played by social networks in structuring innovative ways to organize active citizenship, and to optimize the work of public administrations' employees.

- LOCAL PRACTICES AND SOCIAL NETWORKS

One of the most interesting aspects in addressing the issue of social networks is that even though it could be interpreted as a global phenomenon, uses and approaches to social networks still vary from country to country. Facebook is not the most used social network in the world: in some countries Myspace is more used, in others Badoo. Furthermore, being equal the degree of a social network's penetration in different countries, we could observe significant differences in how people from different countries tend to use the same social network. Therefore, it seems

interesting to shed some light on this phenomenon in order to better understand the local practices of a such an important global phenomenon.

- **CONSENT CONSTRUCTION AND SOCIAL NETWORKS INFLUENCE ON THE POLITICAL DISCOURSE**  
In this period of general disbelief towards the political system – at least towards the Italian and European one - we finally propose to think about the influence of social networks in the consent construction and their influence on the political discourse, in terms of themes that they impose to the media, the way they interact with other political discourses present on different communication platforms, and the way they are able to ‘push’ citizens to action, especially when they unify people around positions that contain proposals, that are not the simple opposition to the discourses of “mass media politics”.

This special issue hopes to begin to unpack this issues and instigate further research and debate on this timely topic. We encourage submission of papers that deal directly with the proposed themes as well as with adjacent questions.

**NEW DATE Submission deadline (max 600 words)**

20 september 2009

**NEW DATE Notification of acceptance**

29 september 2009

**Submittal of final paper (max 6000 words + images)**

20 january 2009

**Pubblication date**

20 february 2010

Please send your abstract with your name and affiliation to:

[elena.codeluppi@unimore.it](mailto:elena.codeluppi@unimore.it)

[nicola.biggi@unimore.it](mailto:nicola.biggi@unimore.it)

[antosan75@libero.it](mailto:antosan75@libero.it)