

Digital Mutation, a Result of Motivation and Resilience Stolen Babies in Catalunya

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Abstract

This paper bridges the concepts of digital literacy and digital inclusion, and introduces digital mutation following an examination of 20 families (older adults) from the Stolen Babies organization in Catalonia, looking for their stolen babies and advocating for social justice. The aim of this paper is to investigate the extent to which digital technologies offer new opportunities to improve people's social lives, transcending barriers and experiencing, in this particular case, a digital mutation. The interaction between factors of social and cultural differentiation for this population gives rise to specific kinds of choices and life changes.

This exploratory study argues that digital mutation responds to the interaction of this population's social factors and digital experiences by combining new social experience / new digital actions and is framed within two parallels: the motivation experienced as a group which makes them transcend barriers and consequently they put digital literacy into practice; the second parallel is between resilience -that empowers them, gives them confidence- also represented as a digital inclusion. The sum of both parallels are the factors that predefine in this population a digital mutation.

Keywords: Digital inclusion, Digital Literacy, Digital Mutation, Stolen babies, Resilience, Spain.

1. Introduction

Media campaign activism and human rights advocacy within media platforms illustrate how digital inclusion opens up new possibilities of study, being in this case its interconnection with motivation and a resilient process (for trauma restoration) considered to be steps prior to digital mutation. In this sense, scholars such as van Deursen, van Dijk and Klooster argue that the main causes for Internet users' choice of activity types are motivations and positions in society (2014; p.260).

The theft of babies in Spain (1940-1999) has been systematic (medical doctors, nurses, Catholic priests and nuns) and based on the concept of eugenics by Doctor Antonio Vallejo Nágera used, during the period of Franco, as an argument for the appropriation of descent. After the dictatorship, in 1975, these practices had an economic motivation. For five decades, some 300,000 babies were stolen in Spain. In this sense, "Te Estamos Buscando" (We Are Looking for You), known as the TEB media campaign (Escudero, 2017, 2018), was based on group dynamics to reinforce resilience and introduce the topic into Spanish society, by empowering the families' voices and focusing on the importance of sharing the traumatic experience as part of the process of restoration, as Herman suggests:

Sharing the traumatic experience with others is a precondition for the restitution of a sense of a meaningful world (...) The response of the community has a powerful influence on the ultimate resolution of the trauma. Restoration of the breach between the traumatized person and the community depends, first, upon public acknowledgment of the traumatic event and, second, upon some form of community action (1992; p.70).

Investigations into the thefts of babies began to take shape in 2010, and in 2011 various organizations of families were created to look for their children throughout Spain. The resilience workshops were held in Catalonia and were for the members of the SOSBRC organizations, from which two campaigns arose in which members of other organizations of stolen babies participated:

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Andalusia, the Basque Country, Pamplona, Madrid (2017). During the following year the campaign was internationalized to include participant organizations and family members from Germany, England, Ireland and the Spanish regions.

TEB became the first campaign launched in Spain humanizing the cases, telling the stories in the first person as part of the recovery and resilient process. As Aguilar specifies, the stealing of babies continued in private and public hospitals for some time after democracy and this is related to the fact that many people working for Franco's regime continued working in public offices during democracy (2013, BarrenecheaLopez, 2017; p.29). Important to note is that with the modification of the adoption law in 1987 came greater control and documentation of births and adoptions (BuenoMorales & GonzálezBesteiro, 2018; p.157).

2. Problem and research questions

This paper examines the group interdependencies and singularities through group dynamics based on resilience before the campaign "We Are Looking for You" (Escudero, 2017, 2018), in order to observe how their uses of Internet have been influenced by motivation and resilience.

We approached this paper from the perspective of the study of communication, focusing on a social problem such as that of the 300,000 stolen babies in Spain, and we developed an analysis based on a cycle of transformations in close relation to digital changes, taking into account those argued by Waisbord (2019) within the field of communication studies and the digital sphere:

Just as the digital revolution has changed social and public life in unprecedented forms, it has also profoundly transformed the ontology of communication studies and academic disciplines. It introduced a whole new set of phenomena –from digital selves to digital inequalities and digital labor– and transformed old thematic questions that defined communication studies –from media effects to media production(p. 76).

More precisely, through this exploratory study we propose to answer the question of what happens when a traumatic event erupts into the life of a person, such as the theft of a baby, and institutions do not advance in terms of justice and human rights. To this we add the intersections between an emotional process and a digital process. For this we will observe the beginning of the creation of a specific group that will experience what we call digital mutation within a cycle of parallels, and actions that would not be possible if they were not carried out within this group in which individuals have gone through similar experiences. As Herman points out:

The solidarity of a group provides the strongest protection against terror and despair, and the strongest antidote to traumatic experience. Trauma isolates; the group re-creates a sense of belonging. Trauma shames and stigmatizes; the group bears witness and affirms. Trauma degrades the victim; the group exalts her. Trauma dehumanizes the victim; the group restores her humanity (1992; p.214).

In addition, the motivation will be interpreted as the initial group movement and carries with it the strength of the transition from the individual to the group, as Harvey points out: "Because traumatized people feel so alienated by their experience, survivor groups have a special place in the recovery process. Such groups afford a degree of support and understanding that is simply not available in the survivor's ordinary social environment."(1991, in Herman, 1992; p.215).

Our study is based on 20 families that actively participate in the SOS Bebés Robados de Catalunya organization, which we will call SOSBRC, established in 2011. In the organization's blog, created in 2016, can be read "Our aim is to inform and advise anyone who suspects they may be a victim or family member of a victim of illegal adoption. S.O.S. Bebés Robados Catalunya (SOSBRC) is an organization that supports the families and siblings of stolen babies. We work with great partners and aim to be truly altruistic. Our sole purpose is to seek TRUTH, JUSTICE AND REPAIR." (SOSBebesrobados.cat)

However, for this analysis we must focus on the population of older adults known as "Digital Immigrants", a definition coined by Mark Prensky (2001) to describe anyone who grew up prior to the digital age and has difficulties in learning and using ICT. At this point, we ask ourselves which predetermined factors have led SOSBRC members to make this change and which components (social, organizational and emotional) have been the motor for this change. More specifically, this study attempts to investigate how these older adults transcend digital barriers and experience what we define as a digital mutation, and then deepen the scope of this mutation and how it shapes their actions.

Hence, the interpretation of the social problems is key to better understanding the changes that occur in this population and that is why the observation of Waisbord (2019) makes an important contribution to our study:

Just as communication studies offers various interpretations of the causes of specific social problems, it also lays out courses of action to address them. Explanations range from social psychological arguments that indicate a preference for ideas that reinforce existing beliefs and attitudes to sociological arguments that underscore the lack of opportunity for exposure to difference to the stigmatization of out-groups in the media and interpersonal communication. Likewise, communication actions and interventions contribute to fostering deliberation across different groups (...) Under certain conditions, these communicative actions promote dialogue, understanding, open-mindedness, and tolerance (p. 144).

We consider it important to establish that when we refer to digital inclusion it will be from a perspective based on the actions and activities through Internet of SOSBRC members and that these actions “are shaped not only by the skills possessed by the users, but also by the interest” (Ragnedda, 2017; p.78). We will also address the motivation and stimuli given within the specific population in which the group is embedded in Catalunya, Spain, based on their cultural norms and values, and structured through past and present experiences.

3. State of the Art

We propose to examine in the following order the concepts of motivation, digital literacy, resilience, digital inclusion and their parallels so as to unify the theories upon which we have relied to advance in this exploratory study of the population of SOS Stolen Babies from Catalunya, taking as a starting point what was stated by Waisbord (2019):

The challenges of communication across social differences reflect problems grounded in factors that have traditionally been the realm of distinctive disciplines –from historical patterns of social exclusion to social-psychological processes that reinforce in -group identity and out-group distrust and rejection. One cannot fully understand deliberation –spaces, opportunities, attitudes, rhetoric, style – without addressing an array of matters long studied by various disciplines (p.143).

3.1 From Trauma to Group Motivation and Digital Literacy

The effect of exposure to a traumatic event on the health of stolen babies survivors from Spain has not received considerable attention in the literature. Much of the research, carried out in diverse sociocultural contexts, shows that sociopolitical events of a traumatic nature affect the physical health and quality of life of affected individuals and groups by altering their grieving processes or inducing negative emotions.

Iribarren, Prolo, Neagos, Chiappelli defines post-traumatic stress disorder, or PTSD as: the psychiatric disorder that can result from the experience or witnessing of traumatic or life-threatening events, such as terrorist attacks, violent crime and abuse, military combat, natural disasters, serious accidents or violent personal assaults (2005, p.503). As we have observed, for people who have gone through a traumatic event that alienates them, when they begin to be part of a group they find spaces to improve their lives and new motivations in the words of Herman (1992): sharing the traumatic experience with others is a precondition for the restitution of a sense of a meaningful world (p.70).

The motivation observed in the group corresponds to a need to take new steps, to generate a change, in this case through participation in resilience workshops as part of the reproduction of visibility campaigns for stolen baby cases. The decision as a group to experience new actions represents an idea of individual and group reconstruction that leaves behind the victim's position in order to transform them into survivors, which indicates a vision towards life and the incorporation of new knowledge. This allows them to move towards digital literacy, to learn more, to expose more and better cases, being aware that the greater the knowledge (digital skills), the greater the possibility of sharing and having more access to the public.

In the case of SOSBRC members, this is observed concretely with an initial occurrence: in February 2016 the members of the organization resident in Catalonia decided to attend resilience workshops. Concurrently the members of the organization asked for help from university students in Communication to create a blog to which, with the help of two students, they uploaded all their information and photographs. Since October 2016, the blog has been updated by the members of the organization, putting into practice everything learned. Since 2017, everyone knows the activities of the blog which they regularly visit.

Authors like Ragnedda and Muschert (2016) point out that those who have more motivation to be online, better digital skills, greater self-confidence, and who are more involved in the digital realm tend to gain greater social benefits than those who do not actively engage in digital life.

That is why, beyond the personal and innate competences in using technology, motivations to learn digital skills are related both to informal (supportive networks, friends, family and peers) and formal learning (Cilesiz, 2009; Eynon and Malmberg, 2012; Ferro, Helbig, and Gil-Garcia, 2011; Selwyn, 2005; Sinclair and Brammley, 2011 in Ragnedda, 2018; p.65).

3.2 Digital Skills/Digital Literacy

Spain ranks 10th out of the 28 European Union Member States in The European Commission Digital Economy and Society Index (Desi, 2018; p.2). Despite an increasing number of Spaniards going online, basic and advanced digital skills levels remain below the EU average. Only 55% of individuals between 16 and 74 years have basic digital skills (57% in the EU)(Desi, 2018; p.5).

In addition, 77% of Spanish Internet users read news online (72% in the EU). The Spanish use of social networks (68%) is above the EU average (Desi, 2018: 7). Digital Literacy in Spain focuses its attention on the acquisition and mastery of skills for the use of information and communication, and not so much on the ability to use technology (Peñalva-Velez, Napal-Fraile, Mendrioroz-Lacambra, 2018; p.3).

Scholars have presented several definitions both of the broader concept of 'digital literacy' and the more specific term 'digital skills' (Buckingham, 2007; Gillen and Barton, 2010, Hague and Williamson, 2009, Lankshear and Knobel, 2008; Litt, 2013 in Ragnedda, 2017; p.64).

3.3 Resilience and Digital Inclusion

Resilience, from the Latin *resilio*, to jump back, jump again, bounce (Puig & Rubio, 2011, p.36) has been approached in the workshops from a psychological perspective taking as a focus the "community resilience" based on a heuristic model created as a result of social research, whose pillars are: solidarity practices; sense of belonging; cultural identity; social humor; state honesty.

In turn, resilience has been addressed as after the recognition of the pain / condition of the victim comes the time of their "return to life", as specified by Cyrulnik (2009). In this sense, bestowing the contributions of resilience on the group prior to the TEB campaigns resulted from an invitation to speak and the reconstruction of individuals through their first-person accounts, as Cyrulnik points out:

The suffering is probably the same in every traumatized human being, but the expression of his torment, the emotional review of the event that hurt him, will depend on the tutors of resilience that the culture has around the sufferer, the invitation to the word or the obligation of silence, emotional support or contempt, social assistance or abandonment carry the same wound of a different meaning according to the way in which cultures structure their stories, making the same story pass from shame to pride, from shadow in the light (2009, in Puig & Rubio; 2011; p.133).

The recognition of pain and what the trauma has generated in these families has allowed for a group accompaniment based on the invitation to speak out and I understand that in each case, this has led to a new way of seeing and experiencing life and, what occupies them most, renewed efforts in their search. The digital inclusion observed in this group is intertwined with a resilient and social depth that sustains constant and prominent progress: all images, statements, new cases and videos are uplifting, always emphasizing the motto of the campaign, that passes from the individual case to the group dynamic: "I'm looking for you, we're looking for you."

In other words, what is observed in the group is specified by Bradbrook and Fisher (2004, in Ragnedda, 2018; p.x) where they present the "5C's" in digital inclusion: connectivity, capability, content, confidence, and continuity. Connectivity: the 20 families are connected to the network; Capability: they have online services; Content: the TEB's campaigns (2017 & 2018) were the first content made by themselves, with their voices, about their cases without a journalist or an intermediary. Sharing this content on social networks has not only given them a new vision, different to that of those specialized in communication, but also a confidence in their actions that contradicts any possibility of non-action; Confidence: observing, listening and being supported by the community of platform users has strengthened their individual and group confidence; Continuity: since the launch of the first campaign, TEB (2017) receives daily messages on the blogs of family members or from people looking for their biological family.

The confidence and production of their own material means that continuity is based on the group's confidence in acting, in responding and providing a service to those who are searching for their identity, and who also hope to obtain social justice.

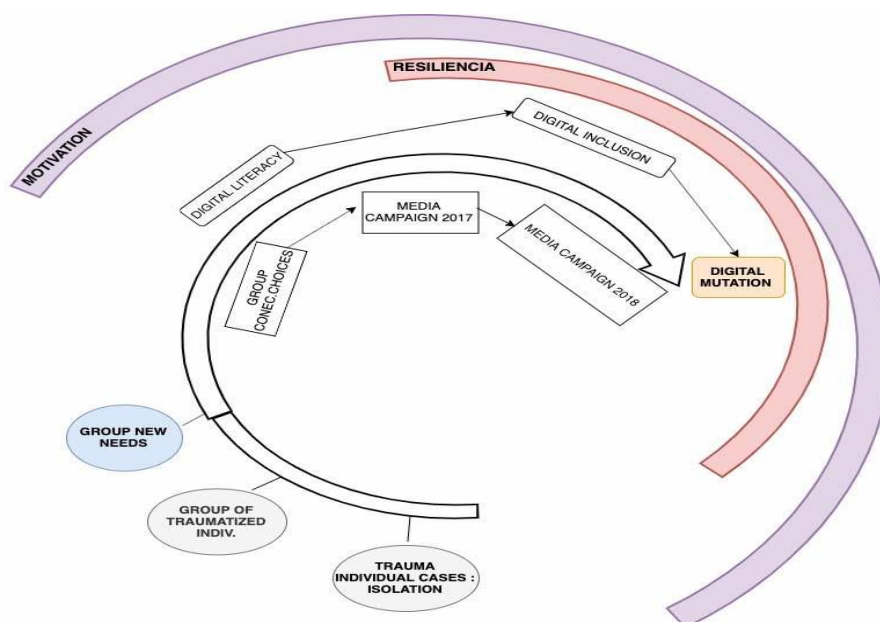
As stated before, we approach digital inclusion as a movement and a parallel action to social inclusion (see graph of the cycle towards digital mutation). In this interconnection, authors such as Ragnedda and Ruiu point out that: since social inclusion and digital inclusion are deeply intertwined, the emphasis changed to a focus on digital inclusion policies and strategies and the discussion over digital divide has thus been remapped in terms of a social inclusion agenda (2017, in Ragnedda 2018, p.6). Another author like Wessels focuses on aspects also present in our study population by defining digital inclusion as the capacity to engage and participate in social networks and local communities (2008, in Ragnedda, 2018, p.7). In terms of interactivity, Abdollahyan & Ansari (2018) state that it is a process through which societal interactivity is transformed from real life into digital life and cites: digital inclusion is the ability of individuals and groups to access and use information and communication technologies” (p.127; Institute of Museum and Library Services 2012; Reader 2015).

According to the Building Digitally Inclusive Communities framework, “digital inclusion encompasses not only access to Internet but also the availability of hardware and software; relevant content and services; and training for the digital literacy skills required for effective use of information and communication technologies” (IMLS et al. 2011 in Ragnedda, 2011, p.viii).

It is important to note that the families from Stolen Babies from Spain, after the first campaign was launched, were contacted by the mothers of Stolen Babies from Germany, with both organizations exposing their cases in the latest media campaign launched in 2018. This connection with Germany proved and confirmed to them the positive impact of digital literacy, as in the words of one of the members of SOSBRC: “It didn't matter if we didn't understand the German mothers of stolen babies, we translated with Google. We had transcended Spain and there was no going back.” That is why when we observe their digital inclusion, we also take into consideration social aspects as part of the emotional reparation through media platforms. In that sense Ragnedda (2018) points out:

The importance of digital inclusion goes well beyond the technological and digital aspects. In a digitally enabled society, being digitally excluded means being at the margins of the whole society and not only at the border of the digital arena. Social exclusion and digital exclusion are deeply intertwined and reciprocally influence and affect each other (p.ix).

Cycle towards Digital Mutation



Escudero, C.

4. Digital Mutation

We observe in the population of SOSBRC that the mutation is a modification in each member in order to survive and overcome the forgetfulness of their causes and stolen children- it is a mutation, first, rooted in their history of life and group consciousness. The decision to repair the consequences of trauma, reconnect with life and remember that they are not the only ones who have gone through this allows them to resolve doubts and fears from a resilient and social commitment.

The other strength that enables them to extrapolate the experience to a digital mutation refers to the change that has occurred in their lives with the knowledge that they do not depend on the institutions in which they do not believe. Their cases, searches and complaints are made known, and to be aware of this generates in them a mutation towards the digital supported by new ways of giving a voice to their causes and finding reparation through telling their story. In this movement, represented in the Cycle towards Digital Mutation (p.14), concrete emotional reparation factors are added that provide confidence, renew motivation and move towards new social and digital experiences.

We refer to the mutation deficit presented by Lopez and Ciuffoli (2012):

In biology the term mutation is used to refer to an alteration or change in the genetic information of a living being, either produced randomly or induced by external agents. As a consequence, there is a sudden and exponential variation in its characteristics, and it can be transmitted or inherited to the offspring (p. 5).

5. Conclusion

Through this paper we examine and then demonstrate the way in which this population has initiated a movement of change in the social and digital sphere where they reach what we call a Digital Mutation. In its relationship with the digital sphere, this change refers to a mutation, an adaptation to the digital and to the changing environment surrounding them. This digital mutation has allowed them to transcend the barriers that kept them as “digital immigrants” or as “traumatized people”. SOSBRC members achieve this digital mutation using social networks and various applications to communicate with their relatives and group members (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Telegram and WhatsApp) which allows us to reflect on the idea that even if the Internet's ability to transform lives remains crucial, when this transformation takes place in parallel with a process of emotional restoration, based on resilience, the impact on the individuals' and group decisions, choices and motivations is deeper and manifested as a mutation, which means that there is no way back.

While this study confirms the existence of the digital mutation phenomena in the SOSBRC, it opens the possibility for new research based on this type of digital mutation in which the expression of emotion and the use of ICT are visible. This exploratory study demonstrates that giving meaning and awareness to the group's emotions transcends previously unexplored barriers such as digital barriers. An empowered and resilient group, and in this case highly active, shows us that the mutation is a change of state and that there is no turning back.

Returning to Herman's argument, “sharing the traumatic experience with others is a precondition for the restitution of a sense of a meaningful world”, and when we extrapolate this sharing to social networks, the experience opens up new expectations and in turn broadens the possibilities of individual and collective reparation. This is because, as we have pointed out, after the first campaign (2017), the organizations in Germany contacted SOSBRC after seeing the campaign and joined the second campaign in 2018, where digital mutation has been reinforced. We consider that there is much to investigate in this area related to digital mutation and its possible consequences, implications and impacts in the social and digital arena.

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