

Chapter 80

The Influence of Groupthink on Culture and Conflict in Twitter

Godfrey A. Steele

The University of the West Indies, Trinidad and Tobago

Niekitta Zephyrine

The University of the West Indies, Trinidad and Tobago

ABSTRACT

Groupthink puts pressure on individuals to conform to social norms, but anonymity has been found to reduce or lessen such influence. Apart from anonymity, the significance of the topic and self-censorship may or may not contribute to the influence of groupthink. Groupthink has been studied in the context of social media using various approaches, but to date it remains unclear how much and to what extent it influences the conflict among users within this cultural context. This chapter describes approaches to studying the influence of groupthink on the users of an open social media platform (e.g., Twitter) and proposes a methodology for conducting a study. Using data from a selected hashtag, it reports on the application of theory to research, considers the role and influence of groupthink, and discusses the implications of the findings for reconceptualizing approaches to the study of new media.

INTRODUCTION

In six main sections, this chapter systematically reviews contemporary research on groupthink, exploring its influence on culture and conflict to formulate a theoretical framework for studying the influence of groupthink on culture and conflict. It reports on an empirical test of that model within an online open community and discusses the findings and implications for understanding and reconceptualizing new media, before concluding.

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BACKGROUND

A Review of the Groupthink Literature in Newer Media Settings

Overview

This chapter presents the outcomes of conducting a keyword search of groupthink, social networking sites (SNS), culture, conflict and related terms in selected databases in communication, focusing on Twitter. The rationale for focusing on Twitter is based on the growing prevalence and use of Twitter as a social diary and as a popular site for intercultural connection and conflict interaction. Twitter is a medium for intercultural connections and expressions and conflict interactions that may be integrative and disruptive. In the absence of a comprehensive review of social media since the review of scholarship on SNS (Boyd & Ellison, 2008) and later research on social networking sites spanning 2004-2015 (Meng, Martinez, Holmstrom, Chung, & Cox, 2017), there is need for an overarching theoretical framework and a method for studying SNS as an evolving aspect of new media reconceptualization in human communication. Current concepts are presented in this first section. This presentation begins with defining groupthink, its precursors or predisposing conditions, and proceeds by defining culture, intercultural connections, conflict, conflict interactions, social networking sites and Twitter.

Concepts

Groupthink, based on Janis' (1972) social psychological theory, is characterized by a:

mode of thinking in which individual members of small cohesive groups tend to accept a viewpoint or conclusion that represents a perceived group consensus, whether or not the group members believe it to be valid, correct, or optimal. Groupthink reduces the efficiency of collective problem solving within such groups (Schmidt, 2013).

Groupthink is associated with the desire to fit in, modifying our individual opinions so that they move in the direction of a consensus, avoiding speaking out based on one's beliefs to keeping quiet to avoid causing problems (Katopol, 2015). When there is dissent on social media such as Twitter, how do persons respond? It has been suggested that two main themes emerge in organizational settings (Garner, 2017). First, prior dissent events chain together and a dissent event can be understood in the context of other events, thereby influencing the expression of future dissent. Second, the channel of expression seems to be guided by unwritten rules about what is appropriate and when channels such as emails or social media are used. In the case of Twitter, it is unclear whether these themes are applicable.

Culture is the shared assumptions, beliefs, practices and patterns of behavior among groups of persons. Within any culture there may be subgroups. Intercultural communication occurs among subgroups within a cultural context, and between groups within and between cultures. Interactions between ideas and issues across various contexts of communication such as computer-mediated and political communication and other forms of communication are essentially manifestations and expressions of intercultural communication broadly defined. Intercultural connections are facilitated by social media platforms which allow

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