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Social Media Platforms as a Tool for Sharing Emotions. A Perspective upon the National Security Agencies

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Abstract. *Emotions importance increases even more in the context of the national security agencies. Since their mission is to protect and defend the citizens against attacks and also to provide leadership and justice services to other agencies and partners, the aim of the information they post on social media should be twofold: on the one hand, it should reflect the attitudes, values and beliefs, supported by the institution, and on the other hand, it should have an impact on citizens feeling of security. But, do they manage to meet these demands? Are they focusing on impressing the audience or they concentrate on sharing specific emotions? Is it a marketing strategy or a knowledge strategy? Starting from these, the purpose of this research is to set a nexus between emotions and the use of social media by the national security organizations. In other words, we aim (i) to determine the main types of emotions, (ii) to establish whether these are shared within the social media platforms, (iii) to identify the purpose for which the national security organizations use social media, (iv) to determine whether social media could serve as Ba for the national security organizations. In order to achieve these objectives, we employ an ethic approach and develop a longitudinal study based on quantitative and qualitative content analysis. The results prove that social media platforms may serve as Ba since they appear as a shared space which fosters individual and collective knowledge creation and sharing. The national security agencies use social media platforms for combining the classical four types of Ba: originating Ba (it shares its emotions, feelings and thoughts through its posts), interacting Ba (through the generated reactions and comments, it ensures the development of shared models and the conversion of tacit knowledge into explicit knowledge), cyber Ba (by fostering the virtual interaction among its followers) and exercising Ba (by facilitating the creation of new emotional, spiritual and cognitive knowledge).*

Keywords: *emotions, knowledge, social media, national security organization.*

Introduction

In the current society several structural changes occur faster and faster and affect both individuals and organizations. Day by day, the individuals become more unpredictable, change their preferences and choices based on rumours, and keep searching for a space where to feel free to share what they live, feel or think. On the other hand, the organizations keep looking for cheap tools that could support their optimal communication with all the categories of stakeholders. At this level, social media seems to satisfy the necessity of both categories: individuals and organizations. Thus, some researchers present Facebook as a platform capable of distracting employees from their work (Fewkes & McCabe, 2012; Rosen, Carrier & Cheever, 2013) while others emphasise its capacity of acting as an open-space in which people can express unconditionally their emotions and they can share their experiences and opinions with others (Ben Youssef & Ben Youssef, 2011; Chamberlain & Broderick, 2007). At the organizational level, researchers argue that Facebook is an efficient platform during the marketing campaigns (Assaad & Gomez, 2011; Rapp, Beitelspacher, Grewal & Hughes, 2013), corporate social responsibility campaigns (Fieseler, Fleck & Meckel, 2010) and also for human resources recruitment and selection processes (Brown & Vaughn, 2011). Although apparently both approaches are divergent, in a more or less conscious manner, they highlight the importance of social interaction and emotions for individuals and organizations development.

Usually ignored, emotions are complex systems of information processing, based on which people understand the reality, the individual and collective behaviour, and they also manage to survive. As O'Rourke and Ortony (1994, p.283) state "feelings influence thoughts and actions, which in turn can give rise to new emotional reactions". Brătianu (2011, 2013, 2015) takes a step forward and introduces the concept of emotional knowledge which has powerful implications in entrepreneurship, management, leadership and marketing since it can be transformed in and from cognitive knowledge. Synthesizing, emotions are those which determine individuals' behaviour; metaphorically, they are the "heart" which pumps the blood into people's veins and make them act in a specific way. In line with this metaphor, Nosko, Wood and Molema (2010) claim that Facebook's users share almost 25% of the information which should be shared within the platform.

Emotions importance increases even more in the context of the national security agencies. Since their mission is to protect and defend the citizens against attacks and also to provide leadership and justice services to other agencies and partners, the aim of the information they post on social media should be twofold: on the one hand, it should reflect the attitudes, values and

beliefs, supported by the institution, and on the other hand, it should have an impact on citizens feeling of security. But, are the national security organizations meeting these demands? Are their posts focusing on impressing the audience or are they concentrating on sharing specific emotions? Is it a marketing strategy or a knowledge strategy?

In order to provide an answer to these questions, we employ a qualitative research which is detailed further. In the next section of this paper, we present the research methodology that we followed and then we expose the main findings. We close this article by drawing the main conclusions, limits and the future research directions.

Research methodology

The purpose of this research is to set a nexus between emotions and the use of social media by the national security organizations. In other words, we aim (i) to determine the main types of emotions, (ii) to establish whether these are shared within the social media platforms, (iii) to identify the purpose for which the national security organizations use social media, (iv) to determine whether social media could serve as *Ba* for the national security organizations.

In order to achieve these objectives, we employ an ethic approach. The ethic perspective has its roots in the behaviourist psychology and the anthropological approaches and it supports the analysis of a phenomenon from the outside. Nevertheless, it suites to the analyzed problem since we use pre-existing theories, hypotheses and approaches as constructs in order to determine if they apply to specific settings (Lett, 1990; Morris, Leung, Ames & Lickel, 1999). Therefore, we develop a multiple-stage research strategy.

First, we search in ScienceDirect, Emerald, Sage and ProQuest databases articles and studies that include in title, abstract or keywords at least one of the following phrases “emotion”, “emotional knowledge”, “social media”, “social networks”, “national security agency”, “FBI”. We focus on the articles and studies that were published from 2006 to the present; the time frame is selected based on the fact that it reflects the period in which the use of social media for professional purposes gained its legitimacy. Second, we analyze the reference list of the selected articles and studies in order to identify additional sources. Then we analyze them in order to determine their relevance for the research problem and we identify a number of 43 articles. Most of them are found in four journals: *Computers in Human Behavior*, *Management Dynamics in the Knowledge Economy*, *Organization Studies* and

Journal of Business and Psychology. Other journals contribute with only one article.

Further, we develop a longitudinal study based on quantitative and qualitative content analysis. We choose to use content analysis as a research method due to the fact that it has an analytical flexibility, it is nonintrusive and it entails the specification of category criteria for reliability and validity tests (Duriau, Reger & Pfarrer, 2007). Therefore, we define three main categories, namely: emotions (characteristics and typology), social media (types and characteristics) and national security agency. Besides, we use techniques like systematization for identifying the characteristics of the main types of emotions which could be promoted by the national security agencies when posting on Facebook.

Last but not least, the research is interdisciplinary due to the fact that it combines concepts and approaches from psychology and management.

Social media: *Ba* when it comes to emotions and national security agencies

Although the concepts of emotion, affect, and mood are usually treated as interchangeable, several differences occur among them. Unlike emotions, moods are usually of long lasting duration, low intensity, unintentional and diffused (Bagozzi, Baumgartner & Pieters, 1999); they appear out of the blue and they do not have a referent. On the other hand, according to Bagozzi *et al.* (1999, p.185), the affects describe “processes including emotions (and) moods ... Thus, affect might be considered as a general category ... rather than a particular psychological process *per se*”. Going further, emotions “are relatively brief, phasic events that are accompanied by physiological processes, often expressed physically (for example, in gestures, posture, facial features) and may result in specific actions to affirm or cope with the emotion depending on its nature and meaning for the person experiencing the emotion” (Chamberlain & Broderick, 2007, p.202). So, the three concepts are inter-related and describe some possible stages of development.

In line with Darwin’s theory (1872) according to which the emotional expressions are universal, the researchers from the psychology area (Ekman, Friesen & Ancoli, 1980; Goleman, 2001; Plutchik, 1982) argue that there are only five basic emotions (namely, happiness, sadness, fear, anger, and disgust); all the others (such as, surprise, shock, exasperation, guilt, desire, love, trust) appear as a combination of the basic emotions. On the other hand, the scholars from the behavioural psychology (Nyarko, Baah-Boateng &

Nketiah-Amponsah, 2014; Yang & Bahli, 2015) sustain that individuals' emotions, feelings and psychological reactions are generated by the environment and determine, more or less consciously, their actions. In fact, Nyarko, Baah-Boateng and Nketiah-Amponsah (2014) claim that individuals' interaction with the environment may transform into an affective event. They argue that the elements from the environment act as stimulus and generate emotional experiences among the individuals. If emotions usually occur almost immediately (or very close to the moment in which the interaction is registered), not the same happens when it comes to its manifestation. Sometimes, people become aware of their feelings and act in consequence (Elfenbein, 2007), in which case they are described as impulsive while other times they just accumulate psychological experiences and use them only in certain circumstances or when they are under a lot of pressure. In both cases the causality relationship between emotions and behaviour is reflected. Despite these insights, there is a lack of research regarding the processes of sharing emotions. The analysis developed so far concentrate either on determining the elements that trigger certain emotions (Bagozzi *et al.*, 1999; Chamberlain & Broderick, 2007; Housley, Claypool, Garcia-Marques & Mackie, 2009; Kanske & Kotz, 2011) or their behavioural effects (Haidt, 2001; Izard, 2010; Kilduff, Chiaburu & Menges, 2010; Slovic & Peters, 2006; Steigenberger, 2015). The first prove that emotions are context-related psychological processes, triggered by verbal stimuli, colours, and others behaviour. The latter bring forward emotions' impact on decision making, information processing and risk-taking.

But, although emotions are perceived as human characteristics and sometimes are included in the tacit knowledge category, the concept of emotional knowledge started to be used at both levels: individual and organizational. As Brătianu (2011, 2013, 2015) states emotional knowledge is based on emotions which are integrated with cognitive knowledge into mental models. Given these characteristics, their importance increases even more in the current digital-driven economy where human interactions move from a real space to a virtual one, and emotions are pictured using emoticons.

Against the backdrop of technological progress, social interactions moved from the real world to a virtual one which allows a more complete and profound manifestation of individuals values, emotions, feelings and beliefs. According to Amichai-Hamburger, Wainapel and Fox (2009), Internet offers various platforms (especially, those from the Web 2.0 category) which enhance and streamline the interaction among users, facilitating the creation and sharing of emotions, thoughts, ideas, values and beliefs. If Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) divide these in two categories: explicit and tacit knowledge,

Brătianu (2011, 2013, 2015) label it as cognitive, spiritual and emotional knowledge.

In September 2013, Facebook became the biggest social media platform and attracted organizations' interest (Nel & Halaszovich, 2015). Apparently, within the social media platforms, people share information and cognitive knowledge (documents, images etc.). In fact, they create the unique opportunity for the organization to get to know its customers and employees (Von Krogh, 2012) and also to communicate globally (Larsen *et al.*, 2006). Users' profiles and posts suggest what they think about themselves or what they would like others to think and they also bring forward personal information (Gosling, Gaddis & Vazire, 2008). Indirectly, it reflects how they react to reality and current trends. An individual's action on Facebook offers the opportunity of knowing and understanding his/her behaviour. When a user appreciates the Facebook page of an institution, he/she establishes a cognitive and emotional connection with the organization (Nel & Halaszovich, 2015). Therefore, as a manifestation of the psychological involvement, when a user appreciates the Facebook page of an institution, he/she recognizes on the one hand, his/her availability to receive information about the organization (Krystallis & Chrysochou, 2014), and on the other hand, his/her agreement and alignment to organization's values and beliefs.

This space is attractive and stimulates dynamic participation (lack of self-censorship, equality etc.) due to the fact that it is practically characterized by "the absence of the geographical and/or temporal boundaries, multiple targets, a continuous character, a relatively simple, cheap and widespread technology, and low operational costs" (Țibuliac & Popa, 2013, p.47). On the one hand, these particularities facilitate the transformation of social media platforms into *Ba* and on the other hand, they are useful for the organizations that aim to monitor and manage emotions, such as the national security agencies.

Nonaka and Konno (1998) use the concept of *Ba* in order to describe a physical, virtual or mental shared space in which relationships emerge. This may be represented by the social media platforms due to their capacity of reuniting individuals and organizations who share the same mental models and fostering knowledge creation and sharing. Knowledge is embedded in social media platforms just like it is in *Ba*; each user has the possibility to post what he/she feels, thinks or experiences and, at the same time, he/she has the opportunity to read what others felt, thought or experienced on the same or different matter; once the experiences of others are internalized, passed

through individuals' personal filter and connected with their experiences and reflections, new knowledge is created and the social platform serves as *Ba*.

Starting from the SECI model, four types of *Ba* can be identified, namely: originating *Ba* interacting *Ba*, cyber *Ba* and exercising *Ba*. The first one is related with the socialization phase and represents the cornerstone of the knowledge creation process; the conversion of tacit knowledge occurs once the individuals and organizations start to share emotions, feelings, experiences, values and mental models. Through dialog each of these are converted into explicit knowledge due to the fact that, in an interacting *Ba*, individuals share the same mental model as others and, at the same time, they analyze their own perceptions, emotions, feelings and experiences. Within this context, metaphors are extensively used and the receptivity and sensitivity for meaning are highly important. The cyber *Ba* is related to the combination phase and its existence depends on the collaborative environment; individuals must cooperate with one another in order to create and systemize new explicit knowledge. Further, the exercising *Ba* facilitates the internalization stage and fosters the conversion of explicit knowledge into tacit knowledge.

According to Basinska, Wiciak and Daderman (2014), the national security agencies are among the first ten institutions in which the citizens trust. Thus, their interest in Facebook and other social media platforms is twofold: first, it serves as an object for work and secondly, it represents an efficient tool for communicating with the stakeholders.

In order to fulfil their mission and to prevent the acts of violence and hostility, the national security organizations need to anticipate their targets' behaviour (Matsumoto, Sung Hwang & Frank, 2012). In other words, they need to read between the lines and to understand which emotions may trigger their targets' actions and which could inhibit them. Therefore, the employees from the national security agencies can observe the way in which users think, feel and behave during the social interaction, and are capable of partially clarifying and controlling emotions' social consequences (Nică & Molnar, 2014). This type of control is relevant for Facebook due to the fact that this platform fosters individuals' emotional contagion (Elfenbein, 2007).

Last but not least, the national security agencies post on Facebook messages with collective emotional impact. A message may determine various emotions and each of them influence the users on a different level, based on a series of intrinsic factors (such as, convictions, values, beliefs, previous experiences etc.). Both the particular and collective emotions generate visible, external behaviours (Gaulin & McBurney, 2004). Therefore, on the

one hand, they aim to justify and motivate employees' behaviour (Matsumoto *et al.*, 2012), and on the other hand, they focus on controlling "institution's image" (Shao & Ross, 2015) and developing the feelings of security and safety among the citizens.

Given the fact that the national security agencies use social media for studying their targets' behaviour, sharing their emotional and spiritual knowledge (disseminating the organizational values, beliefs and successes), and generating emotions among their followers, these prove to serve as *Ba*. In an initial phase (at the level of the originating *Ba*), through their posts, the national security agencies share their emotions, feelings and thoughts. These generate reactions among the followers, reactions that are transformed into comments or "like" actions and ensure the development of shared models which are considered as the main "sources of expertise, action and cooperation of individuals in group" (Hautala, 2011, p.603). Developing shared mental models among the members of a community involves using a common verbal and nonverbal language and exposing to mindful stimulus – response situations. As a result, the same reality is analyzed and interpreted by each member until a common understanding is achieved. These aspects occur traditionally in an interacting *Ba* which supports the conversion of tacit knowledge into explicit knowledge. Further, at the level of the cyber *Ba* takes place the virtual interaction among followers while at the level of the exercising *Ba* previous acquired knowledge is passed through the internal filter and new emotional, spiritual and cognitive knowledge is created.

Nevertheless, the social media platforms may act as *Ba* since they support the all five principles of the human cognitive architecture (Wong, Leahy, Marcus & Sweller, 2012):

1. Long term-memory and information store represent the basis of human cognition. Whenever they have to deal with new situations, individuals report to previous experiences, things that they already knew. It is visible in interacting and exercising *Ba* when individuals use previous knowledge in order to better understand the new emotions or experiences.
2. A reorganization process occurs when schemas are borrowed. If one individual reflects on the issues that are brought forward by others, a change of perspective may occur. In this case, some important issues arise and they are analyzed first internally (in individuals' mind) and then externally (through dialog).
3. The new insights are used for problem-solving. The issues aforementioned can be tested in order to see if they are effective or not. Based on this, new knowledge can be created.
4. New knowledge is processed by a limited working memory. The working memory is limited by duration and capacity. At this level, individuals develop

various personal schemas and mental model based on the new knowledge they acquired.

5. Once the new knowledge is connected with previous knowledge, it becomes part of the long-term working memory. The personal schemas and mental models are categorized and integrated with the previous experience. The individual takes the emotions he/se acquired and the potential reactions that could be associated with them and takes them further into the real live or spread them within the virtual environment.

Conclusions and further research directions

Synthesizing, the main research objectives were achieved. First of all, we identified the main types of emotions, namely: happiness, sadness, fear, anger, and disgust. As we highlight in the previous section of this article, these are the basic emotions which characterize human beings; all the other emotions felt at certain moments are just a combination of two or more basic emotions.

As aforementioned, social interaction is a must for sharing emotions. Individuals and organizations must “meet” in special space and must connect with one another. This kind of space was labelled as *Ba* and may be represented by the social media platforms due to their capacity of reuniting the individuals and organizations who share the same mental models and fostering knowledge creation and sharing. These aspects are even more visible in the case of the national security agencies since they use social media for studying their targets’ behaviour, sharing their emotional and spiritual knowledge (disseminating the organizational values, beliefs and successes), and generating emotions among their followers. In other words, they use social media platforms for combining the classical four types of *Ba*: originating *Ba* (it shares its emotions, feelings and thoughts through its posts), interacting *Ba* (through the generated reactions and comments, it ensures the development of shared models and the conversion of tacit knowledge into explicit knowledge), cyber *Ba* (by fostering the virtual interaction among its followers) and exercising *Ba* (by facilitating the creation of new emotional, spiritual and cognitive knowledge).

Despite these valuable insights, the research is limited by the fact that it is only presenting a theoretical perspective on the issue and the gap between theory and practice is well known. Besides, we must recognize that the research is limited by the number of keywords searched in Emerald ScienceDirect, Emerald, Sage and ProQuest databases. What we found in the literature is just a fraction from what is written but still is capable of

reflecting the ambiguity of these concepts. On the other hand, it is not our intention to give a complete overview of the issue but rather presenting the nexus between the emotional content of the Facebook posts and the national security agencies as a possible research area.

Starting from these findings, we aim to develop a future research in which we will concentrate on finding an answer to next questions:

1. What is the emotional content of the messages posted by FBI on the Facebook page?
2. How are the citizens reacting to these posts?
3. In the case of FBI, can Facebook serve as Ba when it comes to sharing emotions?

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