STRATEGIC OUTNESS AND SOCIAL MEDIA NETWORK FAMILIARITY IN REGARDS OF CYBERBULLYING

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Abstract: Once upon a time, social media notifications' pressure indulged adding all friends request, even if the persons knew each other in real life or not. Nowadays, youth online behaviour tends to be more critical and selective with social media profiles and online identities. Coming out of the closet, or shortly coming out, represents a metaphor for LGBT people's self-disclosure of their sexual orientation or of their gender identity. Labelled as a privacy issue, coming out of the closet is mostly described as a psychological process or journey, a decision-making or risk-taking action, a speech act, an emancipation from oppression, feeling of gay pride instead of shame and social stigma. It has been debated whether the selective disclosure or strategic outness on

social media is a good strategy to overcome possible prospective cyberbullying attacks. The project Keeping youth safe from Cyberbullying was developed by our research team, aiming to deeper understand the dynamics of different cyberbullying aspects in online environments among youth, by creating an online questionnaire composed by single item research questions related to core concepts and perceptions. This paper is focused is in analysing the effect of social media network familiarity on LGBT online self-disclosure or strategic outness in regards of cyberbullying incidents, in 507 high school students from Romania, Belgium, Turkey and Spain. Results show that when modelling effects of social media network familiarity on strategic outness, the curvilinear model (7%) is more consistent that the linear model (6%), when both models show statistical significance. Psychological conclusions and implications are discussed.

Keywords: strategic outness, social media network familiarity, dynamic relationship, cyberbullying

Introduction

Once upon a time, social media notifications' pressure indulged adding all friends request, even if the people knew each other in real life or not. Nowadays, youth online behaviour tends to be more critical and selective with social media profiles and online identities. It is a sifting of relations, called the theory of socio-emotional selectivity. The theory of socio-emotional selectivity shows that young people in particular, are looking for activities and people to offer them an emotional reward. Thus, socio-emotional regulation becomes a decompensation strategy increasingly adopted by young people who use public posting of private aspects over the internet. As we will see in this study, some young people are aware of the aspect of social network familiarity while others are not, when it comes to sharing LGBT online self-disclosure.

A profile on social networks is like a business card we offer to other users, including those we do not really know. Usually, people with whom young people communicate in social networks are real-life friends. Sometimes, however, friendship requests are sent from absolutely unknown people. A social network is a public place with over one billion users, it cannot be a personal space.

Coming out of the closet, or shortly coming out, represents a metaphor for LGBT people's self-disclosure of their sexual orientation or of their gender identity. Labelled as a privacy issue, coming out of the closet is mostly described as a psychological process or journey, a decision-making or risk-taking action, a speech act, an emancipation from oppression, feeling of gay pride instead of shame and social stigma. It has been debated whether the selective disclosure on social media is a good strategy to overcome possible prospective cyberbullying attacks.

Some LGBT youth are more uniformly self-disclosed, while others may disclose to some groups but not others. This selective disclosure is a complex process on real name social media sites, which tend to encourage a unified presentation of self across social contexts (McConnell, E. et al., 2018).

As related to mental health aspects, although bisexual men report lower levels of mental health relative to gay men, few studies have examined the factors that contribute to bisexual men's mental health. Bisexual men are less likely to disclose, and more likely to conceal or hide, their sexual orientation than gay men, this adversely impacting their mental health. Schrimshaw and collaborators have examined the factors associated with disclosure and with concealment of sexual orientation, the association of disclosure and concealment with mental health, and the potential mediators (i.e., internalized homophobia, social support) of this association with mental health (Schrimshaw, E.W, et al., 2013).

In 2011, Orne referring to the concept of coming out, after tracing its conceptual inflation, shifts the lens from identity development to reconsider coming out as identity management. The author develops the perspective of strategic outness, the contextual and continual management of identity, to emphasize the role of social context in sexual identity disclosure. In his research, Orne explored three aspects of strategic outness: strategies, motivational discourses, and social relationships in controlling information, and emphasize the role of social relationships in their decision-making. Strategic outness reconsiders how coming out is used with sexuality research, providing researchers with an explicit perspective to consider the social context of sexual identity disclosure in their analyses (Orne, J., 2011).

In 2016, Whitehead notes that prior studies have noted significant health disadvantages experienced by LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) populations in the US. The results yelled the role of stigma in shaping access to primary health care among rural LGBT people and point to the interventions towards decreasing stigma in health care settings or increasing patients' disclosure of orientation or gender identity to providers (Whitehead, J., et al., 2016).

Finally, in 2019, Feinstein et al., have concluded that sexual minorities are at increased risk for substance use and mental health problems. Their study examined sexual orientation and gender as moderators of the longitudinal associations between outness and substance use (cigarettes, marijuana, illicit drugs, and alcohol) and mental health (depression and anxiety). Authors concluded that being more open about one's sexual orientation had negative consequences for bisexual individuals but not for gay/lesbian individuals, thus identifying potential risks of being open about one's sexual orientation for bisexual individuals.

As a final remark, the negative effects of strategic outness can be seen in terms of attracting cyberbully behaviours that might be represented by posting as comments or messages, negative rumours, threats, sexual remarks or a personal information that can humiliate or injure the victim emotional or social status (Lile, R., 2017).

Research Methodology

With the rapid development of social networks, there is a focus on whether the new communication methods, social networks, have an overall positive impact in all societies or not. There are lots of research that asses the line between cyberbullying and freedom of speech (Espelage, D.L, et al. 2017; Rad, D. et al, 2019; Qing, Li, 2010) concluding that it is a matter of netiquette and how conscious are the online aggressors about the effect of their words. Further, people who would not harass others face-to-face might cyberbully peers because they believe that they could hide or it would be acceptable to engage in such behaviour virtually (Beran & Li, 2005). As suggested by dynamic systems theory, cyberbullying is a result of the interaction of its system's components, peers playing a strong role in sustaining cyberbullying, (Espelage, Holt, 2001).

The project Keeping youth safe from Cyberbullying, ID 2016-3-TR01-KA205-036619 under Erasmus+, had been developed by our research team aiming to deeper understand the dynamics of cyberbullying in online environments among youth, to develop educational resources for professionals involved in youth activities in order to prevent these type behaviors. The objectives of this paper is to analyze the effect of social media network familiarity on LGBT online self-disclosure or strategic outness in regards of cyberbullying incidents, in 507 high school students from Romania, Belgium, Turkey and Spain. In this regard, our team has designed an online questionnaire aiming to gather descriptive data, general perception about the frequency and typology of cyberbullying type incidents, perceptions about the safety of the educational environment, perceived parental support, and an auto evaluation scale centered on self-efficacy perceptions.

This research that is focused on measuring online youth perceptions about strategic outness in relation to social media network familiarity. Single item measures owns the same efficacy in identifying statistical trends like multiple items scales; the procedure has been successfully used by researchers when measuring quality of life (Zimmerman et al., 2006). Single item scales are usually used to represent global constructs that are conceptualized as mono dimensions, like the one we have focused on, strategic outness and social media network familiarity.

The item that measured the perception about strategic outness referred to "LGBT should remain online invisible, otherwise problems will follow." We have registered answers on a 1 to 5 Likert scale, where 1 stands for fully agree and 5 stands for fully disagree. In percent, our respondents fully agreed to the statement in 46,4%, agreed 18,7%, were neutral 17,6%, disagreed 6,5% and fully disagreed 8,9%. We have registered also 2% missing data.

The item that measured the social network familiarity referred to "Do you know all your online friends?". Overall, a percent of 39,6% youth responded Yes and 60,4% responded No.

The study was conducted on a random sample of 507 high school students: 98 from Romania, 130 from Belgium, 224 from Turkey and 50 from Spain, aged 17-19, of both sexes, males 48,6% and 72 females 51,4%, from both rural and urban environmental origins.

One of our preliminary assumptions is that there is a statistical difference between Romanian, Belgian, Turkish and Spanish youth regarding the perception about strategic outness. In order to test our hypothesis, we have used SPSS' one way ANOVA analysis, where strategic outness perceptions were statistically observed based on residence country.

Testing for differences, we have calculated an ANOVA coefficient of $F=27.148$ statistically significant at a $p<0,01$. Thus, on scale from 1 to 5, where 1 stands for fully agree and 5 stands for fully disagree with strategic outness, Romanian youth have a mean score of m=2,19, Belgian youth score m=1,55, Turkish youth score m= 2,58 and Spanish youth score m=1,33. We can observe that Spanish youth score highest on agreeing with LGBT invisibility over the social network, followed by Belgian youth, then there is a slight agreeing with LGBT invisibility in Romanian youth and a neutral opinion on Turkish youth. In other words, Spanish youth feels the most threaten by strategic outness, then Belgian and Romanian youth are agree with nondisclosure, then Turkish youth do not express a particular marginal opinion about strategic outness.

Regarding these aspects, our hypothesis states that two research variables: strategic outness and social network familiarity are in a curvilinear relationship. In order to test our curvilinear hypothesis, we have used SPSS'

multiple linear regression analysis, based on multiple regression analysis for curvilinear effects, where social network familiarity was the dependent variable.

Results

Regarding these aspects, our hypothesis states that two research variables: strategic outness and For testing our hypothesis that states that between strategic outness and social network familiarity there is a curvilinear relationship, we have used a confirmatory factor analysis, based on multiple regression analysis for curvilinear effects.

A curvilinear relationship is described as a relationship between two or more variables which can be graphically depicted by anything other than a straight line. A particular case of curvilinear relationships is the situation where two variables grow together until they reach a certain point (positive relationship) and then one of them increases while the other decreases (negative relationship) or vice-versa, the graphically representation of the function being an U or an inverted U shape.

This relationship can be easily identified graphically by a Scatterplot, choosing additional two representations of the regression line: Linear and Quadratic model, for depicting curvilinear effects. The Scatterplot diagram presented in Figure 1, indicates the curvilinear relationship between online LGBT self-disclosure on the horizontal axis and social network familiarity, represented on the vertical axis.
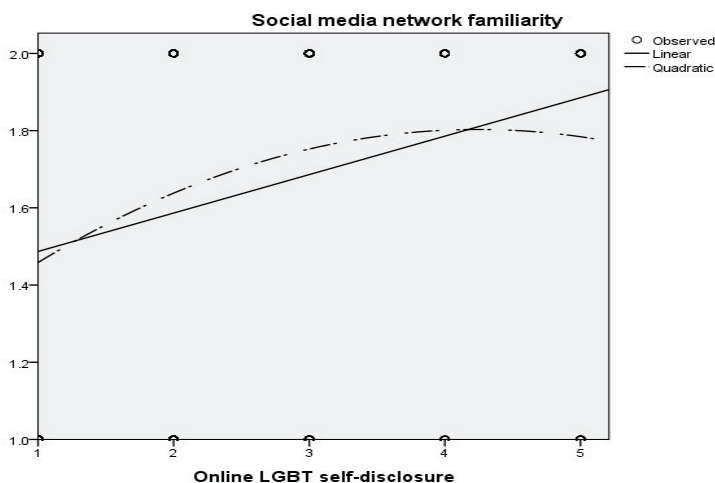

Fig. 1. The curvilinear relationship between strategic outness and social network familiarity

There is a very high correlation between strategic outness perceptions (m=2.11, SD=1.31) and social network familiarity (m=1.60, SD=0.49) of

r=.266 significant at a p<.01 which methodologically allows us to proceed with multiple linear regression analysis.

For curvilinear relationship testing, the present study proposes a hierarchical multiple regression analysis, the dependent variable being social network familiarity, and the independent variable in step 1 online strategic outness, and instep 2 online strategic outness, and squared online strategic outness.

Table 1 presents the fitting of the two models, linear – Model 1 and curvilinear/ quadratic – Model 2. As we can see in Model 1 the model that supposes linear relationship, social network familiarity accounts for 6% of the variance in strategic outness perceptions with a F=37.792 significant at a p<.001. In Model 2, the model that supposes curvilinear relationship, social network familiarity accounts for 7% of the variance in strategic outness perceptions with a F=22.016 significant at a p<.001.

Table 1. Linear and curvilinear regression models for strategic outness and social network familiarity

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.266[a]	.071	.069	.474	.071	37.792	1	495	.000
2	.286[b]	.082	.078	.471	.011	5.869	1	494	.016

a. Predictors: (Constant), strategic outness
b. Predictors: (Constant), strategic outness, squared strategic outness

ANOVA[a]

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	8.478	1	8.478	37.792	.000[b]
	Residual	111.040	495	.224		
	Total	119.517	496			
2	Regression	9.781	2	4.891	22.016	.000[c]
	Residual	109.736	494	.222		
	Total	119.517	496			

a. Dependent Variable: social network familiarity
b. Predictors: (Constant), strategic outness

c. Predictors: (Constant), strategic outness, squared strategic outness

Coefficients[a]

Model		Unstandar. Coef.		Standar. Coef.	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1.387	.040		34.467	.000
	strategic outness	.100	.016	.266	6.148	.000
2	(Constant)	1.213	.082		14.717	.000
	strategic outness	.278	.075	.744	3.686	.000
	squared strategic outness	-.033	.014	-.489	-2.423	.016

a. Dependent Variable: social network familiarity

All standardized coefficients of Beta (β= .318; β= -.946 and β=1.282) are significant at p<.05 which gives a high consistency to our both models. Changing Beta coefficient's sign from + to - means that the effect is growing in the opposite direction, which demonstrates that the relationship between the two variables: strategic outness and social network familiarity is not linear, but curvilinear. The additional incremental predictive capacity of 1 percent, added by including the squared online strategic outness which is accounting for the band in the regression line, indicates that there is a curvilinear relationship between strategic outness and social network familiarity.

This curvilinear relationship demonstrates that extreme aspects, extremely reduced and extremely high levels of youth online LGBT self-disclosure or strategic outness agreement regardless of consequences, significantly influences the activation of social network familiarity type of online behaviour, which is an identity management strategy of closure, meaning that youth will select their social network contacts according to familiarity, while situating on the neutral segment of agreement-disagreement to online strategic outness, triggers the non-selectivity of social media network, especially in regards to a prospective cyberbullying event.

Until now, we are not aware of any research indicating a curvilinear relationship between online strategic outness and social network familiarity, thus, this study may help expanding the current body of knowledge on socio-psychological aspects of youth online strategic outness taking into account the social network familiarity.

Conclusions and implications

According to social capital theory, social networks provide a vehicle for social resources that can be beneficial for youth well-being. This study is a first step at understanding the correlates of social network familiarity among LGBT youth. Social networks can be incorporated in a variety of theoretical frameworks, including social capital theory. The concept of social capital involves a notion of social relations, networks, as an available resource or social support. Social capital can be defined as a function of social structure, a system of social relations, producing advantage for individuals who are within that structure (Erosheva, E.A. et al., 2016). Thus, social ties constitute social capital of people that can give them access to social, emotional, and practical support (Gray, 2009). As a conclusion of a recent research regarding socio-psychological understandings of diverse type of conflicts, people express and react according to what they are, they feel, live, life events can change the way of thinking but cannot change their personality, which will continuously be an object of study for specialists (Vancu, G., Egerau, A., 2016).

The socio-psychological conclusion of this curvilinear relationship is that extreme aspects, extremely reduced and extremely high levels of youth online LGBT self-disclosure or strategic outness agreement regardless of consequences, significantly influences the activation of social network familiarity type of online behaviour, which is an identity management strategy of closure, meaning that youth will select their social network contacts according to familiarity, while situating on the neutral segment of agreement-disagreement to online strategic outness, triggers the non-selectivity of social media network, especially in regards to a prospective cyberbullying event.

We can identify two limits of this research, firstly not considering Donovan's et al., (1999) notion of layers of outness, which LGBT continually negotiate and re-negotiate, due to the fact that we have measured the agreement with online self-disclosure on a 5 points Likert scale item, reducing the options for describing layers; and secondly not differentiating between LGBT.

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