

PERSPECTIVES ON DIGITAL INCLUSION: PARTICIPATION OF SENIORS IN SOCIAL NETWORKS¹

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Abstract

The research presented in this article had as main aims: a) to know the use of social networks by a group of elderly people, as well as b) to understand the representations of this target audience on the use of this type of technology during their daily lives. The qualitative study had a first phase of exploratory collection, which consisted of randomly analysing public profiles of Facebook users over 65 years of age. Taking this into account, categories of analysis were defined which catered for a more in-depth look at 6 profiles, of 6 elderly people, which have been observed over 6 months. At the same time, 8 interviews were undertaken with individuals of the same age group, users of social networks, in order to understand their representations on the topic. The data collected allowed us to understand some aspects of the use of social networks by this public, namely the lack of care in the disclosure of personal information, the integration of the use of Facebook in the daily lives of the elderly, the use of the network as a means of approach relatives, either to learn how it works or to contact those who are far away.

Keywords: Digital Inclusion

Introduction

Data from the World Bank shows the seriousness of the national situation in demographic terms. In 2014, Portugal is one of the 4 countries in the world with the greatest decrease in population. The National Statistics Institute (INE) recorded, in 2018, data from 2016 that point to an aging rate of 151 elderly people for every 100 young people (INE, 2019). The reasons are diverse, but a future with the increase in the retirement age is expected, as well as the need to captivate immigration, replacing young people who neither contribute to the increase in birth rates nor stop emigrating. With the departure of young people, children and grandchildren, seniors are left with less support, with smaller family structures and no longer have the safety of those closest to them (cf. Albuquerque and Rosa, 2015). Those closest to them become neighbours and / or professionals who deal with this population and who often function as the only support structure around. The massive use of information and communication technologies in Western societies has raised a set of social and theoretical concerns regarding inequalities in access by citizens, both due to different technologies and to the information conveyed by them. Aspects as digital exclusion and digital divides were introduced to respond to the need to map situations of inequalities in access and in the use of technologies. If, at first the digital exclusion is related to the inequalities among nations, afterwards it has been associated with the urgency to equate these inequalities within each national state, among citizens (Selwyn, 2004).

With the increase in the elderly population in Portugal (INE, 2014), this being a group particularly vulnerable to social exclusion, the focus of our research relates to the digital exclusion of older people (Gil, 2015; Cabral, 2017). Within the scope of this study, we try to understand behaviours and forms of interaction that older people seek through technologies.

Digital Cleavages And Social (Dis)Insertion

Since the 1990s, the concept of “digital divide” has occupied the minds of the scientific community. For a previous definition of the concept of “digital divide”, we turn to Warschauer (2011, p. 5), who highlights its relationship with social stratification due to inequality in access, adaptation and knowledge building through the use of information and communication technologies (cf. Warschauer, 2011, p. 5). It is interesting to analyse two basic aspects: access to the technology itself and access to understanding about the information conveyed on the

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network. The first could be translated as an analysis of existing resources and the second related to the way we understand technology and make use of it, which is highly variable.

Castells considers that the network has the function of enriching face-to-face social acts, or, in its absence, catering for the creation of an alternative form of relationship development. The author highlights a set of positive effects on internet access, with special emphasis on issues of social interaction and the accumulation of other sources of knowledge (Castells, 2004). Their analysis does not follow exclusively from the study of networks. However, if there are people without access, or with more difficulties in the informed and critical use of technologies, it is likely that the development of social cleavages is associated with the use of networks. At the same time, studies show that families connected to the Internet seem to be more likely to establish more social relationships, whether based on strong or weak ties (Castells, 2004; Hampton, Wellman, 2000). The notions of digital exclusion and digital divides were introduced to respond to the need to map situations of inequality in access and in the use of technologies (Selwyn, 2004).

The 1990s named the widening gap between those who had and those who did not have access to technology (cf. Rapaport, 2009). In Portugal (Rebelo, 2008), researchers showed that access to the Internet by the elderly population (men and women over 65 years old) was quite low. However, the same study notes that it cannot be inferred that these elderly people would not have contact with computers and mobile phones with internet access. On the contrary, they know the technologies, since these are devices commonly used by their children and grandchildren (Rebelo, 2008, p. 230). Bearing in mind these problems, one may also question whether the lack of knowledge in the use of technologies, namely social networks on the Internet, will not currently represent a new factor of social exclusion that will add to other factors already identified by authors dedicated to the analysis of exclusions. This was one of the main questions that drove this study.

Therefore, we may highlight two issues which are directed by Gaulejac and Léonetti (1994, p. 77) to explore the meaning of the concept of social insertion: why is it that more and more individuals are affected by the disqualification and the difficulty of inserting themselves into society? What can the state and each citizen do in relation to this process? In order to answer these questions, the authors point out three types of factors that contribute to the process of social disinsertion and that seem useful to map some positions of older citizens in relation to the use and social appropriation of social networks on the internet. The first set of reasons leading to social disintegration is mainly economical. In this domain, the authors consider that, at present, issues related to the difficulty of finding employment, precariousness or unemployment can dramatically and decisively affect the individuals' life paths. A second type of reasons, and which interests us particularly within the scope of our study, is associated with social ties. In fact, what is at stake in this case are family ties and other close relationships that, when broken, tend to leave subjects completely unprotected. A third set of factors are, in essence, symbolic and reach a particular relevance when articulated with some preconceived (or prejudiced) ideas regarding the elderly, i.e., the perceptions that are formed about the social utility of the roles that individuals play in society and that, when they do not correspond to their normative requirements, or do not conform to a given dominant ideology in a society, they leave individuals much more vulnerable to processes of social devaluation (Gaulejac and Léonetti, 1994, p. 78).

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Communication and Facebook

Communicating seems to be a normal act that requires compliance with basic rules: one speech, the other responds. Throughout history, the individual's involvement as an emitter has assumed that one knows who the receiver was. We knew that another subject would be on the other side of the telegraph, that it was the inhabitants of our village who heard the church bell, we could even characterise the listeners of a radio program, etc. In reality, until recently, the means of communication most used by the elderly were the telephone, television and radio (cf. Pasqualotti, Barone and Doll, 2012). This raises the question of the appropriation of the elderly and the way they build relationships with technological objects. Although it can be assumed that culture and communication participate simultaneously in the creation of experiences, values, social practices, it is nonetheless important to highlight, for analytical purposes, the dimensions of communication which are directly related to culture. We do this by focusing on Jean Caune (2008) who highlights, in this sense, some of the features of communication in its relationship with culture. The first involves overcoming the idea that a means of communication represents only a vehicle for transmitting information to recognise that the subjects actively participate and are involved in the communication process. This is as much as communication induces subjects to assume their social political positions. The second feature of communication most directly associated with culture is that communication is at the basis of the community. Rescuing the perspective of John Dewey (1916), who argued that communication was at the origin of the social bond, as it was the means through which individuals shared their beliefs, aspirations and goals (Caune, 2008, p. 40), the symbolic dimension of communication should be highlighted, by observing that it is from this

that realities are built, maintained or transformed. In this perspective, it is legitimate to recognise that language and the symbolic dimension of communication are essential for the creation of social realities. Therefore, knowledge and the sharing of social experiences are only possible in and through the communication process (Caune, 2008, p. 40).

If we use digital media, do we know for sure who we are sending a message to? In reality, digital tools have transformed content into blocks of information with (almost) a life of its own. They are transported along the network quite exponentially. "The first thing that good shareholders (pay attention: shareholders only own shares and it is possible to get rid of what they do) in the morning is to open the newspapers on the capital market pages to find out if it is time to keep the their actions or dispose of them. The same thing also occurs with other types of actions: relationships" (Bauman, 2006, p. 31). These, like other actions, have entered our daily lives in a very consolidated way. In such a way that we do not even realise we are undertaking it. Our difficulty in discerning the importance we attach to information means that our actions are often inconsequential. We share many messages and advance information to new paths without separating the essential from the accessory.

We can look at the characteristics of the internet and soon realise that freedom stands out as the main value (cf. Domingo, 2015, p. 78). The freedom to view, share or just browse. However, it is interesting to reflect on the freedom to control information. Debates around access to social platforms and the information they reserve are frequent. Much has been said about the access and use of information which is published by governments. Therefore, the conception that until a few years ago was about the value of freedom, seems to be quite questioned today. The guarantee of freedom of movement and actions is currently more unprotected.

It is interesting to see how the individual makes access to his/her information available to everyone, in an almost voluntary way, giving space to the emergence of a consented dictatorship. Like the new state which controlled the individual as a whole, both in public and in the individual's private life, facebook has mechanisms to undertake this and, at this moment, the users themselves are the ones who voluntarily place the possibility of control over their own lives, whether in the hands of the state, or any person or group that appropriates the information they publish. We ask ourselves, as Norberto Bobbio did in his famous work, *The Future of Democracy*, "Who controls the controllers?"

Participation, as a digital inclusion strategy, is an issue that goes beyond technology. What makes an individual to be autonomous in the network? Have your own Facebook profile? Participating in the network can be a strategy to fight against digital divides, being ourselves, without following others, although networks depend on followers. The technologies emerged to supply needs for this reason, even Facebook when it appeared in 2004 (Kirkpatrick, 2010) aimed to promote relationships between students in a certain context. In a short time it went beyond the university campus.

Initially assumed as a platform for young people, it has been replaced in this field by other platforms, such as *Instagram* or even more recently *TikTok*. The latter are networks which promote faster interaction and greater access to more dynamic digital objects. "Among young users of social networks, the results of 2018 show an inversion of the networks visited most frequently, with Instagram placing itself in the first position and Facebook in the second" (Fernandes, 2019)

We know that, in Portugal, 80% of internet users make use of social networks (INE, 2018) and we also know that the number of elderly people who use social networks has also been increasing. We also know, from INE data, that the number of elderly people over 65, who use social networks, is very similar to the number of young people aged 13 to 17, which reflects the growing interest and need for this technology within that age range. The same source adds that participation in social networks is more frequent in Portugal than in the United States.

Increasing in number, the age group of the elderly / retired people has become a group with more literacy and skills. In addition, it is also much more open to welcoming new forms of communication, taking into account that the family organisation has also been changing. With children working and grandchildren attending school all day, seniors seem to try to embrace other ways of interacting with family and friends. The trend is therefore for an increase in Facebook registering and access. This seems to happen because, on the one hand, this age range tends to adhere to the internet late, and for this very reason they opt for a more widespread-used platform; on the other hand, because the experience in using images and video allows them to maintain their social life and contact with their children and grandchildren (cf. Fisher In Sweney, 2018).

Methodological Proposal

The study presented in this article reports a descriptive research with a qualitative base structure that analyses publicly available profiles on the social network. The methodological path of this research followed the aims outlined in the project: to draw profiles of senior users on senior social networks (+65 years); to make an analysis of the use of social networks by seniors, describing and systematising the published content; to relate the use of social networks to the needs of socialisation and interaction by seniors; to make the elderly population aware of the need for a meaningful and safe participation in social networks; to identify the social interests and needs implicit in seniors' use of the network.

After undertaking an exploratory period developed in order to identify if there are differences and aspects in common between the various users of the network over 65 years old, a more concrete period of information collection was started in a more structured and systematised way. We move forward with a more comprehensive / descriptive logging and analysis logic. In this way we consider it pertinent to create and use an individualised registration instrument. Therefore, many of the dimensions of analysis were discovered on an emergent basis and throughout the collection period, leading to several reformulations and validations of the dimensions themselves. The registration form is therefore made up of the following dimensions: Identification - information provided by the user in his profile; characterisation of identifying images: profile and mural; People you interact with and who you add as “friends”: number, type, groups; Type of messages you send and respond to; Personal information made available through messages - habits, tastes, routines; User type.

In terms of the organisation of the study, we started by defining the profile of the users to be observed: we randomly selected individuals who were proven to be over 65 and who use the Facebook social platform. We defined 6 months as the period of observation of the messages. Bearing in mind that one of the dimensions to be analysed was the type of information shared, we realised that one of the selection criteria, in addition to the priority of age, over 65, could be related to the ease of access to profiles, i.e., due to the user's availability to make his profile and page public. The sample selection ended with the definition of a group of 6 seniors. All analysis of the profiles was done anonymously, so that all confidentiality is guaranteed. In this paper we identify elderly using a fake name.

The project demanded, in parallel, that we asked senior users about the interests, needs and difficulties in using social networks. Only through this strategy was it possible to develop data triangulation in order to understand the users' real perceptions, motivations and interests. At this stage of the study, it was possible to understand what motivates these users and what, from their own point of view, promotes interactions, as well as satisfaction, anxieties or problems arising from their use. It was intended to know, in depth, according to their perspectives, the path of 8 seniors in relation to the use of technology and which surroundings were built. The intensive and biographical character needed to fully understand the research question forced us to make use of the interview as an instrument of data collection and the creation of a script that would allow us to effectively know this age group. The “listening technique”, highlighted by Ferrarotti (2013, p. 52) becomes an essential methodology in the whole process of collecting and understanding stories, through interviews that “generate rich understandings of biographies, experiences, opinions, values, aspirations, people's attitudes and feelings” (May, 2004, p. 145).

Within this study, essentially “primary biographical materials” were used (Ferrarotti, 2013, p. 89), i.e., interviews were conducted by the researcher. Being aware of the weaknesses that the non-use of secondary materials (biographical documents) implies, we understand that the interest is centred on the senior's look at what technology has meant to him, in each moment of life, and what relationships he/she has created with it. Therefore, it is a study with the subjectivity that each report about ourselves reflects, but with the valorisation of the voice in the first person.

Thus, the following dimensions were defined for the interview guide: identification data; childhood / youth technologies path; today's technology and social needs; technology and values; technology and Facebook today (motivations, learning use, interactions, changes and representations).

The definition of the group of interviewees was based on a principle of selection by convenience, according to the proximity of the interviewers team members. It was also determined that the interviewees were over 65 years old and were users of social networks. This being said, a group of 8 interviewees was formed, being retired and aged between 67 and 84 years, identified in this paper as “E” plus a number, from 1 to 8.

Data Analysis

The research developed resulted, as it has been said, from the articulation of a set of data collected from two different sources: the observation of the profiles of 6 seniors, publicly accessible on Facebook, and the interviews carried out with 8 seniors and users of social networks. All subjects are over 65 and retired. The analysis was structured according to several thematic dimensions, to which we will be referring to the most relevant ones, taking into account the principle of economy of text.

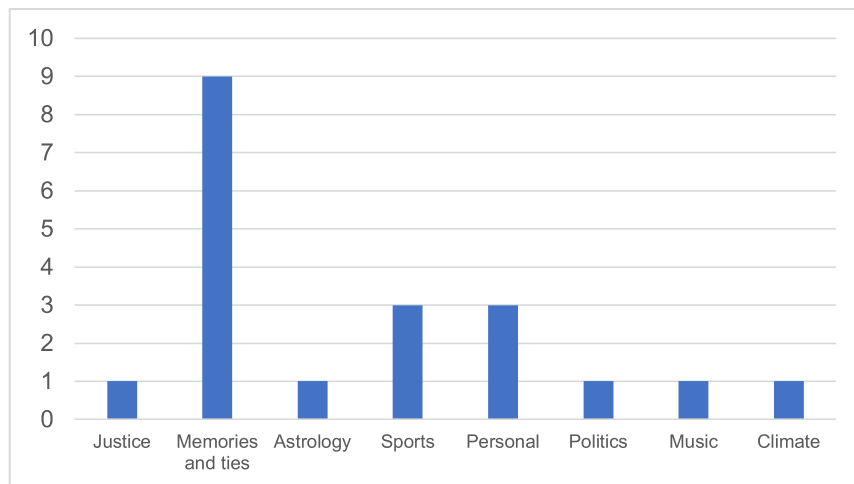
What can we know about users through their “profiles”

When we look at the profiles of seniors on Facebook, we realize the difficulty in obtaining detailed biographical information about them. However, some of the messages they publish reveal much more about different aspects of these users' lives. Let us look at some examples. In general, users provide information on their profile such as sex, year and date of birth, the city where they are born, where they currently live, the place where they worked and the institutions where they studied. In some cases, users also record their connections with family members, including the relationship degree they hold. But there are users who make a differentiated appropriation of the “profile” space. For example, Jo, in addition to revealing the information previously mentioned, adds, in this space, another set of information referring to relationships that he establishes or established and that, from the biographical point of view, result in a detailed presentation of himself: the date of his marriage, the name of the spouse that is associated with the link of the wife's profile on Facebook, links to the profiles of other family

members (son and nephews, among others). Within the section “life events”, we can observe from the date of birth, the places, dates and institutions where he studied and worked, as well as the evolution of his marital relationship, from dating, de facto union, engagement and marriage and, finally, a phrase that you want to be associated with your personal identity: “I am... I, the only one. Let no one doubt!”.

Other users share personal information in different places on the Facebook page and in the messages they post. Sometimes they have conversations where they publicly share information about their daily lives. For example, Ange, when he publishes a painting he did, receives the following comment: “XXX: How can you do it with two grandchildren?! Isn't “your good life over?” Very beautiful!”. At another time, Ange is not shy about sharing her daily routine: “So it is like this: I take them to school at 8 am. I will walk my 6 / 7km. After a good cup of coffee and toast, I get home and take the notebook and pens! At 4 pm I am leaving to pick them up and take them to football or tennis, etc. etc.” These dialogues on Facebook allow not only to identify the routines, but also to infer about the presence or absence of users in their home, as well as the life of their interlocutor who, following the conversation, also reveals his/her daily routines.

Thematic analysis of messages by profile reveal new information. As an example, see Graph 1, where it can be seen that Jo presents a higher frequency of messages on issues related to the past, memories and affective ties. The memo section includes several references to relationships that the user has maintained, or maintains, which in turn helps us to characterize the profile of this user.



Graph 1 – Jo's message themes

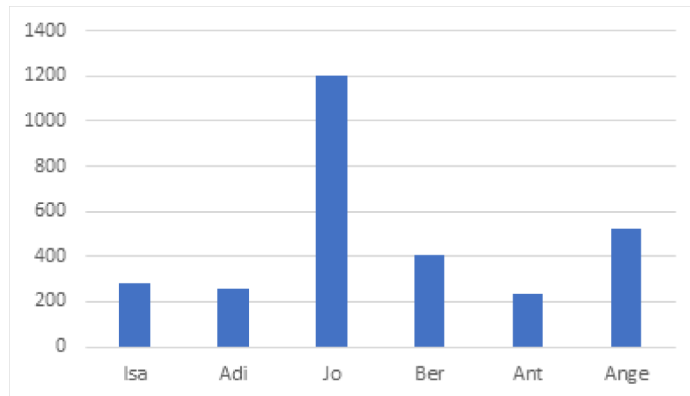
As for the group of respondents, all reported having children and grandchildren, which could have predicted the possibility of a dynamic family life. We came to realize, during the interview, that three of the interviewees live alone and the remaining five with their spouses and that they do not always feel accompanied. This aspect is highlighted in a very particular way by two seniors who refer that “the two children are no longer at home” (E2) or “I already took care of them, because they are now in England, everything is in England” (E4). Only one elderly person stresses that he relates daily to family members when he says: “my granddaughters are always here with me, I am always surrounded by them” (E7). This aspect matters because, as we will see later, the search for contact with the family can be one of the most important factors in order to start using the social network.

The profile photos

The use of the images in the profile seems to differ from user to user, and there is no room within this space for conclusive generalizations. There are users who make use of Facebook applications (frames with Christmas effects, or related social and political causes, for example) to frame their own photo on the profile; others prefer to highlight, from photographs, their artistic qualities, by publishing artwork they have created; others also select photographs that capture moments of leisure, or publish photographs of their home, or images that depict moments of greater affection with other people with whom they have a closer relationship. Despite the diversity, we believe that the images published in the profile by users are truly motivated by their sole desire to present themselves to others, with a concrete communicative intentionality that is not always possible to unveil.

The number of “friends”

The number of “friends” added on Facebook can be an indicator of their use and also be conditioned by the criteria assumed by the user himself/herself, such as care in the selection of people who belong to his group, the integration of family members, security issues, among others.



Graph 2 – Number of “Friends” on Facebook

The number of “friends” registered on Facebook differs among each subject that we observe. We noticed, within the analysed profiles, that in addition to people there are also institutions that present themselves as profiles and, therefore, have been added to the group of friends. In one of the analysed cases - Ange- maintains in his group of friends a set of libraries which probably represent the contacts established during her active life, since she was a librarian. This example leads us to think that Facebook can fact as a means of connecting to work field, while one is retired, thus favouring that the rupture between professional activity and retirement takes place gradually.

The analysis of online profiles aroused our interest in understanding the criteria and the way in which the elderly add “friends”. To this end, the interviews brought us complementary data to the research.

We observe that there is not always a perception of how many “friends” you add and that the knowledge you have about them differs between users. Several interviewees mentioned this aspect: “I don't think two hundred I know (Laughter) me, some who I have, but I don't even know who they are. (...) I accept it because they know me, I don't know them”(E1); “Oh, I don't know... I have many! I have many because they were friends of my husband and mine... I have many... And some make others (E7).

“Being a friend” and “being known” are two perceptions that some users do not distinguish on the social network. One adds another because one knows the other person, but in reality one doesn't really know who one is: “I have a hundred and such, I am friends with everyone here, nurses and everything. (...) Yes, I do not accept anyone who is not known...” (E1). However, other elderly people make informed choices about who to add: “I only accept those I know, and I look at each person's page to see if they have many friends added (E8); “No, I don't accept everyone, I only accepted friends I knew”. (E3)

Habits, tastes and preferences

Generally speaking with technology communicating is a priority for these individuals. Some of the interviewees report that their friends and family are the most frequent recipients: “What can I do ?! Some things ... send messages to my friends! (mobile phone)” (E7). The need for communication is then transferred to social networks. The analysed profiles seem to predict some of the respondents' replies. We have already seen that within some analysed messages, the past and memory are recurrent topics in users' messages. In this sense, it is not surprising that the recovery of contacts, which have been lost throughout life, or that are now distant, or even the desire to maintain contact with family members, are factors that seem to motivate some of our interviewees: “Face is about communicating with people from my homeland, that I found people from my time and newer ones, I met them again, they are in different lands, and that, since I can't meet them personally, because for many years I didn't know about them, isn't so?” (E2); “Communicate with the family, learn...” (E2); “Talk to friends and family, when I see that they have a green ball” (E8); “...what I like most is really being able to communicate with people from afar” (E8); “I really enjoy writing on Facebook about my childhood, for example, when I remember my own childhood moments” (E4).

On the other hand, seniors clearly state what they do not want to see or dislike. See the following excerpts: “Ads annoy me” (laughs) (E8)”; “... If you only use it for games, to play, look, I don't go in, if you just use it to play, if you just use it to discover people you don't know to create those bonds there and who have other goals... (E2); “I spend my life saying that I don't want friends, it's not about not wanting friends, it's my age, sometimes it's not appropriate for people who ask me to be friends” (E4).

Message Types

There are different types of behaviour among users regarding the messages they post. Some just share what they receive, others oscillate between sharing and creating new posts. This aspect may be related to the proficiency in using the platform, but also to the conscious choice about the modes of use.

Among the analysed profiles, sharing posts is the most used dynamic: the post can be shared, just as it was read, or there may be an addition in message format. For example, within Ant's profile, who seems to have a greater

tendency to publish political themes, she doesn't create messages, she just shares them. Ange is the only one who proves to be more motivated or proficient in sharing messages created from scratch, of the 43 messages analysed, 13 were built from scratch. However, there are messages that encourage more sharing, as it happens when Isa shares a perception test where the image of a woman is supposed to be identified.

The type of use of the social network also seems to be associated with the desire to keep in touch with family members and memories. The interviewees reinforce this idea: "I do... Well, photographs and so I still don't put... I put only a few that I see, and the memories I share"; "I write many comments for my dear one who is already in heaven, unfortunately, for my granddaughters, for my children, news, I write about what comes from animals, I comment a lot... (laughs)" (E7); "And now we get together and that's it, and we share anything and the family... Well, many of my friends on Face are my family, so instead of using the phone, you use Messenger and call and exchange news and stuff... and sometimes we have fun with jokes and anecdotes and that's it" (E2).

Where am I?

In the analysis we made of the spaces of the senior users, it seemed easy to identify the locations where they are at different times. The trips to the restaurants, the photos of the food or the places they visit, or even where they spend holidays, allow the recognition of the physical spaces that the subjects frequent or where they are at a given moment. The following photo helps us to illustrate this issue:

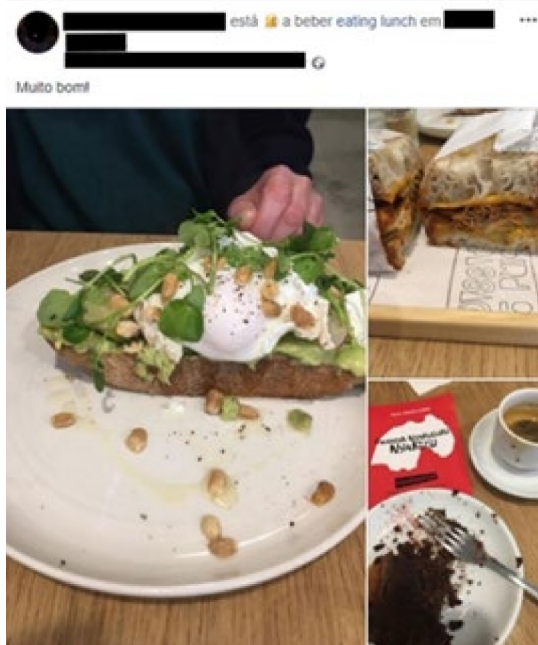


Figure 1 – Ange reveals where she is and what she is eating

Another example emerges from the analysis of Ber's space, who, for the purpose of denouncing what she considered to have been a poor service in a restaurant, publishes a photo of the invoice she paid. See the figure below.

Restaurante IGNÁCIO
Paula Pelitelo (Unipessoal), Lda.
Campo das Hortas nº4
4700-210 Braga
Tel: 253613235
Email: geral@restauranteignacio.com
N. Contrib. 509932770
Registo na Cons. Braga n.509932770
Capital Social € 1.000,00

Consulta de mesa TC B162/1408
2018-08-31 13:03

Qt	Descrição	P.Unit.	Tx	Valor
2,00	Couvert	€ 1.50	13	€ 3.00
1,00	Murallas	€ 10.00	23	€ 10.00
1,00	Água sem gás (1/	€ 1.50	13	€ 1.50
Total 11q.				€ 14.50

Taxa	Base	Valor	Total
23,00	€ 8.13	€ 1.87	€ 10.00
13,00	€ 3.98	€ 0.52	€ 4.50

IVA Incluído
Mesa: 1
Emp: Gerente

Figure 2 – Ber publishes pictures where he reveals what is up to at that precise moment

The issue which arises is that, even if they are not aware that data is being provided from the places where we are located, or from the spaces they attend, users provide information to the public, disclosing a document that is prepared with another end and with elements that identify it. They also publish photographs with other people without totally realising if they are aware of this fact and agree with it.

We can conclude that, in general, users do not show particular care in hiding information about their location, either with regard to the places where they are passing through, or those they usually visit. Throughout the analysis, only one specific context denoted this concern that happened when a generalist television report about a case of fraud and false Facebook profile was broadcast. This period led to the closure of some of the profiles, which we have been analysing, to the public. This allows us to understand the importance of other means of communication on a large scale for the conscious use of these social platforms.

Frequency of use

The access records of the analysed profiles reveal that these elderly people regularly use Facebook. Whether to comment, or to share what already exists, or to build new posts from scratch, the profiles are active and promote the circulation of various messages. Being aware that it is not possible to assess the frequency of use by the elderly on Facebook, we understand the pertinence of asking respondents about this frequency. From their answers, it appears that there is a very frequent and regular use of the social network. For them, these resources seem to have entered their daily habits and are now assumed to be an integral part of their daily lives.

Facebook as a platform to promote self-esteem and appreciation

Several times we realised that the sharing of messages or content on the network can aim to promote self-esteem and appeal to the personal appreciation of the user / issuer. We refer to messages from which praise is expected, for example, in the case of Ange: "Today I was super radiant!! Xxxxx Xxxxx following me on IG and like the portrait I did !!".

The sharing of paintings created by Ange, or of poetry written by Adi, is almost always followed by very positive comments from others, such as "I like it", "I love it", or more explicitly - "How beautiful!" among others which are more or less long. And when Adi humbly notes that she does not deserve such comments and that he has much to learn, she receives even more praiseworthy comments which allows her to confirm her successes.

Often, when personal valuation is not called for, another type of recognition is requested, through photographs of personal property, as Jo does when he shows the house he rebuilt, the boat and the old car he keeps recovered, etc. Above all, these are the type of posts that receive comments from friends with whom they interact on Facebook.

Another strategy to talk about yourself that users resort to is to publish pre-written messages that circulate frequently on social networks. The publication of videos with quotes or phrases with messages that morally elevate a set of behaviors is quite repeatedly used based on processes of identification of users who expect new reactions. The following figure is intended to illustrate this dimension.



Figure 3– Ant’s message

This user, like many others, often makes use of quotes accompanied by images to characterise feelings, experiences, supposedly his own, and to disseminate them among other users.

Indeed, the validation of our action by the “Facebook Game”, which is a game of identities, is very present in the conveyed and exchanged messages. One writes to convey an idea, but that transmission is conditioned by what one thinks to receive from the other.

What causes interactions

According to our analysis, interactions often change depending on the type of message. In several situations, there are clear differences regarding the quantity and quality of interactions and feedbacks. For instance, Ange provides two separate messages with 20 minutes difference. In a first message, she publicly shares a musical preference that has had no reaction from anyone. Then, after 20 minutes, she shares a picture she painted that receives 15 reactions with icons: 14 “Likes” and 1 “I love”.

It seems that shares directly related to themselves tend to be more prone to interactions, opinions or feedbacks. Users' daily lives are also a topic that provokes comments. A "good morning", from the café where you attend, the photograph of the place you are at the moment, can receive a greater number of messages than other posts, which shows that mobility in accessing technologies is preponderant and promotes greater interaction. When a user writes his own text, for example poetry, the decoration of his home, the "likes" and "adores", as well as the complimentary comments, go off. Another type of messages that calls for interaction are tests carried out from Facebook applications. The type of posts that appeal to the recognition of the subjects' abilities, or to test those abilities, based on challenges launched from Facebook applications stimulate reactions and comments often emerge.

Ant's case is interesting. He uses the network every day, or to share something from someone else, or to express his opinion on the matter. Interestingly, we realise that Ant never responds to comments from his friends about his publications. The interaction, therefore, seems to be weakened with the unidirectionality in communication. The fact that Ant publishes mainly political messages, which are more controversial, does not mean that he receives more responses or reactions.

There is also another aspect that causes interactions and that is related to notifications, whose objective is not only centred on the warning for reading, but that effectively promotes an answer and an action on the part of the elderly, as mentioned by the interviewee 1 : "Yeah ... when sometimes I hear the sound, I log in to see it, sometimes I have someone like my stepson who sends me hmm sometimes my nieces also say it and I answer there or like it or whatever." (E1)

Integration and communication on the social network

Although at different speeds, the elderly increasingly adhere to social networks and Facebook in particular is a space in which young people have less importance than before. We saw this aspect in the theoretical reflection component of this article. From the point of view of the elderly, it is important to understand how they joined a platform. Here, we systematically record the reasons and contexts that, according to the subjects interviewed, led them to join Facebook. Among these is the importance of “not being left behind” and the influence of the children, or grandchildren, as you can see from the voice of some interviewees: “I never had that interest in experimenting, because after that is always the same, look on Facebook. My son gave me the phone, and then I even said, "Abel everyone has Facebook, why don't you install it to me here" and that's when he installed, "Mum, it's ready, you already have it here".” (E1); “Look, you know, I saw the others who have it and I told him. (...) Yes, I said to Abel, to my son like this - “Abel, if they all have it, why can I have it too, why?” (E1) "I started to see how my grandchildren used the computer and decided to try it out" (E8); “But it was she [daughter] who taught me, I took it and I didn't know how to use it, I didn't know what to do (E4); “I... It wasn't me... This account was created by my husband, and I continued using it... only I changed my name, didn't I? (E7) It was... it was... it was... Then

my husband was really ahead all of us (laughs).” (E7). The influence of family members can be indirect when, for example, the main motivation is to contact them when they are away: “I created Facebook 12, 15 years ago. That was when my son went to England.” (E4).

It was recurring to realise that, according to some interviewees, the information that circulates on Facebook is of little depth and even of little use. As E3 states: “Because of what I saw on Facebook today, it is all useless, sterile conversations that do not lead... Say... No, they do not form people, they do not inform, they are all sterile things, false things, false profiles...” (E3).

In parallel, we have already seen in the literature review that the new communication contexts have created situations in which the sender does not have a clear idea about who reads the messages he/she publishes, making them circulate through the network, dependent on others' shares, “likes”, etc. Respondents 3, 4 and 6 show that they have this perception: “I mean people put themselves behind a screen and say what they want, but face to face they wouldn't say it, and that's the big problem, it's the big difference between us talking here face to face or talking behind a door, it is not the same...” (E3); “Yes, because now they are able to say things on the mobile phone that unfortunately we don't say when we are with the person. And then they are wrong, because we write I love you on the internet and then do not show it in person. There is a lot on Facebook that doesn't matter, they just want to talk about this and that. And he went there and goes I don't know where and then he goes there. It is very difficult” (E4); “Yes it is, like those chains I receive, in which she says send I don't know to how many people, she sends it to me and I always send it to her. She doesn't know whether to send it to others or not, so I just send it to her”.

On the other hand, networks allow communication to become faster and more immediate. One of the interviewees recognises this aspect well: “It made it easier for me. (...) I had to be waiting to call England at a certain time, so as not to pay and at this moment if I want to go to WhatsApp, Messenger and I connect the camera and I can see them, that made it easier for me (E4).

Changes in relations

On this issue of the impact of technologies on interpersonal relationships, most references are negative and do not reflect the idea that technology has brought advantages. In fact, there is a very particular concern with grandchildren, young people and the maintenance of intergenerational relations. There are elderly people who report that the use of networks causes behaviours considered to be unusual: “The other day I was at the window and I saw a boy waving his arms, talking and I didn't see that he had the hearing aids. I didn't realise it and I thought the guy was not doing well at all.” (E4); others are concerned with the distance associated with the use of these technologies: “When I talk to my grandson, Martim, I turn on the camera and I am not able to see his eyes! He is always looking at the keys on the computer responding to friends. I have to say: Martim, look at your grandmother because I like to look you in the eye. And I say to Martim: TURN OFF. END IT. (...) And I think this is driving us away from each other. We are old and we are completely alone. There are the elderly and there are the youngsters. The youngsters are not interested in the elderly and the elderly also have difficulties in getting close to the youngsters” (E4), or as one of the interviewees says, “Ah yes, nowadays young people only speak through cell phones and Facebook, even when they are together they don't talk, it used to be different in the past we went to the street to play the spinning top, the marble, things that nowadays no longer exist. We had a lot more contact with each other, nowadays virtual contact is the basis” (E8).

From the perspective of our interviewees, the privilege of being present meant another way of organising life. Whereas technology caters for quick and immediate contact with someone, people before had to define, in advance, meetings and commitments: “So that's what I say, it was privileged hmmm... Let's say... It was privileged the person's presence. So we already knew that at 1pm we were all drinking coffee in a certain place and talking, playing the naval battle, exchanging impressions and agreeing (...). Dividing people, that is, today people do not privilege personal contact, today the privilege among young people it is not personal contact, the exchange of ideas, say ... Empathy. This is what we are doing here, this is not what they privilege, they privilege this (points to the cell phone). They speak through WhatsApp, speak through Facebook, which one is it? LinkedIn? LinkedIn, isn't it? (E3). Among the group of interviewees, only one elderly person mentions the fact that he did not have any negative changes, emphasising the coexistence as a positive context: “In principle, nothing has changed, that is to say... it has given me more possibility to live with... coexistence.” (E5)

We know, and history records, the changes that new technological resources, as well as the interaction on social networks, have been conditioning our lives. However, our constant ability to adapt to new contexts also allows us to welcome new habits and fit them into our daily lives at ease, leaving little room for us to perceive the before and after.

Final Considerations

One of the objectives of this article was to be a contribution to research on social networks with older audiences. This social interaction resource has come to be seen as an integrating means of this population in a technological world that is still a remote one. In this study, we tried to explore a set of observation indicators for the identification of user profiles on the network which allowed us to characterise ways of use by the elderly, their behaviour and

interactions on the network. With this, we got closer to the representations of these users in relation to their relationship with Facebook and other technologies.

We note the concern of the elderly with the youngest, particularly with their grandchildren. The seniors specifically refer to the excessive time spent in front of the screen and the way in which intergenerational communication is impaired. Sometimes there is a certain impotence to intervene in this field and some resilience due to the fact that the elderly assume, which is part of the behavior of this generation. However, grandchildren, in many contexts, are the ones who help grandparents to integrate into social networks.

Among some elderly people, there is an awareness of the dangers and problems associated with the use of social networks, such as the credibility of information, isolation, messages that circulate with little or no depth. Even so, several elderly people emphasize access to information as a positive aspect and that keeps them active on social networks. However, while analyzing the profiles on Facebook, we did not find this awareness with regard to the amount of personal information that users disclose on the networks, making it public. During the period of analysis of the profiles, we noticed that the elderly provide personal information which can be appropriated by others: interests (hobbies, favorite foods, outings they like to do, etc.); political inclinations; times of entry and exit from home; weekly routines; socioeconomic aspects; vacation locations; existence of material goods; names and profiles of close family and friends, including your childhood friends. In addition to these aspects, we found that some have the locator activated, making it possible to know, at each moment, where the elderly person is.

In this specific data collection, for methodological reasons, we had to limit the analysis of messages in time, but the perception was that if we focused on certain users, we would be able, with some ease, to profile the person and understand his/her habits, routines, tastes ... aspects that make them clearly vulnerable to criminal actions, such as scams.

Facebook, a platform that allows the recognition of the qualities and characteristics, ways of thinking of each one, assumes a particular role for the elderly. We are talking about a group that has lost the possibility of being socially recognised in relation to tasks within employment and other types of achievements, such as the children who are raised, the building of the house, the grandchildren occupied at school, as we have already seen in the theoretical part of this article.

Finally, we want to highlight an aspect that makes us think about the need to rescue humanity in this virtual context. Many of the published posts seem to have as main communicative intent the expression of the emitters as singular subjects, unique, in some cases, good and worthy of recognition. It cannot be said with any certainty, in relation to the cases which were analyzed, that this is an attitude assumed also in face-to-face relationships, or that it is motivated by isolation, to which many of these people are subject. It seems to us, in any case, a call for the recognition of individuality in a diffuse community, in which some of the "friends" have never met before. One feels, however, that it is important to be part of this community, because we need it to exist.

The reinforcement of individuality in the narratives of these subjects, either through statements about themselves and about their character traits, the manifestation of their talents and moral values, the expressions of personal pride, or in relation to what they do, or what they have, in relation to their loves, the expression of the experiences of the beautiful, with photographs published here and now, the affirmation of policies and ideals, all this seems to be directed towards reinforcing an individual identity, in the face of a community of recipients, either imagined or real. They seek to belong to a community where it is possible to find one or more interlocutors capable of appreciating their identity, where one can speak to and praise others through a "like", a "smile" or a throbbing red heart. Yes, we are unique, but we don't like to be alone.

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