Purposes for social media content production

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KEYWORDS
social media, content creation, communication purposes, information, entertainment, personal identity

BRIEF DESCRIPTION
Informed by the uses and gratifications framework (Katz & Foulkes, 1962; Lasswell, 1948) according to which people produce and consume certain media for specific uses and because they expect specific gratifications, these variables address the types of communication purposes and social relations that content producers on social media seek to build with others when publishing specific types of posts.

FIELD OF APPLICATION/THEORETICAL FOUNDATION
Four main purposes explain why individuals use social media (see e.g., Pelletier et al., 2020):
- informational purposes: people seek information and self-education
- entertainment purposes: people seek enjoyable experiences
- social purposes: people seek to interact with others and gain a sense of belonging
- convenience purposes: people seek to maximise convenience (e.g., easy and cheap communication)

In the same vein, four motives can explain why social media users engage in leaving comments, split into individual and social reasons (Barnes, 2018):

individual-centric reasons
- informational reasons: people seek to provide information and educate others
- entertainment reasons: people seek to provide enjoyment and fun
- personal identity reasons: people share their opinions and emotions with the community

social interaction:
- people seek to build relationships, interact with others and gain a sense of belonging

Barnes’ four reasons for leaving comments can be broadened to publishing social media content in general. Let us now see how to infer these reasons from manifest content. Dolan (2015) analysed the communication purposes of wine brands on social media. She quantitatively inferred these three motivations from informational, entertaining and relational social media content. She defines the variable of relational content as “gratifications of integration and social interaction [that] involve members gaining insights into the circumstances of others, social empathy, identifying with others, gaining a sense of belonging, finding a basis for conversation and social interaction, helping carrying out social roles, and enabling a user to connect with family, friends and society”. It is evident from her definition that personal-identity/relational reasons and social interactions are intertwined and impossible to separate from each other. Rather, social relations permeate in informational, personal and entertainment content. As their name suggests, social media posts are social by nature.

Example studies: Dolan (2015); Bouko (2024)

INFORMATION ON DOLAN, 2015
Author: Rebecca Dolan
Research question: What communication purposes do wine brands seek to fulfil when they publish social media content?
Object of analysis: The study was based on the social media posts published by twelve Australian wine brands (N = 2,236).
Time frame of analysis: January 1st 2013 – December 31st, 2013
Information about variables: Dolan (2015) coded informational, entertaining, and relational variables in relation to the social media content production of wine brands.

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Dolan's informational content codes were: brand name, general information, product/vineyard/ winery/venue image, price, website, product review, product award/image, testing and sampling, product variety/origin/making, opening hours, year made, contact details, brand news, service, wine shows/awards/reviews, event, product description.

Her entertaining codes are: food/recipe, emoticon, weather, humour, interesting/fun fact, historic image, scenic/occasion/food and produce/celebrity/meme/animal image, slang.

Finally, her relational content codes are: question, congratulations and thanking fans, quiz/game, holiday/event/day, affection (e.g., xo), ask for action, child/baby image, inspirational/motivational quote, customer/employee/community involvement image, friends and fan, employee name, emotion words, family.

**Level of analysis:** social media post

**Reliability:** 1) training session held in which the two coders worked together on a sub-set of the data, in order to discuss agreement and disagreement on the coding of variables; 2) independent coding test on a sample of 100 posts by the two coders, 3) inter-coder agreement calculated with Cohen's kappas (media kappa value of all variables = .77) (Dolan, 2015: 118-120).

**INFORMATION ON BOUKO, 2024**

**Author:** Catherine Bouko  
**Research question:** What informational, entertainment, and personal identity purposes do citizens fulfil in their image-based social media posts when expressing their political opinions and emotions?

**Object of analysis:** The study was based on a data-set of Brexit-related image-based social media posts (N = 1,676 Flickr posts and 1,343 tweets)  
**Time frame of analysis:** June, 24 – July 23, 2016 (the month that followed the Brexit vote)

**Information about variables:** The coding scheme (see Table 1) contains six variables, which are all coded as present (value 1) or absent (value 2). These variables are not mutually exclusive: very often, several types can be inferred from each social media post, e.g., informing and expressing one’s point of view at the same time.

The results reveal that self-expression is the most salient purpose in both corpora, concerning 46% and 62% of the Flickr and Twitter posts, respectively. What is more surprising is that one out of four Flickr posts (i.e., 25%) serves the purpose of sharing information. Play is a major purpose in both datasets (20% and 31%). The results for Twitter indicate a concentration on three types of communication purposes (self-expression, information and play); no other social function exceeds the 5% threshold. Finally, sharing elements of one’s personal life is relatively infrequent, especially on Twitter.

**Level of analysis:** social media post

**Reliability:** 1) training session held in which two coders worked together on a sub-set of the data, in order to discuss agreement and disagreement on the coding of variables; 2) independent coding test on a sample of 500 posts by two coders (i.e., 10% of the dataset), 3) inter-coder agreement calculated with Cohen’s kappas (Bouko et al., 2018).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of purposes of social media content creation</th>
<th>Description and examples</th>
<th>Cohen's kappa</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Informational</td>
<td>Information sharing</td>
<td>.878</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Forwarded news, link to external content, informational statements and/or others’ points of view</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Eye-witnessing</td>
<td>Amateur pictures of events that the individual attended, possibly with text that refers to eye-witnessing (e.g., an amateur photograph of an anti-Brexit march)</td>
<td>.944</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal identity</td>
<td>Intimacy sharing</td>
<td>.733</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Event-related intimate moments in visual content and/or in text (e.g., a picture of a tree and the text “Treexit. A sad story. Another sad”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal points of view and appraisals</td>
<td>Self-expression and appraisal in visuals and/or text (e.g., a picture of someone drinking in a pub and the text “Time to have a drink to forget all this mess”)</td>
<td>.890</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entertainment</td>
<td>Playing</td>
<td>.957</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Playful content in visual and/or textual content, based on incongruity and/or exaggeration (e.g., a meme featuring Boris Johnson as a</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td></td>
<td>.921</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### REFERENCES


