Facebook: Networking the Community of Society

By Jesper Tække
Assistant Professor
Department of Information- and Media Studies
Aarhus University, Denmark
imvjet@hum.au.dk

Abstract

The article examines the significance of new "social media" like Facebook for the way we socialize, develop social identity, and shape society. Based on the work of Luhmann, the article proposes that community communication is fundamental to the self-regulation of our society and that this type of communication also provides the basis for the formation and maintenance of people's social identity, so that they and society are in harmony. In contrast to community communication, the article explores the notion of network communication, which is classified as communication that may have some positive effects but that also may pose certain risks for modern society and for the development and maintenance of social identity. The article argues that communication through and about status updates on Facebook may be categorized as network communication, and finally it discusses whether and to what extent this kind of communication leads to the aforementioned risks.

Keywords: community, network, Facebook, Luhmann, sociology of media

Introduction

Social media, in particular Facebook, have expanded enormously during the last couple of years, with Facebook now hosting much of the communication taking place in Western society. This article addresses the problem of how to understand this form of communication by discussing the concepts of *community* and *network,* which are terms used in the fields of media sociology and Internet research. The article examines the two concepts from the perspective of Niklas Luhmann's

systems theory, with the aim of exploring the nature and meaning of Facebook communication based on systems theory.

According to Luhmann (1995, p. 220), from a theoretical standpoint the concept of community (*Gemeinschaft*) implies the interaction of individuals with the social; however, since Luhmann's concept of communication is based on a multiplicity of contributing psychic systems, this concept denotes something fundamentally common to all, but without confusing the psychic and the social. Luhmann's concept of organization comes closest to describing the mainstream concept of community, and a detailed examination of what the literature calls *online communities* shows that they may be described as self-*organizing* interaction systems (Tække 2006).

Luhmann (2002) uses the concept of *network* to describe a form of communication belonging to stratified society. This form of communication is not obvious in today's functionally differentiated society, in which inclusion is regulated through functional systems guiding distinctions, and personal status is achieved by taking positions in organizations. Since network communications must therefore be seen as in conflict with modern society's functional systems and organizations, the distinction between the concepts of community and network stands out as a fertile analytical distinction.

The article first explores the concept of community, then examines the concept of networks, and finally concludes by discussing Facebook communication.

Community

The discussion of community may be traced back to Plato's *The Republic* and to Aristotle's *Politics*. Aristotle viewed the state as a community consisting of adult free men who came together to deliberate and make decisions about the community. The meaning of man could only be realized in the community, so the individual is seen as both bound to and constitutive of the community. Habermas (1976) considered the concept of the public sphere to be defined in the image of the ancient form of community, only in his view this sphere is opposed to the state, which now

represents a dictating force. But contemporary communities are not only defined by politics; also religion, ethnicity, work and, for instance, interests can be the topic or meeting point for a group of people (not only men) who will form a community through communication within the group. Still, I propose that a more or less explicit element of politics is at play in every self-regulating community. By regulating itself, the community stays focused on and communicates about its topic in a tone accepted by the members. I return to this central point below in a functional description of communities. But at this point it is important to note that in the sense in which I am using the concept of community, a dialectical relation exists between people as individuals realizing themselves only in communities and communities only existing because of people's contributions.

Community as Communication

Luhmann (1995, p. 220) explicitly does not subscribe to the notion of community (*Gemeinschaft*), given that his concept of communication always already represents the social, or what is shared by all, but does not simultaneously represent a fusion of personal systems and social systems. Luhmann (1999a, p. 190) defines communication as the unity of three selections: information, utterance and understanding. What is shared or common is that it is always up to the other person to select an understanding, so that the sender, the one selecting information and making an utterance, cannot control how the utterance is understood. *Communication* is for Luhmann what *life* is for Kierkegaard: it is experienced forwards, but can only be understood backwards. An utterance only becomes part of communication if it is subsequently linked meaningfully to by an understanding, and it is only understood if it meaningfully links to prior communications.

Since communication as a particular process may be distinguished from its surrounding world, which consists of thoughts and lives, it may be described as a system. From an evolutionary starting point, this level of systems formation has undergone a process of internal differentiation (Luhmann 1995, p. 158, 2000, p. 19) and may now be regarded as differentiated into three main types of social systems:

interactions, organizations and society (Luhmann 1995, p. 2). Because media of communication have played a decisive role in this social evolution, a medium like Facebook is also important to observe. Based on Luhmann's concept of communication, I now propose defining *community* as self-organizing systems of interaction consisting of recurrent interactions between a limited group of contributors who may all both make and receive utterances. It is obvious that the members of such a system can, through deliberation, decide to rank themselves and choose a representative, manager, moderator and so on. The crucial feature of a community is that in principle everyone has access to communication.

Media and Communities

Ever since the emergence of writing, communities have transcended the sphere of face-to-face interaction in time and space. In this way, interaction and society were torn apart (Luhmann 1995, p. 87). Over time this evolution resulted in empires (Innis 1986, p. 8) and later, with the development of the printing press, in modern states (Eisenstein 1983) and today's functionally differentiated society (Luhmann 1999, p. 322). Each new basic medium of communication provides society with new possibilities, within the limits of which society, over time, has developed (Luhmann 1990, p. 100).

Although from a very different perspective than that of Habermas, Luhmann also sees present-day society as made possible by the medium of printing. According to this logic, with the printing press we have gone from a society primarily differentiated according to strata to a society primarily differentiated according to functions. The functional differentiation provides a community where everyone, regardless of ancestry, can link to communication, and where a plurality of functional systems such as science, mass media, politics and the economy keeps society poly-centred and anti-authoritarian.

The functional system of the mass media is of particular interest in the present discussion. According to Luhmann (2000, p. 2), this system is separated out from other communication through technical means of reproduction. The system

has a special code involving a communication process whereby messages believed to have information value are linked to, while messages not believed to have any information value are not linked to. The information value of messages is interpreted differently by various media organizations, and other functional systems must subordinate themselves to the logic of the mass media if their contributors wish to have their messages distributed publicly. For instance, a political party (an organization) must subordinate its communicative contribution to the code of the mass media within the interpretive programme of a specific mass media organization if its message is to be distributed.

But not only is mass communication technically isolated from other communication, so are online communities such as Usenet newsgroups, chat rooms and mailing lists. In groups like these, people contribute to communication that is enabled by the very technology that distinguishes it from other communication.

A Functional Description of Communities

Using Luhmann's theory it is possible to explain how communication regulates itself. Over time, the process of recurrent communication within a system forms what Luhmann calls *a border of meaning* (1995, p. 61, 195ff).[1] The border of meaning refers to the semantics defined by a group of contributors within this process. Gradually the process of communication crystallizes *what* this group can talk about and in what *tone*, and perhaps also at what times communication can take place and by whom (Tække 2005a, p. 86). In other words, the history of interaction shapes and condenses not just the topics that can be legitimately communicated, but also the standards for how they can be communicated. This process of condensation also includes and excludes contributors because not everyone can construct contributions that will be linked to (Luhmann 1995, p. 155). The communication eventually creates the border of meaning as proposals of meaning are accepted and negated respectively, and after a while the border of meaning itself structures how it

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[1] Luhmann (1984, p. 95) uses the term *Sinngrenzen* in German.

can be modified. It is clear that such a system requires a stable external environment consisting of contributing psychic systems (ibid., p. 127).

A number of studies of online groups seen as self-organizing systems of interaction have been conducted within this theoretical framework (Tække 2005a). These studies have shown how the border of meaning is produced and reproduced, attacked and defended, and how contributors are personalized and sometimes depersonalized through communications about their contributions and history of self-presentation. The groups negotiate what topics may be addressed, how they may be addressed, and which self-presentation contributors may legitimately use when contributing to the online group (ibid.).

Such findings are also described using other theoretical starting points in other newsgroups (Baym 2000, Gotved 1999). Even in chat rooms the same social process of developing a border of meaning governing communication has been documented (Tække 2008). A special borderline case is weblogs, because the user can configure this medium for both one-way communication and community communication (Tække 2005b). A useful distinction in this regard is between mass media and interaction media, the former characterized by the exclusion of feedback other than in exceptional circumstances (Luhmann 2000), and the latter by the opportunity for feedback.

Network Theory

Network theory originates in mathematics, but is a sociological theory positing that the social distance between any random person and any other person is only six other people, even though our world consists of over six billion people spread across the earth (Barabasi 2003). If everyone only had relations to their neighbours, the world would be terribly big seen from a social perspective, but because many know people living far away, the world is small (ibid., p. 53). Knowing that it is possible to network, and not least knowing how to do it, must be seen as a social competence, as social capital (Rasmussen 2008, p. 145). Although the numbers of nodes in a network are numerous, the relations between them are far greater in

number, which radically reduces the distances between nodes. A closer look shows that the world is a network consisting of clusters, which in turn are linked to other clusters. We can find a random person among millions in a few steps because we introduce shortcuts established by using the limited knowledge we have about who we know who might know someone (ibid.).

Network and Media

"The networks represent a new social morphology of our society", proposes Manuel Castells (2003a, p. 431). However, what is new is not that society today can be observed from the perspective of network theory, because, as Finnemann (2005, p. 255) notes, all societies have been information as well as network societies; what is new according to Castells is that now society as *whole*, with its material basis in the new information technology paradigm, is permeated by the network structure. Defining a network as a collection of connected nodes, Castells (2003b, p. 9) points particularly to the Internet as the driving force behind the network society.

Castells (2003b, p. 57) considers networks to have a particular value in virtual communities, which he describes as "self-directed networking". The value is that anyone who cannot find his own place on the Internet could create it and send his information and network with others from this destination. A shift is observed from communities in groups to network individualism (Wellman et al. 2003, p. 3, Castells 2003b, p. 123). According to the Danish Internet researcher Jacob Linaa Jensen, the distinction between networks and communities should be understood as points on a continuum rather than as dichotomous categories. Like Castells, he believes that a shift is underway from communities to networks, at the core of which are social media like Facebook (Linaa Jensen 2009). He describes online networks as having no privileged central position. Their social architecture is made up of relations and their social reality of relations and actions between the actors, who interact through decentralized relationships rather than shared forums: "The actors

are only directly visible to each other when they interact or when they appear on each other's friend lists, as on MySpace and Facebook" (ibid., p. 91).[2]

Networking as Communication

Castells (2003a, p. 379) is relatively spatial in his perception of networks (the space of flows); however, communities, *contrary to networks,* are usually perceived metaphorically as spatial (e.g. Linaa Jensen 2009, p. 90). This is reminiscent of Tönnies (2001) and his opposition of village *Gemeinshaft* to networks, which are defined as consisting of relations - like the dichotomy of relationalism and absolutism within the philosophy of space (Tække 2002, p. 37). In communities, communication takes place in a shared forum where all the participants have access to all the expressions that are constituent for what the community members can talk about. At the same time, this communication establishes the standards governing how to talk (the tone, attitude and so on). In contrast, the network is more problematic if considered from its degree of community. In theory, we are all in one big network with each other, only separated by at most six degrees. We are all part of a wide range of different networks defined by such variables as, work, interests and political view, but also just in terms of the categories to which we belong, such as gender and ethnicity. Particularly important to take note of is the central role of the individual in the networks, as both Castells and Wellman have noted. As individuals all of us are always at the centre of all the networks to which we belong, but none of us can know what is going on between others in these networks. It is precisely this aspect that constitutes the risk of networks. They are invisible to those not participating, and even the participants do not receive all the messages or simply notification that others are receiving messages or services. From Durkheim's perspective, these conditions can lead to anomie, and from the perspective of Weber, this is precisely what should be organized through bureaucratization.

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[2] My translation.

Network, Organization and Society

Examining networking from Luhmann's perspective, we must hope that Castells is wrong in believing that we are being *permeated by a network structure*. This is because Luhmann considers modern society's functional differentiation to be threatened by networks, which are identified as a structure that has survived from earlier societal forms: "These are chains of reciprocity, utility friendships, (...) where the functional subsystem's resources become 'alienated' to cross-cutting relations and the maintenance of networks" (Luhmann 2002, p. 129).[3] With the functional differentiation of society, the social positions determined by the stratification of society were replaced by positions in organizations, "as the source of resources, property and family were replaced by the legal and illegal opportunities for influence offered by positions in organizations" (ibid.).[4] The networks endure to some extent because the distribution of positions in society largely falls within the sphere of influence of the political parties, which thus help to keep the networks alive. However, the network formation is no longer self-evident, and the networks must therefore maintain themselves as parasites on today's society (ibid.). According to Luhmann (ibid., p. 130), neither stratification nor centre/periphery characterizes networks; rather they provide the societal conditions for networks, which exploit these structures like parasites. In this way, *society* with its structures serves as the medium for the network form of *favours between friends* (ibid.). Networks are based on dyadic relations that circumvent particular organizational constraints and are subsequently not committed to any internal solidarity. Networks bypass and replace what is normally considered to be given and made possible by modern society: "Instead of this, the functional systems with their organizations seem to (...) provide persons-in-positions that are available as addresses one can contact when a need arises " (ibid., p. 131).[5]

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[3] My translation.
[4] My translation.
[5] My translation.

A key characteristic of network communication is the interaction, whether this is done face-to-face or, for instance, via telephone (ibid., p. 129).[6] The interaction occurs between "someone who knows someone, who knows someone" likely via "a facilitator" and "intercession" and circulates "favours between friends" that do not function according to a "quid pro que-rationality" (something for something), but that ensure secure inclusion (the reproduction of one's personal status and as an address in the network). Furthermore, network communication cannot be organized and adapted according to rules transparency and mutual solidarity (ibid., pp. 128 - 133).

Organization and Network

It should be noted that Luhmann's perspective on networks is not inspired by the Internet and not at all by a social medium like Facebook, but by an analysis of the exclusion that can be traced back to the closure of the individual functional systems, the dynamics of which excludes integration between them. In this societal form, wealth, for example, does not lead to political influence, appreciation of art, or love (Luhmann 2002, p. 128). Consequently, networks *short circuit* the functional differentiation and its organizations (ibid., p. 131). The risk of the network society is therefore not only the digital divide, as Castells (2003b) explains, but also the short circuit, which involves the networks cutting across the closure of the functional systems in the factual dimension (for example, the mixing of politics and science), and the closure of organizations in the social dimension (so also non-members can participate in decision making).

By monitoring employees' use of digital media as a response to the networks, organizations are clearly taking the networks seriously (Castells 2003b, p. 165). A medium like Facebook may be regarded as an example of what Albrechtslund (2008) has called *participatory surveillance* and what Linaa Jensen (2007, p. 371)

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[6] Earlier I developed a concept of cyberspace interaction, which refers to an interaction in which "two or more persons at the same time are observing utterances from one another by a technology that reduces geographical space" (Tække 2002, p. 41).

has called an *Omnnpticon*. The concerns about surveillance society can probably not be overestimated because digital media are also communicative, storage and retrieval media. However, it is not this aspect of media that is of interest here, but rather the idea that formal organizations react to the digital media with surveillance. Overall, this reaction is obviously an extension of the Tayloristic panoptic attempt to self-discipline members of organizations to do what those in power demand (Tække 2009), but it may also be seen as a defence against network communication. It is clear that a mutually beneficial relationship exists between formal organizations and network communication, and that a medium such as Facebook is seen not only as a useful medium allowing employees to network, but also as something to be limited, controlled and monitored.

Facebook as a Medium for Network Communication

Facebook offers many different possibilities for communication; however in keeping with my focus on communities versus networks, I will focus only on the field for status updates and the friendship system, starting with the latter.

Similar to MySpace, but in contrast to online communities and social networks like LinkedIn and Twitter, Facebook is primarily a medium for people who know each other offline (Boyd & Ellison 2007; Boyd 2007). LinkedIn is a professional network requiring its users to have, as a starting point, first-degree contacts; then, through these, users can get in touch with their contacts' contacts (second-degree contacts) for favours and services. Twitter may be best described as a quasi-mass medium, which I will discuss below. So a typical feature of Facebook is that its users only *friend* people they know in advance. Users decide for themselves whom they will friend, and friendship is always reciprocal. But users are not bound to treat each other equally; on their profiles they can freely adjust the information available to each friend and the interaction possibilities of each friend. The latest observation of Facebook's privacy settings showed that there are 50 settings with

170 options which users can use to control what is accessible to others.[7] Users can also open their profiles for all friends or for friends of friends (second-degree contacts) or open them completely for everybody on Facebook. Linaa Jensen believes that Facebook examplifies a shift from the Internet as a medium for the open distribution of information to a filter-medium that requires admission or membership – and on Facebook, *friendship* – before it is possible to participate in communication. Since most Facebook users now filter access to their personal information and status updates (at least in Denmark; see *Danmarks statistik* 2009), Facebook is clearly a medium that effectively excludes non-friends and gives preference to or discriminates against friends.

Status updates are the central feature of the Facebook profile, which includes a photograph of the user and some personal information. The status update consists of a small text message of fewer than 420 characters, but the user and those with permission may comment on the update as much as they want. The updates gradually move down the profile page as the user writes new ones, and in this way they form a history of self-presentation. Genre descriptions of the status updates are emerging, and so far a total of four different genres have been distinguished (Klastrup 2010a). The status updates appear on the wall, which is a compilation of all the user's friends' latest status updates. Depending on the settings, users can allow certain friends to post updates on their private wall profiles, comment on them, and express whether they like them.

Since everyone has different friends and it is only possible to see status updates from one's own friends, users cannot keep up with everything their friends are uttering and doing; users cannot see when their friends comment on other friends' updates if these friends are different from the users' own friends or if they are prevented from doing so by privacy settings. So users do not see precisely what their friends see when they look at their walls, and friends see only a little of the activity of their friends when commenting on status updates.

Facebook is not a medium that provides community communication among

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[7] *The New York Times,* Business Day, 12 May 2010.

friends since the users all have different friends. Rather, as a medium, Facebook may be viewed as an infrastructure that provides network communication. Since it is also possible to write completely private messages, peer-to–peer networking can be done without being seen by others. As mentioned above, a community consists of a group that has negotiated a border of meaning through communication over time. This negotiation does not take place in the communication through and about the profiles. However, various individuals do comment on the status updates from completely different perspectives and at different times.

Facebooking as Microblogging

Facebook and other social media like Twitter are a kind of microblog, and are perhaps best viewed as consisting of many small blogs that, through the friendship network, are associated with various other small blogs. Facebook also raises many of the same issues as weblogs (Tække 2005b). The individual profiles range from being quasi-mass medium (see below) to real interaction media, and from having hundreds of thousands of fans to a few friends. Regardless of whether a particular Facebook profile is actually open for comments, those with extremely many friends or fans must be viewed as A-blogs, which are blogs with many incoming links but little or no outgoing links (ibid.). Weblogs differ from Facebook profiles by containing longer text contributions usually on *specific topics*, thus showing coherence (ibid.). Blogs that are actually being read and are open for comments often contain community communication: they have a circle of stable commentators communicating within a border of meaning (ibid.). Community communication is also seen in clusters of weblogs with reciprocal links to each other, where the bloggers, through comments and the trackback function, communicate within a border of meaning (ibid.). Facebook obviously also has clusters of persons with mutual friends — for instance, everybody in a high school class; however, the communications are centred around the individual's self-presentation and open for comments from all other kinds of Facebook friends rather than being thematically

bounded. Facebook consists of thousands of synchronously existing parallel networks and all users are isolated in the centre of their own unique networks.

Since Facebook is a medium for online contact between people who know each other offline, there must be a limit to how many friends a user can have before seeming unserious, or becoming a *micro-celebrity*, as Danah Boyd called this phenomenon when I discussed it with her. It is my feeling that it seems cool to have at least 200 friends, but, conversely, not very cool to have many more than the 400.[8] Users with so many friends seem to be collecting all sorts of unknown people in order to become a micro-celebrity, which someone with around 700 friends may be described as. The fact that many comedians and politicians (and also some of my colleagues) now have thousands of friends means that they have gone from using Facebook as do other mortals — to network with friends, colleagues and family — to using it as a quasi-mass medium facing their crowds of fans.

Facebook as a Quasi-Mass Medium

Facebook may also be seen as contributing to the current functional differentiation of society. By this I am referring to the mass media-like form of communication that can be observed in Facebook: Some users comment on political, cultural or scientific events, or just the news, on their status update. Other users comment on such status updates and discuss them with each other, sometimes copying them more or less directly into their own status updates. Many Facebook users also share links to and discuss newspaper papers, scientific papers and YouTube videos. In theory, these communications link to the different codes of functional systems and in this way contribute to the societal reflexivity providing societal self-descriptions, accepting or negating proposals of meanings about what is true, beautiful, pay etc. On Twitter it is possible to simply press 'Retweet' to send someone else's update to one's own network. If the 90-9-1 rule (which says that only a minority are active; see below) is

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[8] On MySpace the label 'MySpace whore' is used for someone with too many friends (Boyd 2007, p. 13).

only somewhat true in regard to Facebook and Twitter,[9] it means that a not-insignificant number of people – almost as in the mass media – will consume these utterances and in this way get news and interpretations and reflections on and by the active friends in their own networks. It is not *exactly* the same as in the mass media because it is actually possible to interfere to some extent, and also because it is necessary to be in a network with some of the active micro-bloggers. Another difference is that the mass media organizations have criteria for news, source criticism, an editorial responsibility, and so on. This may be indicative of the battle in which the intellectuals, as Habermas (2006) writes, must learn to manoeuvre in the Internet medium, so they can once again focus public debate. For example, in Facebook, some politicians have actually succeeded in attracting many friends or fans that they can focus debates for and utter their positions to, leading then to discussions through comments and comments on comments. So as a quasi-mass medium Facebook actually brings something back to society in the form of social reflexivity within all its functional systems.

Social Identity and Facebook

This article will now cross the distinction between the social and the psychic level of systems formation to discuss what we as persons get out of Facebook communication.

The network structure in the form of the friend system on Facebook makes it possible for users to satisfy the need for social confirmation of their self-descriptions, as well as to satisfy their curiosity about what others are doing and writing (Donath 2007). This may be why many people find it hard not to use a medium like Facebook even in inappropriate contexts, possibly because no social standards have been developed yet for regulating the use of social media in school and work (Tække & Paulsen 2010).

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[9] Twitter may be regarded as more like a quasi–mass media than Facebook because on Twitter relations do not have to be reciprocal, which is also the case with weblogs. In fact, only 20 percent of the relations on Twitter are reciprocal (Kwak et al. 2010).

Studies have shown that participation in online communities provides people with a sense of community (Blanchard & Markus 2004). Participation in online communities may be described in terms of the 90-9-1 principle, because only one percent contributes daily, ten percent occasionally, and ninety percent never or only rarely contribute (Nielsen 2006; see also Smith 1999 and Baym 2000). Even among the ninety percent who are mostly lurking, many have a sense of community (Roberts 1998; Nonnecke & Preece 2001). In online groups, the members share a meaningful community whose primary function is to discuss a topic that feels important to those who choose to be members. This implies that one becomes a person through the communication. Users are ascribed identity as a function of their contributions to the group and the responses to these from other group members. The members get their identity negotiated in the community when they contribute in relation to their history of self-presentation. "Since it is a social self, it is a self that is realized in its relationship to others. It must be recognized by others to have the very values which we want to have belong to it" (Mead 1936, p. 204). Members of communities gradually develop individual styles of self-presentation which are expressed in accordance with each community's border of meaning. This development of personality takes place within the capacities and desires of the individuals in the community. At the same time, they must differ from each other and provide expected contributions in relation to their own history of self-presentation, but still behave within the border of meaning if they want to maintain their identity.

Even passive members of a community make no cardinal error by feeling a sense of community and retrieving their sense of identity from the feeling of being a member of the community. Members identify themselves with the community's standards, tone and conclusions, and they always have the opportunity to interfere. Whether this sense of community is real cannot be discussed, but in the case of Facebook it may be discussed whether communication within this medium displays the qualities that qualify it. Facebook communication through and about status updates is only based on co-existing synchronous parallel networks of friends with only some overlap of common friends. The sense of community does not refer back

to an actual community, to a substance — whether one is just lurking or is active — but only to scattered communication about countless issues lacking coherence and carried out by various individuals who do not obey common norms.[10] However, Facebook may provide more community communication among people who know each other offline than would have occurred without such a medium.

Friends are not just friends anymore, but people who are grouped together with acquaintances, family members and colleagues. As a result, a shift occurs the balance between front stage and back stage (Goffman 1959), and a larger middle region (Meyrowitz 1985) pushes the other two scenes back. The backstage is reduced by the ability to see our friends in conversation with others whom we usually cannot observe them in conversation with. And what was previously reserved for *real friends* or family or colleagues is now made known to the other groups also through status updates and comments. On the one hand, this phenomenon entails more distanced, suave and reflective self-presentations, as well as, on the other hand, less schizophrenic self-presentations, because users must communicate in situations where people from different parts of the users' social lives are all watching at once.

Conclusion

I have defined communities as a special kind of communication system whose main principle is that everyone has access to communication. Networking is also an expression of communication, but with a much smaller degree of community; networks are not organized and can only be poorly described as systems because their social differentiation is weak. Even though Facebook is not as cartel-like as LinkedIn, the medium still plays a role in increasing the diffusion of networks. Theoretically, this could perturb the balance between society's primary functional differentiation based on organizations and the secondary network coding.

The societal risk is that network friends might not be sincere in their

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[10] There are Facebook groups but their extension in time is so limited (Klastrup 2010b) that it seems improbable that they can provide the stability characterizing a community fostering the development of personal identity.

contributions to organizations. So rather than base their contributions on objective criteria and rules that apply equally to all, people will choose to further their network friends' special interests. The parasite may kill the host. From a theoretical perspective, the problem is that networks cut across the closure of functional systems in the fact dimension and the closure of organizations in the social dimension. This problem is more complex in the case of Facebook: Exchanging services in the Facebook network may well be limited in the fact dimension but not in the social dimension because Facebook does not require membership in a strict sense. In addition, Facebook allows messages to be forwarded. It may be argued that the friendship *system* for the individual bounds the system in the social dimension, while no closure is evident in the fact dimension (everything can be communicated). The fact of the matter is, however, that within Facebook's communicative structure many parallel networks are actualized in which no one has the same circle of friends, which means that the relationship structure is poly-centred in the social dimension and thus open and impossible to limit. As a result, the only unique feature of the system is that communication occurs in it, and that this communication is decoupled from other communication by the very technology that enables and quasi-duplicates it. If Facebook is considered a quasi-mass medium it might actually contribute to the community of society. For example, Facebook can also be used critically to address the corruption of networks that worries Luhmann, and it can be used to focus the debate, as foreseen by Habermas, by processing societal reflection within all the functional systems.

As this article has argued, one should think carefully about the sense of community provided by Facebook, not just in relation to the development of semantics and common understandings of certain topics, but also in relation to the production and reproduction of one's social identity. This is because Facebook communication through and about the status updates does not offer users either a group with a border of meaning providing feedback on their self-presentations or a community in relation to which they can be acknowledged and attributed a distinctive identity — such as clever, funny or conciliatory.

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