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## Socialization, uses and influence of social networks in adolescents: the role of broadcast scheduling

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### Abstract

This research deals with the influence on adolescents that have the stereotypes from TV series, reality shows and social networks. The initial aim was to know how stereotypes transmitted in television could be perpetuated by social networks. During the fieldwork emerged outstanding concepts that have been incorporated, they were connected with the different uses that adolescents had in social networks. The methodology used is qualitative with an ethnographic design. The study was centred in three schools from Aragon (Spain). Significant differences in age and gender were observed. They deal with the uses adolescents made of the social networks, perceptions and beliefs. Being Twitter the favourite one due to the benefits they consider it gives them.

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**Keywords:** social networks; adolescents; use; influence; stereotype; ethnographic; Twitter.

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### 1. Introduction

The investigation report presented represent a part of a wider study entitled “Influence of stereotypes in adolescents: series, reality shows and social networks” accomplished as an investigation for a Master’s Thesis in University of Zaragoza (Spain). What is going to be presented here pertain to the results related to social networks.

The driving idea arises from previous inquisitiveness of the investigator and from prior literature about the field investigated. Finally, the field of interest to investigate is defined around the influence of stereotypes in the three

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formats named in the main title. Regarding to the epistemological framework, we are positioned within a Naturalist Paradigm, also denominated as Humanist, Interpretative or Ethnographic by diverse authors (Sabirón, 2006). This paradigm encompass those works that study social phenomenon from an emic perspective whose backdrop are the interpretations that people make of the different situations that happen to them. (Fernández, 2010).

Nevertheless, we resort to the Epistemology of Complexity (Morin, 1999) to complete the starting epistemological view. It is based on an holistic view of reality, where it is interesting to know the whole networks and correlations included in diverse levels of reality (Nicolescu, 1996) adopting a multi-referential approach. (Ardoino, 1991). This way, the transdisciplinarity assumptions (methods that include different individuals-objects-contexts-projects), are the most appropriate for this type of research. (Vilar, 1997)

Lastly, to understand how knowledge between informants is generated, we established ourselves in the trend of social constructionism, where this is the result of the elaboration that the individual make from their experiences (Carretero, 1993), with the environment and the milieu. The knowledge emanates from the meanings construction that configures the setting itself whilst people internalize it. (Vygotsky, 1931:94 quoted in Mendoza, 2010: 160)

### *1.1. Starting assumption and purposes.*

Right after, we capture the starting assumption corresponding to social network's field that is defined as follows: "*Stereotypes who appear on television can remain perpetuated through social networks via videos and pictures that they share from programmes or via famous people*"

As purpose, seeing the prominent influence that social networks have on adolescents (Lacalle, 2011), and taking into account that its use is increasing in this collective, it was interesting to know how and in what way the stereotypes that appear in series and reality shows could be perpetuated through different dynamics in communication and in the uses that adolescents set in social networks.

At the same time, it was also interesting to know how socio-demographic differences could have influence in their perceptions. In this case, there has been a differentiation taking into account gender and age. This was the starting purpose, however, the theoretical sampling led to interesting categories that emerged during the fieldwork in this sphere and they were incorporated to the research how it will be explained in detail afterwards.

## **2. Method**

### *2.1. Methodological choice*

The methodology chosen is qualitative, based in enquiring and understanding the profoundest nature of realities, their connection and situations (Fernández and Pértegas, 2002) through an interpretative process full of meanings and constructed symbols. It has been considered that this methodology is the most accurate for the purpose of the research. (Sáez, 1988). Within this methodology the design chosen has been ethnographic, emergent, where as the fieldwork is being made, new elements can be incorporated according to subjects and categories that arise (Quintana, 2006). This design has some characteristics.

First of all, has an emic character, explaining the social phenomenon from the own perspective of the social context of participants (Yanes, 1997: 207 quoted in Axpe, 2004: 44). Secondly, this kind of design suppose a continuation relatively persistent in the field studied, conditioned by the purpose of the research. (Serra, 2004). It is holistic and naturalistic, so the information obtained will be detailed and full of social meanings (Goetz and Lecompte, 1988).

Furthermore, the procedure, its limits and interactions, are open and will be defined in the own field just as the research and events progress. Simultaneously, information is collected and analysed (Pérez, 2000). Finally, it should be pointed out that it has an inductive character, meaning that through the information collected patterns; hypothesis and theories will be established to explain the reality. (Axpe, 2004)

### *2.2. Selection of informants and timing*

This study was accomplished with informants from three different schools in Aragon (Spain), I.E.S. Lucas

Mallada, 'Azucarera' and Escuela de Arte, in 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> year of high school and 1<sup>st</sup> year of bachelors respectively, with ages between 14 and 18, two with 19 and one person with 22 involving a total of 74 participants. The research was carried between October 2012 and September 2013. The fieldwork lasted three months from March to June with a total of three sessions in each centre, except one with four sessions.

### *2.3. Strategies for data collection and processing of the information*

The techniques used for data collection in this field were a first questionnaire, *ad hoc*, with open questions, for all the informants, validated by judges. The questionnaire had questions referred to stereotypes that appear on series and reality shows on television and a final section that had to do with social networks whose questions were related to the ones they own and their preferences, uses adolescents gave to them and motivations for doing it. After gathering the first piece of information, some questions were added, especially regarding Twitter and how adolescents express through it because it is the most common social network. In addition, a discussion group was implemented with different question marks in each school depending on the previous answers given by the informants. At the same time, the participant observation was utilised, with notes from the field, as main resource to collect all the information and the field diary as a technique to contrast the information. The processing of the information has been made through software called Atlas.ti.

When analysing the data collected in Atlas.ti, age and sex were two variables to bear in mind due to important differences that appeared with them. The different answers were grouped shaping the final categories. In particular, they dealt with social networks that adolescent used and their preferences, uses of social networks as a way to express themselves, beliefs about social networks by age and gender, monitoring programmes and famous people through Twitter and a possible transmission of stereotypes.

In order to guarantee the validity and reliability, it has been mainly used the tool of triangulation (Denzin, 2006), as a way to contrast the information from different points of view. On one side, the techniques (questionnaire, discussion group, field diary) were executed mostly during the processing of results, which consist on contrasting answers collected through diverse techniques. On the second side, it has been done a contrast with different and previous theories or researches, in order to compare others authors' results with ours to give more credibility and coherence to our outcomes.

## **3. Results**

After reaching a category saturation through Atlas.ti, different results that have appeared start being developed, treating the information carefully and being rigorous. The starting idea was to know if the stereotypes that appear on TV series and reality shows, that adolescents normally see, are transmitted as well through social networks.

### *3.1. Stereotypes across social networks and preferences.*

It should be noted first that practically all of them have at least one social network; barely three individuals commented that they have none. It was thought that stereotypes could be transmitted if they shared or commented about videos or images from programmes they saw or people that appeared on them in social networks. From all the participants that filled the questionnaire, more than half of them pointed out that they do not comment or share images from the programmes or famous people they like. It is less the number of individuals that confirm that they do it.

At first glance, results were imprecise and it was necessary to investigate further. It is possible that people who share videos or images, normally humoristic as some informants said, are at the same time receiving, for example, the stereotype of beauty through pictures of characters, etc., but this cannot be totally affirmed with the lack of information. Thereby, we go to the question they were asked about if they had any social network and which ones did they have. Most of them answered that they had Tuenti and Twitter and some of them Facebook. Most of the ones that said they had Twitter, two thirds of the whole, said that they preferred that network to the other ones.

In this moment it was thought that if adolescents follow through this network the programmes they like, characters and famous people, they could receive some kind of influence and, consequently, stereotypes could be

transmitted via this network. Therefore, this question was added to the investigation in order to analyse it. Results given about it are considered highly relevant. From all of adolescents who have Twitter, more or less half of them confirm that they follow in this network programmes and famous people they like. Instead, the other half have Twitter but do not give to it the same use.

### *3.2. Monitoring of programmes and famous people in Twitter.*

The act of following people, according to what students say, is to be informed about curiosities of programmes, news, or simply because they like it. In the case of famous people the act of following them is for the same reasons, because they like the person, what she or he does, because they want to know more about her or his life, curiosities, news, etc., to see pictures and tweets. It is as well to follow what the rest of them do (friends, acquaintances, etc.), to know their opinions, aims, news, etc. Regarding to other social networks they consider Twitter faster and more dynamic. In respect of gender, maybe males in Escuela de Arte express, generally, to be less interested in this kind of activities although it has to be known that the proportion between them in relation to females is the same centre and other ones is fewer. Later, and even though initially it was not our purpose, it was considered relevant to know other uses they gave to social networks, specially Twitter.

### *3.3. Social networks as a way to express themselves.*

Half of the informants affirmed they use social networks to express themselves, giving to it one or more uses; some of them like to express their feelings and emotions, what they feel in each moment or sometimes they like to write what they are doing in different moments of the day, if they are going somewhere or their activities. Others prefer to write ideals, experiences, extracts from songs, etc. In the discussion group from I.E.S. ‘Azucarera’, for instance, came out the fact that it was a great place to express their ideas because sometimes they could not make it in any other place.

It can be said that the number of individuals in Escuela de Arte, being the oldest group, that affirm that they express themselves through social networks is fewer regarding to other centres and they might talk more about sharing music through status and phrases at a given time. Reasons cannot be established accuracy, however, in their discussion group came out the idea that as they get older they loose interest and they prefer to talk about some things “face to face”. Anyway, in the debate in this centre an informant said that social networks ‘hook you’; affirming that although it might be just once, they get online, mainly via mobile phone.

Nonetheless, not all of them like to express themselves neither in the same way (indeed, sometimes they criticize other uses). There are people who social networks do not catch their attention or they do not think they are interesting. Generally, it is observed that in these cases, they considered that other people do not care about what they feel or do in each moment and some of them criticize the uses that other people give to social networks.

To finish, completing the information, in the discussion group of I.E.S. ‘Azucarera’ appeared two aspects that surprised a lot about other uses they gave to Twitter that were totally unknown to the researcher. They affirmed that they have another Twitter account, or the same, to write nonsense and trivialities as a way to be entertained and for fun. It was remarkable because in the same group they were questioned about if they could be without social networks and all of them said yes, opposite to the belief in Escuela de Arte where they affirmed that their generation was born with technologies and they prefer that because then they are up to date and know everything.

We can conclude that uses for social networks are diverse, as seen, with different ways of expressing it that depends on incentives and personal interests that they found difficult to define and that not all of them share. It looks like they give a lot of importance, as they affirm in discussion groups, to the fact of ‘following’ someone, i.e. Escuela de Arte said that they follow the friends they care about, and acquaintances because they want to know about their lives, their activities, opinions, etc. And vice versa, they feel a reward when someone follows them or when someone ‘retweet’ a status because they consider they care about them or their opinion.

### *3.4. Beliefs about the uses of social networks.*

Otherwise, in what concerns to beliefs, there were some interesting answers regarding differences in age that catch the attention.

Regarding to differences in gender, in both I.E.S. Lucas Mallada and Escuela de Arte came the belief that girls express more than boys through social networks, although boys do it too; it is a belief that girls confirm as well.

But it is noteworthy that in questionnaires this belief has not been reflected because the number of boys in the three schools who confirm that they express themselves through social networks is quite high, fewer in Escuela de Arte, maybe due to what it was commented before. This belief, that can be more or less true, is still a stereotype about girls being more ‘gossip’ than boys and needing to express themselves more, interiorized by both sexes.

Regarding age, in the discussion group of Escuela de Arte, they believe that nowadays the younger ones use social networks for everything, they call it a ‘bad use’ while they do not have an excessive use of it and they prefer to talk face to face instead through a network.

They do consider as well that the use of social network has leaded to a loss of habits that they used to have and they say that, generally, adolescents are really influenced by them. A debate emerged, promoted by the boys, around the idea that social networks remove their privacy, seeing it as something negative. In I.E.S. ‘Azucarera’ appeared a similar idea as well because one of the boys affirmed that social networks could be dangerous depending on the use you do of it. It was remarkable that in some questionnaires and partly in discussion groups some of them were pressured to have a Tuenti account or to change their statuses.

Lastly, they talked a bit about ‘Whatsapp’ because, even though it is not a social network itself, a lot of them mentioned it in the questionnaire and it seemed relevant to talk a bit about the use of it in discussion groups. In the main, most of them have it, the ones that do not have it is because they do not have a proper mobile phone and a minority because it does not catch their attention. From the ones that use it, a lot said that they speak more there than in social networks, even more than with phones because they save money, using groups above all, where there are more than two individuals in a simultaneous conversation. All discussion groups affirmed that they have all kind of groups and they talk through them, share pictures, videos, etc. They consider it more comfortable and it is easy to communicate and is very useful.

It is observed regarding to ‘Whatsapp’ that it is one of the new ways to communicate, alternative to face to face talks with one person, or more than one at the same time, to meet, talk about how they are feeling, etc. Sometimes, due to it being a free programme, sometimes because it is easy, because you can speak with more than one person at the same time, because it is immediate or because of the fast information.

#### **4. Conclusions**

This final section corresponding to conclusions has been written extensively to provide a better justification about how we have assumed the conclusions and how they can be completed with contributions from other authors, which will be the discussion, to contrast our conclusions with theirs.

First, it can be said that it cannot certainly be established if stereotypes discussed in this study are transmitted through images or videos or via social networks, mainly Tuenti or Facebook. Although it may be possible in some individuals, a large number of them using it do not include sharing this kind of files in their utilization and there is no information about the rest of people to say it categorically. Because of it, this topic was rejected in first place.

Nevertheless, Twitter was investigated in deep because there was seen that through this network some of the stereotypes could be transmitted. It is concluded that the majority prefer Twitter to other social networks for many reasons. First, because of the incentive of being able to follow idols because they like them physically or, above everything, because they like their personality and they want to know what they do, to know more about their life, etc. Or as well because they want to know curiosities about TV programmes, about news or simply because they like them. They praise as well the fast exchange of information.

We consider that some stereotypes as physical attractive keep having influence through this network, mainly when they follow famous people from television (singers, actors and actresses, people from reality shows, etc.). Regarding to general stereotypes, they could have influenced the viewer through mainly the use of Twitter, although it could be through other networks as well. Obviously not in the same measure or way because not all of them have Twitter and in those cases where they have, not all of them follow the same number of famous people or programmes and probably uses of it are different as well.

The way to influence could be diverse, and not all of the ways are known, from following famous people

because of their attractive and/or their personality to follow characters from TV series where they upload quotes, pictures, character features, etc. Another way could be the act of seeing reality shows that are being broadcast as a way to know what happens to the main characters that appear on them, or when it has finished, etc. Each way is being received differently and it has an influence in the phenomenon itself.

These aspects are corroborated in the study made by Charo Lacalle (2011), where she affirms that television channels use Twitter predominantly, although they use Facebook or Tuenti as well to announce premieres to have internet surfers commenting them, to make adolescents and young people follow the characters of those TV series, exchange information, etc. Therefore, in this exchange, fans have information but at the same time are replicators of that information transmitted by media and that it could be about diverse nature.

Apart from this use, adolescents use Twitter in other ways. Generally they are about the idea of express themselves through ‘tweets’ (publications or status updates) while they follow famous people, friends or acquaintances because they want to know what they do. When expressing, they do it variously depending on their incentives, from capturing their emotions and feelings to what they do in each moment or sometimes, ideals, experiences, songs, etc. Incentives are various and exalt their uses while in other cases they criticize the rest of them. In I.E.S. ‘Azucarera’ we could see that they made use of one or more than one Twitter account to insert or comment nonsense and trivial things, as they defined it, as a way to entertain themselves and for fun.

It is concluded that, apart from the uses previously mentioned, adolescents find in social networks, mainly Twitter, a way to have some personal space where they can express themselves (how they prefer and how they wish), where they can vent, say what they feel, write their activities, opinions, etc. freely and sometimes they can keep themselves entertained. They found it hard to define the incentives because it was difficult for them to explain them. At the same time they enjoy the fact that they can express themselves, they find it interesting to be able to follow people they care about, see their daily activities and what they do with their lives and they find some kind of reward in being followed by others, or having ‘retweets’ about their points of view, opinions, etc.

All these aspects present a new way of socialization really important that is consolidated through the net. It is possible for it to have even more weight than the “face to face” contact in the group or more weight than what they receive through television. This is because in social networks adolescents share experiences in chats, they put their mood in their wall and profile, they comment and share pictures, they have groups of interest and they interact, they follow their favourite famous people, programmes, etc. This point of view is completed by Rivera (2012), who reaches similar ideas. They are the new manner of consumption of images and daily routines of adolescents and young people.

In respect of Twitter, all is not enough. Studies delve into general questions and, from my point of view, you can enquire a lot more. Most of the information is in newspapers. Anyway, in regard to the last uses that we have seen about Twitter, we can see for example that they were topic in a seminar in University of Palermo in 2010<sup>†</sup>, where they were reunited representatives of diverse organizations invited for Unicef Argentina.

These ones emphasize the importance of some social networks as Twitter to have information fast and immediately about topics of interest, to write opinions and other uses as amusement or talk about incentives. They explained as well that networks allow you to express yourself and communicate better and, consequently, adolescents show a need for being connected, for sharing things, for expressing themselves and for publishing everything unfiltered. These aspects commented by the representatives of those organizations are in accordance with the ones commented by our informants.

In regard to differences in age, generally all of them do this kind of activity but there is a shared belief for both sexes that girls use more social networks to express themselves because they mention they are more ‘gossip’ and have a bigger need. Regardless of its veracity, it is, after all, a stereotype.

Their uses are part of everyday life for most of the adolescents as they admit to log in at least once a day from their computer or mobile phone. It was striking the fanciful of having students in Escuela de Arte saying that social networks are part of their lives and students from I.E.S. ‘Azucarera’ declaring that they could live without them. In

<sup>†</sup> eldiario.com.ar (2010, 19 de noviembre). La importancia de las redes sociales (periódico online "el Diario del Centro del País" de Argentina). Retrieved on 1<sup>st</sup> of September, 2013 from: <http://www.eldiariocba.com.ar/noticias/nota.asp?nid=31706>

spite of it, seeing the other side of the coin, not everyone likes to express and if they do, it is not in the same way. There was as well a relatively high number of individuals that were not interested in knowing everyone's life not in them knowing about theirs. This was especially in students from Escuela de Arte.

Informants from this school have some beliefs due probably to age that are relevant. They consider that, when you are younger, it is usual to make a 'bad use' of social networks using it excessively instead of facing some aspects face to face. They consider too that there has been a loss of habits and that adolescents are under a huge influence of them. Lastly, they commented, like an informant from I.E.S. 'Azucarera', that those social networks take away your privacy and they could be dangerous depending on the use you make of them.

Finally, I have to say that as a whole, networks along with Whatsapp, even though it is not considered as social network itself, are the new channels of communication and expression, sometimes an alternative to talks face-to-face or maybe complementary. They are becoming a forum of exchanging of fast and quick communication praised for adolescents. Therefore and to finish contrasting our results with the starting presupposition: '*Stereotypes appeared in television can remain perpetuated through social networks via videos and images that they share from programmes or via famous people.*'

It should be refuted due to have an emphasis in videos and images that could be shared through Tuenti or Facebook and, as seen in the beginning, it cannot be certainly established if those exchanges through the network repeat the stereotypes analysed.

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