Chapter 5
Dynamic Social Impact Theory:
Heterophily and Homophily in Socio-Culturally Mediated Communication (SCMC)

Binod Sundararajan
Dalhousie University, Canada

Elizabeth Tetzlaff
Dalhousie University, Canada

ABSTRACT

Following the sociocultural traditions of communication, the authors explore the commonalities between Latané's dynamic social impact theory (DSIT), and the concepts of homophily and heterophily, and find that the markers of DSIT appear quite strikingly similar to the concepts similarity espoused by homophily (i.e., clustering, correlation, and consolidation), while the continuing diversity in DSIT is very similar to heterophily, which exists in groups and cultures. The authors test these concepts by analyzing two different blog conversations and find support to the above propositions. In the process, the authors suggest that social media should be retitled sociocultural media as this media aids in the creation and maintenance of cultures that coexist with those of differing viewpoints.

INTRODUCTION

Individual and collective identities are in a constant state of flux, particularly in the modern socio-culturally mediated communication environment that spans a range of communication channels, each with its own idiosyncratic qualities and challenges. From the whimsical Snapchat, to the voyeuristic Reddit and Instagram,

from the staid Facebook updates to the tremulous tweets of Twitter, from the un-nuanced, asynchronous pronouncements of traditional email to the unavoidable 'Good mornings'', or incessant forwards of family Whatsapp groups, and many more, far too numerous to mention, each has established a presence in our socio-cultural landscape as a mediator, moderator, soother and instigator of our waking selves.

Latané (1996) presents a theory (Dynamic Social Impact Theory – DSIT) of, "how individuals located in social space influence each other to create higher patterns of structure", and demonstrates how "culture could emerge from individual experience and everyday interaction". He outlined four phenomena, (i) clustering, or regional differences in cultural elements; (ii) correlation, or emergent associations between elements; (iii) consolidation, or a reduction in variance; and (iv) continuing diversity that can serve as indicators of DSIT. Harton and Bullock (2007), reviewing DSIT, suggest that cultures can be created and changed from the bottom-up through everyday communication with neighbors, friends, and coworkers.

Using the socio-cultural tradition, one can view the individual, their relationships with others, the channel, the message, and the collective (culture, sub-culture, smaller cliques or the broader organization) that allows individuals and groups to weave a tapestry of cross-cultural identities, ranging from simple alter egoistic identities to undetectable and undecipherable no-nyms adopted by internet trolls and their ilk (Phillips, 2012).

Using the lens of dynamic social impact theory (Latané, 1996), the authors of this chapter wishes to demonstrate the existence of heterophily and homophily among individuals and groups, as they navigate their individual and collective identities in the socio-cultural landscapes provided by modern media. Heterophilous groups tend to become homophilous over time, yet maintain the primary diversity that brought the group together (Sundararajan, Finch, & O'Reilly, 2016). However, like the DSIT has posited, there is constant tension between the consolidation (reduction in variance or tendency towards homophily) of individual and group identities in socio-cultural media, and continuing diversity (heterophily) as individuals strive to maintain their individuality in the face of pressure to conform from their group or collective.

Sundararajan and Macdonald (2016, pp 202) state: "we are at the threshold of the next generation of web and mobile tools, applications and services, possibly Web 3.0". The phrase "social media" came to stand for the entire collection of online and mobile applications that allowed everyday people to create and share content with pretty much everyone else, engage with one another, create shared commons, and eventually, cultural enclaves. Many of these cultural enclaves came to exist as the online space resulting from real world offline activities, but many others were primarily created online and may have migrated to offline meetups, action

25 more pages are available in the full version of this document, which may be purchased using the "Add to Cart" button on the publisher's webpage: www.igi-global.com/chapter/dynamic-social-impact-theory/202778

Related Content

Synchronous Physiological Electrical Fields: Function and Interface Potential
J.F. Pagel (2016). *Exploring the Collective Unconscious in the Age of Digital Media (pp. 107-127).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/synchronous-physiological-electrical-fields/145261

Development and Implementation of Digital Tools, Neural Networks, and Cyber Control Systems in Sliding Modes
Mikhail Ivanov, Yulia Vertakovaand Vardan Mkrttchian (2020). *Avatar-Based Models, Tools, and Innovation in the Digital Economy (pp. 141-151).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/development-and-implementation-of-digital-tools-neural-networks-and-cyber-control-systems-in-sliding-modes/237724

Towards Technological Literacy: Fostering Digital Citizenship and Sustainable Development Education in Next-Generation Teaching
Nicole Simon (2025). *Digital Citizenship and Building a Responsible Online Presence (pp. 241-258).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/towards-technological-literacy/373017

Transformation of China's Most Popular Dating App, Momo, and Its Impact on Young Adult Sexuality: A Critical Social Construction of Technology Analysis
Weishan Miaoand Jian Xu (2020). *Young Adult Sexuality in the Digital Age (pp. 210-223).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/transformation-of-chinas-most-popular-dating-app-momo-and-its-impact-on-young-adult-sexuality/255511

Need for Dynamicity in Social Networking Sites: An Overview from Data Mining Perspective
Gurdeep S. Hura (2014). *Digital Arts and Entertainment: Concepts, Methodologies, Tools, and Applications (pp. 64-87).*
www.irma-international.org/chapter/need-for-dynamicity-in-social-networking-sites/115010