

DIRECT COMMUNICATION AND COMMUNICATION THROUGH SOCIAL NETWORKS IN THE 21ST CENTURY. AN ATTEMPT TO RECONCILIATE THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THEM

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ABSTRACT. The person is ontologically a communicational person, a relational being. Through communication we do not communicate just a message formed of words, but most of the times, beyond words we share a part of who we are and we receive a part of what the other is. Communication has as a final target to achieve communion, it is meant to lead us to the other's inner self, to advance from *me* and *you* to the opening of *us*. Social networks, as the most used means of communication today, may enhance the entire process, but they may also limit it. In order to explore the facilities and excesses that pertains the use of social networks, we have used a questionnaire specifically designed for this aim, and the results of this research are presented in the last part of the present study.

Keywords: communication, communion, relationship, social networks, unicity

Introduction

In the theological field, especially in the Romanian environment, there are very few studies that analyze the changes that occurred after the appearance of the socializing networks¹. Because of this small amount of studies regarding this theme, in the present study I wish to develop a research with respect to the meaning of social network communication, taking into account both the facilities and the limits of this type of communication, in the same time comparing communication through social networks and direct communication, showing how one can complete or limit the other.

In the international space there are many well documented studies, which present the impact that digital communication has on the real communication.

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¹ Amongst the important publications of theologians or researchers that present an interest for the theological field, we mention: Radu Preda, „Comunicare *versus* comuniune. Marginalii social-teologice despre Internet,” *Tabor*, no. 10 (2012): 55-70; as well as Constantin Cucos, „Educație și integrare: Tinerii, față în față cu noile tehnologii,” accessed 15.06.2016, <http://ziarullumina.ro/educatie-si-integrare-tinerii-fata-in-fata-cu-noile-tehnologii-63463.html>.

Rather few of these studies present both the advantages and the limits of the socializing networks², most of them emphasizing only the negative effects that may occur as a consequence of the excessive use of these networks. Most of them state that the use of the Internet for education and communication lead to a significant decrease of the direct interactions in the lives of the young and this decrease of interactions may have serious effects in the development of the social interaction habits³. As a result, both because of a small number of national studies (especially in the theological field) regarding the phenomena that accompany communication through social networks and because of the analysis of a large number of studies that present only the negative part of this means of communication, I wish to analyze in this study the changes that occurred after the appearance of the social networks and to present it from a theological point of view.

The current study is motivated by the frequency with which social networks are used today, which confers them an important part in our lives, especially in the case of youth⁴. Therefore, the positive and negative aspects will be analysed in order to understand more of this current reality that tends to have an increasing importance in our human experience.

In order to relate our discourse from a theological perspective to the realities of today's society, we propose, in the last part of the present study, an empirical research component in which I aimed to understand the perspective of the social network users in terms of the benefits and potential excesses that they themselves foresee/feel in using these communication tools. Also, this component does not constitute the entire base of this study, but represents a complementary element.

² See Thomas Wells Brignall III and Thomas Van Valey „The impact of internet communications on social interaction,” *Sociological Spectrum* 25, no. 3 (2005): 335-348.

³ To this respect I only mention a few of the relevant studies: Brignall and Van Valey, „The impact of Internet communications,” 335-348; Norman H. Nie and D. Sunshine Hillygus, „The impact of Internet use on sociability: Time-diary findings,” *It & Society* 1, no. 1 (2002):1-20; Aida Abdulahi, Behrang Samadi and Behrooz Gharleghi, „A Study on the Negative Effects of Social Networking Sites Such as Facebook among Asia Pacific University Scholars in Malaysia,” *International Journal of Business and Social Science* 5, no. 10 (2014): 133-145; Mohamed El Khouli, „The most important negative aspects of using social networking affecting the family stability in Abu Dhabi – A pilot study,” *International Journal of Engineering and Technology* 5, no. 1 (2013): 85-90.

⁴ A study conducted in 2014 shows the following frequency of utilization of social networks in users of the on-line environment aged above 18 years: Facebook (70% daily, 17% weekly, 12% rarely), Instagram (49% daily, 24% weekly, 26% rarely), Twitter (36% daily, 24% weekly, 40% rarely), see M. Duggan, N. B. Ellison, C. Lampe, A. Lenhart, M. Madden, „Frequency of Social Media Use,” PewResearchCenter – Internet, Science&Tech,” accessed 15.06.2016, <http://www.pewinternet.org/2015/01/09/frequency-of-social-media-use-2/>.

The Person – communicational being

The last innovations in the field of technology offered new means that can enhance the act of interpersonal communication. The communicational field was revolutionized by the appearance of Internet and implicitly of the computer because with their appearance communication received a new instrument that can facilitate it. The most outspread innovation in the field of technology and communication is the creation of the social networks that generated new forms of human interaction. But the following questions occur: How can we use the facilities that they offer without falling into the trap of replacing the real presence with the digital one? Is direct communication influenced by the digital one? To what extent is the digital world able to present the person in its unicity? To offer some answers to these questions we think that a few specifications are necessary with respect to the communicational and relational character of the person.

The human person is ontologically communicational and has imprinted in its nature the relational character. The main semantic content of the person is given by the reference to the others and by the dynamic achievement of a relationship. Through the etymology of the word *person* its relational character par excellence is expressed. The preposition *πρός* (towards) together with the noun *ὄψ* (which means look, eye, face and image) form the compound concept *πρός-ὄπον*: I'm looking towards something or someone, I am face to face with someone or something⁵.

The theme of the relational being became more and more explored comprising various fields of research. A current that was preoccupied with this theme was personalism, which had Emmanuel Mounier as representative; I will pause on his thinking. He mentions that “the person is by nature communicable”⁶ and the first experience of a man consist of “experiencing the second person. The *you* and in it the *us*, precedes the *me* or at least it accompanies it”⁷. Hence, the *me* penetrates the other's interiority, *me* and *you* surpassing in *us*, and through this unity each person grows, through the other it has the possibility of a more complete knowledge, of reaching another stage of development. E. Mounier places love at the basis of the fulfillment of a human being, stating that “You may say that I exist only to the extent where I exist for the other and, in an extreme sense, to be means to love”⁸.

⁵ Christos Yannaras, *Persoană și eros*, trans. Zenaida Luca and Mihai Șora (București: Anastasia, 2000): 21.

⁶ Emmanuel Mounier, „Introducere familiară la universul personal,” in *Filosofia contemporană. Orientări și tendințe* I, trans. Nicolae Frigioiu (București, Universitatea București, Catedra de filosofie, 1955): 301.

⁷ Ibid., 301.

⁸ Ibid., 302.

Existential philosophy also had representatives that were preoccupied with the relational character of the person, amongst whom Martin Buber became known for his ideas that he developed to this respect. He says that the self exists always in relation, and it never exists only in itself, the self increases from the richness of you, which transmits in its turn from its richness: "I am complete through You; becoming Me I say You [...]. All real life is meeting"⁹.

Taking into account these psychological and philosophical perspectives, we may state that the relationship contributes to the completion of the person, to reaching the potential of each of us. The dynamics of the continuous receiving and giving leads us to the infinite You, from Whom and in Whom germinate, grow and perfect all the relationships, as M. Buber also states: "The prolonged lines of the relationship with the other are crossed by the eternal You"¹⁰. This idea is continued by a contemporary author, who states that in communication, God reveals Himself as Person open to the communion. Therewith He lightens the meeting taking it to the real destination, giving it a meaning¹¹.

After having analyzed a few statements from the field of philosophy and psychology, I will make a brief presentation of the theological view regarding the communicational character of the person. Although each person is unique in its own way, it does not have fully and individually the potentiality of the self-completion, because it is not sufficient to itself¹². The dialogical dimension, the conversational dimension of the person is the most profound truth that it has. The most obvious consequence of this fact is that man becomes self-conscious only in the presence of the other. This generates the necessity of the dialogue, of conversation and of a concrete meeting between people. Man creates real relationships with the others when he is "in front of a you and amongst an us"¹³.

The social nature of man involves his communicational character. By his nature, man cannot avoid communication, he is structurally a communicational being. Man, created in the image of God (Genesis 1:26-27), received the vocation of communication through the act of creation, and his dialogical fundament is in the Word that God spoke at his creation:

"Man becomes man to the extent to which he is literally called to life by the Word that God Himself addresses. So, in a way, man was created within God's heart because from the very beginning God Himself was *Logos*, Word that is dialogue, conversation. Man is a being called to existence as God's interlocutor"¹⁴.

⁹ Martin Buber, *Eu și tu*, trans. Ștefan Augustin Doinaș (București: Humanitas, 1992), 37.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 37.

¹¹ Vasile Cristescu, *Persoană și comuniune în creștinism și filosofie* (Iași: Tehnopress, 2008): 35-36.

¹² Ștefan Iloaie, *Responsabilitatea morală personală și comunitară*, (Cluj-Napoca: Renașterea, 2009): 229.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 229.

¹⁴ Marko Ivan Rupnik, *Cuvinte despre om. Persoana – ființă a Paștelui*, trans. Maria-Cornelia Oros, (Sibiu: Deisis, 1997): 70-71.

As a dialogic reality, as a reality created by Someone who addressed the word, man is eventually “a being of the answer”. Man’s life may be understood as the answer given to the one who addresses the word constantly, continuously¹⁵. The importance of the dialogic character is given by the fact that the communicational act is not just a mere transfer of information, it does not imply only the transmission of words, but it rather involves unity, mutual participation to the inner reality of the other, communion, entering into the other’s interiority, forming a complete unity between the persons, because beyond the emission or reception of words, communication is sharing something from the profound interiority of each of us, something from everyone’s unicity, something that only that particular person is.

Man is a unique and non-recurring person, aware of its unique value and of its place in the world, which is represented concretely through communion between persons, with whom my person is in a permanent relationship of reciprocity: “But this relationship is not just a simple communication, a simple exchange of information, but it is a meeting of spiritual attitudes, of dispositions, a need of mine for the other, a permanent tendency of searching my person and concomitantly my need *to be with the other*”¹⁶.

The love directed towards other persons is the one that moves a person towards the other, it is the mystery of the persons and of the divine presence within them. Through the relationship between persons we have an infinite possibility to discover another part of the revelation of God Who speaks differently in each of us and who is lived by the other in a different way and with a different intensity. In this way, the relationships with our fellows transform into the discovery of the beauty and love of God for the world¹⁷.

Beyond the exterior communication the intimate horizon of interior correspondence teethes, of an internal, spiritual reciprocity between persons, which is communion. This correspondence intra- or inter- spiritual is generated by the necessity of meeting between two persons, between a *me* and a *you*, a meeting in which the two persons look for each other, meet, harmonize with or complete each other¹⁸.

The reflections regarding the communicational nature of man will stand at the basis of the approaching of the subthemes that I will present hereinafter. If the person is naturally communicational, if the act of communication is not at all reduced to the transmission of words and if there is a non-recurrent singularity characteristic to each person I intend to answer the following questions: Can we emphasize our characteristic unicity which individualizes us in the on-line space?

¹⁵ Ibid., 70-71.

¹⁶ Constantin Enăchescu, „Persoana umană ca mister,” *Ortodoxia* 1-2 (1992): 192.

¹⁷ Iloaie, *Responsabilitatea morală personală*, 264.

¹⁸ Ibid., 264.

How can we seize what is hidden beyond words? How does the word in the on-line environment relate to truth? How much do the social networks contribute to achieving a more efficient communication?

Advantages and limits of the communication through social networks

Facilities

Before answering the questions presented above, I think it is necessary to see for the beginning what are the advantages that the social networks present. I consider adequate to mention this, all the more so as, in the Romanian environment, lately, when this subject is discussed, only the negative aspects that may occur after using these networks are presented, and the advantages that they offer are unremarked. Lately, we have heard so often about the negative effects of these networks that we almost forgot they have so many advantages. I don't wish to deny the fact that when used excessively, they may present a negative part as well, but I consider that the facilities they offer should be emphasized, and instead of the negative aspects, I believe it would be more favorable to try to benefit as much as we can from the opportunities that they offer.

Once the social networks appeared, the concepts of "space" and "time" received another dimension, and the usual frontiers of communication have been eliminated. After the development of these networks, we benefit from many advantages, amongst which we mention the most important: creating bonds between different points of the world, without necessitating moving in the physical space; rapidity of communication; the possibility of maintaining relationships when we are far away from someone who is close to us; making new acquaintances, and implicitly developing new friendships; affiliation to groups that have the same emotional-affective characteristics; the possibility to enrich our vision on our self, on the community and on the world¹⁹. Last but not least, the social networks can be very handy to the persons who have difficulties in communication (social phobia, excessive shyness, emotions, introversion etc.), to whom the on-line environment offers the comfort favorable to communication, because these persons can express easier if they are not in front of the other.

¹⁹ Gwenn Schurgin O'Keeffe, Kathleen Clarke-Pearson and Council on Communications and Media, „The Impact of Social Media on Children, Adolescents, and Families,” *Pediatrics* 127, no. 4 (2011): 801, accessed 15.06.2016. Additionally, social networks can function efficiently as a support for some individuals, especially in the case of some very united on-line communities, see J. Marti, M. Bolibar, C. Lozares, „Network Cohesion and social support,” in *Social Networks* 48 (2016): 192-201.

Nevertheless, the social networks offer us the possibility to be informed about the new discoveries/researches of culture, because we have the possibility to join the groups which share the latest information on a certain theme. Hence, we have extended access to actual researches from various cultures, and this facilitates the mutual understanding of cultures, each of us being able to share the most valuable elements from our own culture. Last but not least, the field of education had a lot to win from the appearance of Internet, and implicitly of the social networks because each institution got the possibility to present the educational principles that it uses, and the teachers/students have the possibility to develop relationships with persons from other institutions, thus being able to achieve new perspectives on their own development and on that of the institution. Students may benefit of methods of self-education, there are forums on-line that support continuing the study and discussions after the school program, in the on-line environment²⁰.

Of course that the communication from other analogue means (letter, telegraph, telephone, radio) has constituted an important stage in conquering the spatio-temporal limits, but we argue that the on-line environment in general and the social networks in particular generates a more efficient communication that couldn't have been conceived before.

We presented the benefits of a social network, but we also have to take into account the risks to which an excessive use may expose us we cannot say that technology in itself is bad, as long as it stays a useful way that facilitates communication, when the off-line variant is not available. A thing that we must be careful with is not to give up social interaction for the sake of commodity, so that we become subjected to the social networks, spending more time behind the screens than in the real presence of a person.

Limits

Although the social networks have preponderantly a beneficial effect, allowing communication between different parts of the world in time units expressed in seconds, however these means of communication may generate risks which are less visible, related to the positive characteristics that accompany and define them in the first instance. Lately there are more and more studies

²⁰ Philippa Collin, *et. al.*, „The Benefits of Social Networking Services A literature review,” *Cooperative Research Centre for Young People, Technology and Wellbeing* (2011): 13-14, accessed 15.06.2016, <https://www.fya.org.au/app/theme/default/design/assets/publications/The-Benefits-of-Social-Networking-Services.pdf>.

which prove that the excessive use of the social networks affects the stability of the direct relationships²¹. In this study I will present the main limits of the digital communication, limits that are given especially by the nonverbal and paraverbal language.

The digital world may constitute a real impediment for communication and intimacy between people, despite all the benefits it offers. The main limit of digital communication is the absence of the nonverbal and paraverbal language, which form 93% (55% is formed by the nonverbal language and 38% by the paraverbal language) in transmitting the message and only 7% is conveyed by the words. Practically, the absence of the body language leads to a loss of 93% of the transmitted message²², favoring the increase of meeting with deceit. Within digital communication we cannot verify if the other is sincere with you, you cannot be sure that the one you talk with is the way he says he is.

Because of the lack of nonverbal and paraverbal language, within communication through social networks it is very hard to distinguish between sincerity and lie, because we don't have the possibility to analyze the body language or the tone of someone's voice. In the transitional forms of communication, the body language, the smile, the eye contact, the distance, tone of voice and other behaviors offer the emitter and the receptor information that they can use in order to maintain, change and control the dialogue. Digital communication, because of the lack of nonverbal language, may not always reach its goal because we don't have the possibility to realize if the discussion was characterized by sincerity and if it fulfilled the needs of the interlocutors²³.

²¹ See to this respect: Emily Drago, „The effect of technology on face-to-face communication,” *The Elon Journal of Undergraduate Research in Communications* 6, no. 1 (2015): 13-19, accessed 16.06.2016 – the effects of the digital communication are reflected on the direct communication, which means that, practically, today the two means of communication cannot be entirely separated; Al-Sharqi, L., K. Hashim, and I. Kutbi, „Perceptions of social media impact on students social behavior: A comparison between Arts and Science students,” *International Journal of Education and Social Science* 2, no. 4 (2015): 122-131, accessed 16.06.2016 – this study offers useful elements in comparing the effects of social networks on youth depending on the academic field (art, science, in our case – theology, etc) and to propose potential remedial solutions; Biswajit Das and Jyoti Shankar Sahoo, „Social networking sites – A critical analysis of its impact on personal and social life,” *International Journal of Business and Social Science* 2, no. 14 (2011): 222-228, accessed 16.06.2016 – the study is important in the present when more attention is given to the correlation of an individual's parts of life (professional, personal, social) as forming a coherent whole; this means that the effects (either positive or negative) of social networks do not limit to social life, but transcend this borders, and affect all of the three parts previously mentioned, in other words, the entire individual.

²² Albert Mehrabian, Ferris R. Susan, „Inference of Attitudes from Nonverbal Communication in Two Channels,” *Journal of Consulting Psychology* 31, no. 3(1967): 249.

²³ Sara Kiesler, Jane Siegel and Timothy W. McGuire, „Social Psychological Aspects of Computer-Mediated Communication,” *American Psychological Association* 39, no. 10 (1984): 1125.

In the case of digital communication we may speak of expressing ideas, transmitting precepts, but the nuances and the interpretations of situations are fragmented. Although we have the advantage to choose the most expressive words, to intensify the impact of the message, however nuancing, potentiating or diminishing the message is given by the nonverbal and paraverbal message. Hence, although communication is not always possible in all its forms, still to have a maximum efficiency and to benefit of the complexity of the message it is necessary to have all its elements (words, gestures, mimics, tonality etc.).

The on-line communication must not replace real communication because the true feelings may be observed/transmitted/received only in someone's proximity. Each feeling has a rhythm and a time of self-development, which doesn't always coincide with the rhythm in which we press the buttons. That is why, often, when we try to be as rapid and as concise as we can, we end up expressing less of our feelings. The real feelings can be much more easily remarked in a direct communication, when we often don't need to express how we feel because the other person can observe and understand this.

In the presence of a person you may divine its wishes, you may deduce a part of the message that it didn't succeed in expressing very clearly, you may receive the complete message if it is accompanied by all the elements that are characteristic to a communication. In the face to face communication we may easily scent where our interlocutor transmits a truth or not because we can analyze his body language or we may observe the tone, the rhythm of the voice, the pauses in speaking. The true emotions, the longing of the meeting, the fulfilled expectation, the joy of the meeting, all these cannot be experienced for real in the digital life. The human relationships lose their credibility and complexity, the emotional experiences are reduced and minimalized when we cannot see the expression the emotion that the other one has when reading our message.

We know that each person is, on the one hand, characterized by a manifestation that is characteristic to many persons and on the other hand it is unique and non-recurrent, each person has something unique that belongs only to that person in particular. If we take these into account, we cannot avoid the question: Can the unicity of a person be emphasized in the digital world? I think that in the digital communication it is very hard to express the singularity of the person because it may be noticed especially when you are in the presence of that person. I don't wish to deny the fact that in a conversation in the on-line environment you can still discover a small part of your unicity, but this is only achieved at a low level, especially when we refer to written communication. Indeed, when we express ourselves in writing, we express a part of who we are, but no matter how hard we try to describe what we feel, what we experience, it is rather difficult for the other to discover depth of his own person. In the face to face communication, unicity can be much more easily

discovered because on the one hand the verbal language is completed by the nonverbal and the paraverbal language and on the other hand in the presence of a person we may receive of the inner state of the other.

In the communication through social networks you cannot verify how sincere the other one is with you, you can't be sure that the one you talk with is the way he pretends to be. And this occurs because there is this possibility to create and control your own identity, the "self" ending up being negotiated depending on the choices made out of a multitude of options.

Creating a false identity – an acute reality today – comes with changes within the person, because when you try to present an image that, in fact, does not represent the real one, dissatisfactions and disappointments occur. There will be a permanent preoccupation to hide the real identity, to correspond to an ideal reality that was presented on the page of a social network. Also, there will be an inadequacy between the image that presents only the good aspects and the real image of the self, leading to the burst of inner conflicts and to a decrease of the self-esteem²⁴.

Building a fake identity, and also replacing the real image of our own person with an ideal image also generates changes of the spiritual disposition. The ideal image after having entered the soul of man, it eats on him, it disorganizes him, it crushes his liveliness, his dynamism, he doesn't have disposition and appetite for struggle and work, precisely because the ideal image takes the man outside reality and produces a split inside him²⁵. In this situation, before deciding to create a different identity we should think of the consequences that this decision may have.

Social networks – facilities and limits perceived by users (empirical research)

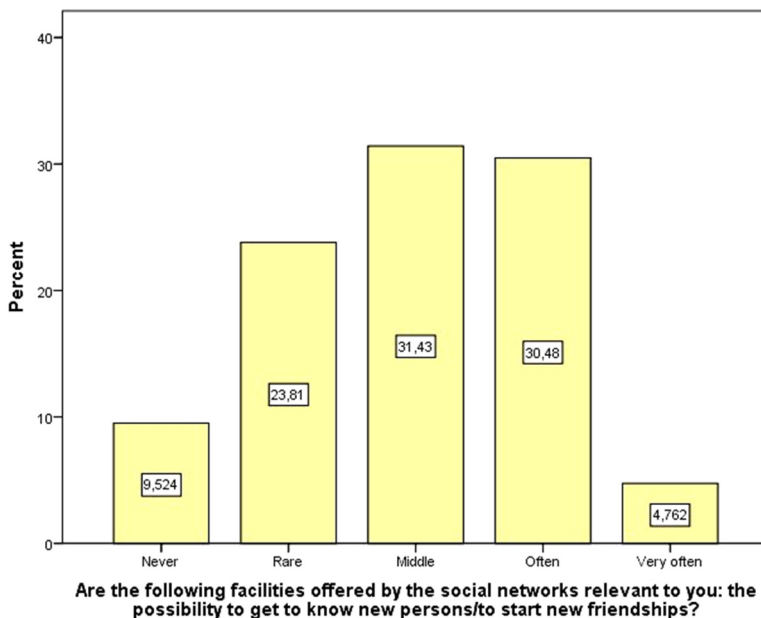
The previous theories are based both on the existent literature on this subject, as well as on a study that I developed in order to obtain better results for the environment I belong to. I have elaborated a research instrument represented by a questionnaire formed of 24 items in which I tried to investigate several dimensions of the use of the social networks, pausing both in the facilities that

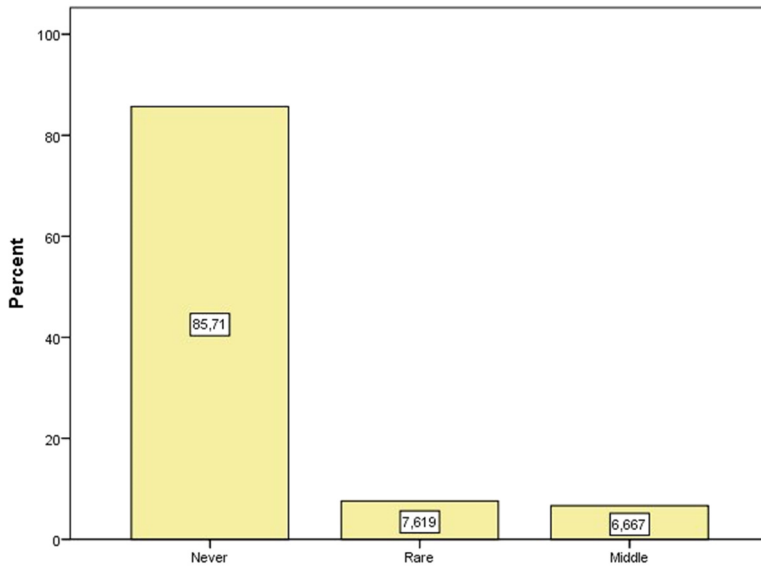
²⁴ Nicole Ellison, „Future Identities: Changing identities in the UK–the next 10 years,” *DR3: Social Media and Identity* (2013): 7. The level of self-esteem can lower from the on-line „evaluations”. Especially among adolescents, a strong influence was observed of the „like”/ „dislike” „evaluations” on the way in which youngsters relate to one another, for details see K. Fujimoto, T. Snidjers, T. W. Valente, „Popularity breeds contempt: The evolution of reputational dislike relations and friendships in high school,” in *Social Networks* 48 (2017): 100-109.

²⁵ Simeon Kraiouopoulos, *Te cunoști pe tine însuși? Viața duhovnicească și problemele psihologice*, trans. Cristian Spătăreanu (București: Editura Bizantină, 2008): 95.

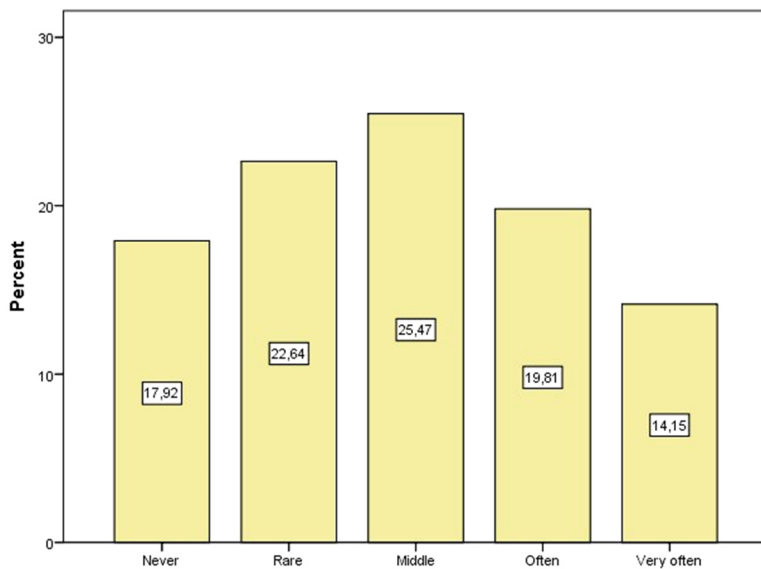
they offer and on the effects of their excessive usage. I collected the data through the direct application of the questionnaire, in a printed form. 110 persons participated to the study, students of two faculties from Babeş-Bolyai University from Cluj-Napoca: from the Faculty of Orthodox Theology (65 participants) and from the Faculty of Psychology and Education Sciences (45 participants).

Out of the results I obtained, I present here only what corresponds to the theoretical part developed within this paper. Of the facilities offered by the social networks, the one that was most appreciated as having often (21,70%) and very often relevance (17,92%) for the participants was that of communicating only when, with whom and what you want, and second most appreciated facility was that of expressing easier when you don't have to face someone (often 19,81% and very often 14,15%). Also, integration in groups that have similar preferences as yours, developing connections/relationships without taking into account the physical space, the possibility to know other people or to start new friendships were appreciated by a large number of participants as having frequent and very frequent relevance. I have already mentioned that the social networks offer us the possibility to communicate using a different identity, but the results of the study show that for most of the participants, the possibility to communicate using a different identity is never relevant. This is also supported by the fact that most of the participants declared that they have a single profile on the social network that they use most often and by the fact that they declared they are sincere in communicating through these networks.

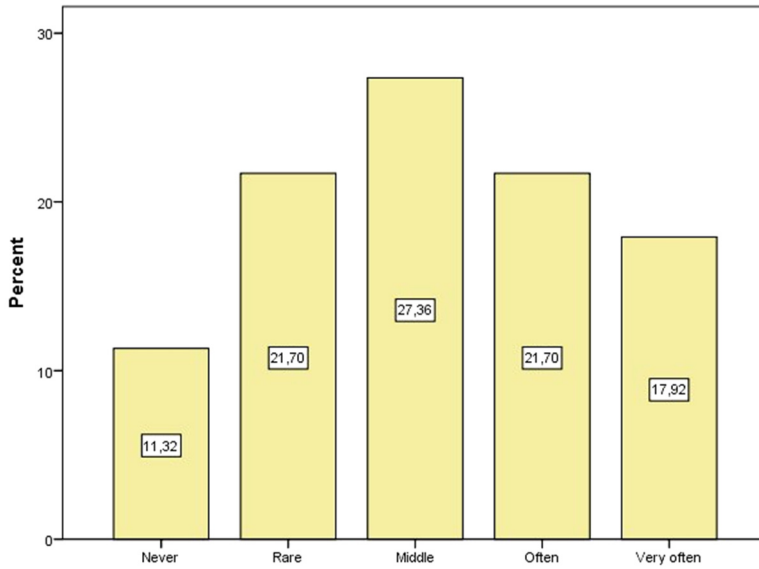




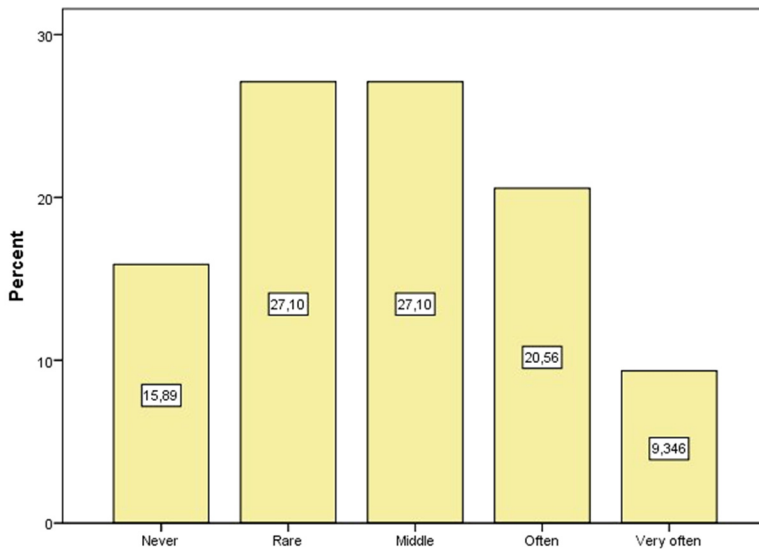
Are the following facilities offered by the social networks relevant to you: the possibility to communicate under a different identity?



Are the following facilities offered by the social networks relevant to you: expressing easier when you don't have to face someone?



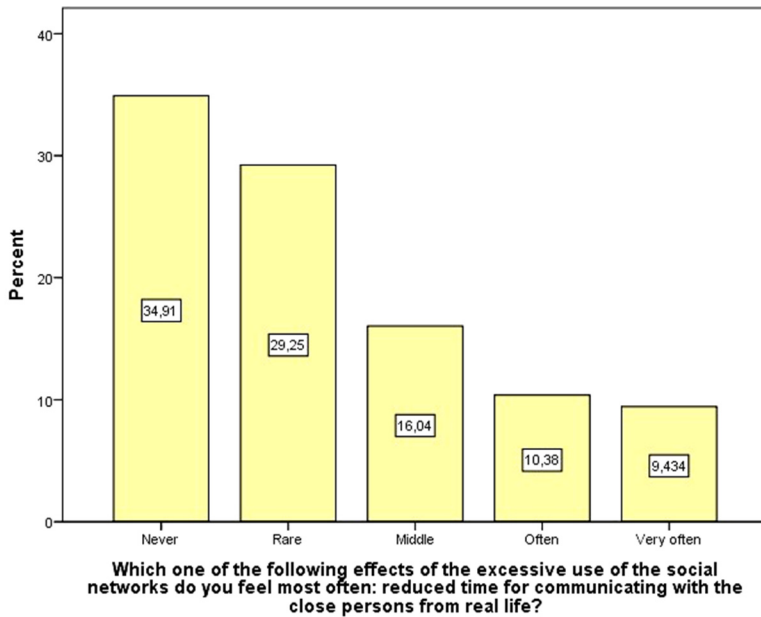
Are the following facilities offered by the social networks relevant to you: the possibility to communicate only when, with whom and what you want?

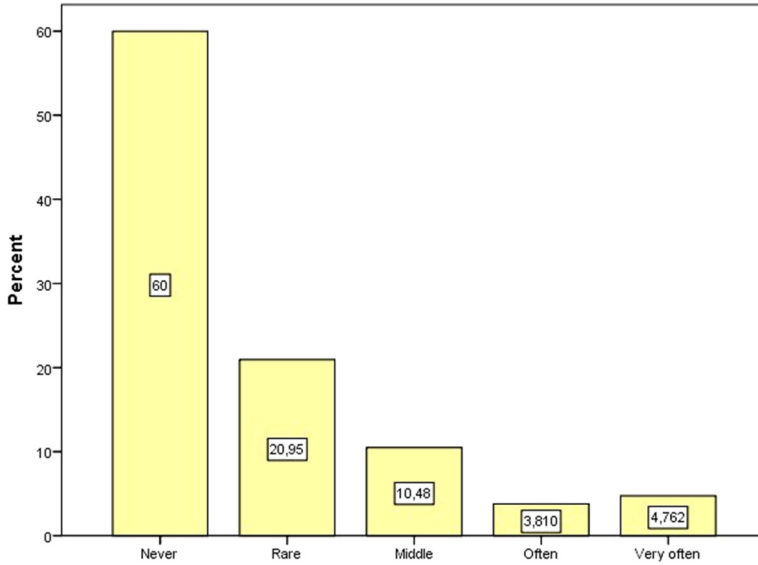


Are the following facilities offered by the social networks relevant to you: developing connections/relationships without taking into account the physical space?

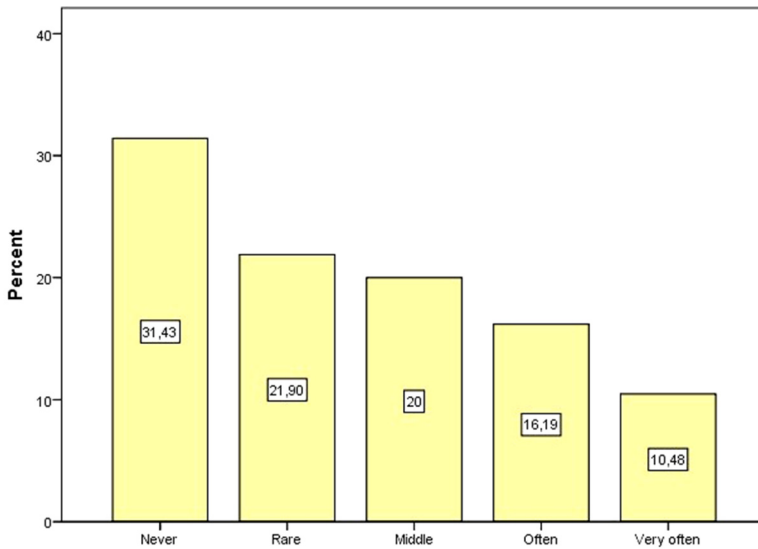
Negative effects

Of the negative effects that the participants to the study notice, most of the participants answered for all the items that they never notice the negative effects mentioned by the questionnaire. However, a rather large number of participants said that there have been a few effects which they felt often or very often, amongst which we enumerate: the lack or reduced presence of the nonverbal and paraverbal elements, as well as the reduced time dedicated to the communication with close persons from real life. Although most of the participants said that they don't feel any negative effects of the use of the social networks, there is also the possibility that these persons haven't acknowledged yet these effects. But we may also see the positive parte in this, which shows that 110 persons use the Internet in a rational manner and thus they only benefit from its advantages.

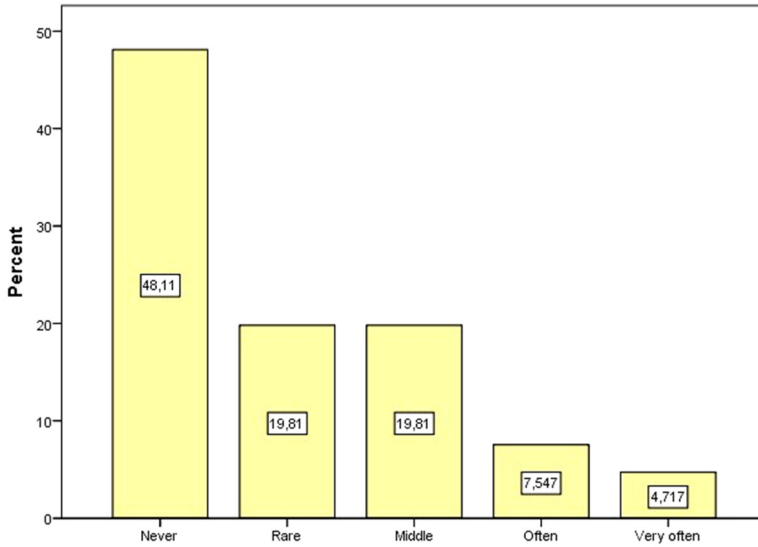




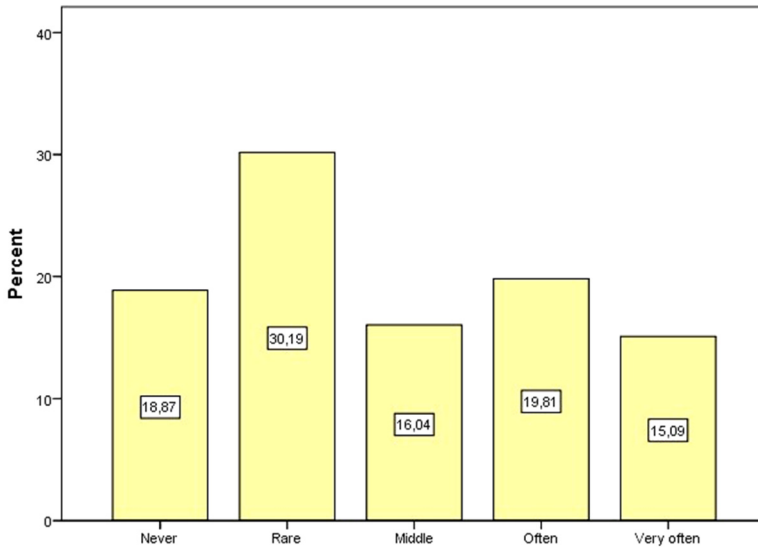
Which one of the following effects of the excessive use of the social networks do you feel most often: decline of the family relationship?



Which one of the following effects of the excessive use of the social networks do you feel most often: lack/reduced presence of the elements characteristic to the nonverbal and paraverbal communication?



Which one of the following effects of the excessive use of the social networks do you feel most often: isolation from the others (the group of close friends from real life)?



Which one of the following effects of the excessive use of the social networks do you feel most often: it facilitates professing some opinions, but it fragments the nuances and interpretations of situations?

Personal meeting and creator word

After presenting the advantages and the limits of the social networks, I will present why the real presence of the persons is so important for a fuller communicational process. I emphasized previously that within a direct communication we transmit more than a simple verbal message, each person reveals something of its own unicity, something characteristic for each of us. Most of this message is lost in the communication through social networks that is why I consider necessary to bring new arguments to support this idea, which I will present below.

Firstly, I will use the example of the relationship between the master and the disciple from Ancient Greece, and then the example of the relationship between our Lord Jesus Christ and the Apostles. We know that in Ancient Greece each master had a group of disciples that spent a lot of time with the master in order to learn from him “the school of life”. Hence, these percepts were transmitted directly, personally. And moving forward we have the example of our Lord, Who formed a group of disciples that stood around Him during His active years. Thus His teaching was transmitted in a vivid, direct, personal manner. The Saint Apostles had the occasion to learn not only from Christ’s preaching but also from His manner of living. The Apostles in their turn had disciples to whom they transmitted directly the teaching they received. We see that the Eastern Christianity puts a great emphasis on the personal meeting with a spiritual mentor. Because “whoever climbs a mountain for the first time must take the marked path: he must have as guide and companion a person who has already climbed that mountain and knows the way”²⁶.

Transposing these elements to our theme, we will say that the digital world offers a lot of opportunities, but in a communicational process it is ideal to have also a face to face meeting, so that the person communicates wholly, not just verbally, but from what it is. And giving from what it is, it completes its own person in a mutual constructive conditioning, in which “each person has to gain the joy of the participation to the other one’s completion”²⁷. The completion of the existence may be achieved only by personal encounter, only by “the perpetual discovery of the other existences”²⁸, and the discovery of something from the deep existence of the other can be done when you are close to him.

²⁶ Irene Hausherr, *Paternitatea și îndrumarea duhovnicească în Răsăritul creștin*, trans. Mihai Vladimirescu (Sibiu: Deisis, 1999): 5.

²⁷ Iloaie, *Responsabilitatea morală personală*, 164.

²⁸ Ibid., 165.

The true communion is a concrete reality: to have the other person close to you, to hear it speak, to have someone to listen to you. To this respect, the term “word” in Romanian has a very meaningful sense. It comes from the Latin *conventum* which means to be in communion, to be together with someone. It is not just a simple phoneme, it is an action, an act, it is a mutual confession, as well as a promise and a guarantee that those who are dialoguing listen to each other, and as a consequence the word must be used as a sincere confession of one to the other²⁹.

The word can be a creative or destructive energy that is why we must be very careful to the manner in which we transmit a message. The word may be received differently by people, but when we have a direct dialogue we may observe the effect of a word on the person in front of us. In digital communication due to the absence of the nonverbal and paraverbal message, this effect can no longer be observed, and that is why we need to be more careful with the words we transmit. Every word contains a part of the identity of the one who speaks it and it is full of content, that is why a word is not expressed pointless, it is not expressed in vain. By speaking a word we offer it substantiality, viability, existence, hence speaking a word is not a pale articulation in comparison with reality, it is not an empty expression, but receives unique value which is transferred from the person who speaks it, because it is thought, it is created by it, it belongs to it and it brings the features of its own thinking. That is why we have to use the word in order to convey the truth as much as possible. In this context, the word transforms into an efficient means of communication, representing the mediating essence of information³⁰.

The responsibility for word is big because it remains bonded through unseen wires to the one who spoke it, to whom it belongs and on whom it depends. The word comes from a person and is directed to another person, intermediating the transmission of the self-knowledge from one to another. Each word has the role to illustrate the reality lived by man and thus it represents the one who speaks it, having value precisely because of the structural identity between the person and what it conveys³¹. Thus, a word which does not correspond to the particularity of the thinking of the one who speaks it loses its value, causing blockages in the process of communication. Saint Apostle Paul in the *Epistle to Ephesians* urges us: “Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen” (*Ephesians* 4:29).

²⁹ Dumitru Stăniloae, „Persoana și individul – două entități diferite,” *Studii Teologice* 5-6 (1993):47.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 54-55

³¹ Umberto Eco, *Limitele interpretării* (Constanța: Pontica, 1996), 78.

Words can be carriers of grace. By receiving the words that come from the heart, people may change miraculously, because they feel they are treated in a personal manner. We can make the person beside us feel that we are close to him when we are wholly present. That is why when we listen to him, we must listen with all our being. Our eyes must be looking only at that person. Our ears must be listening only to him. Let us rein in the tendencies of our thoughts to move away from the situation we are in, to yesterday, to tomorrow, to something we have forgotten about, to another place we are about to go. Or presence may be thus a healing presence because it is personal³².

When we succeed to create a mutual dialogue with the ones around us we become richer, receiving the miracle of the presence of the other one, who is the bearer of a unique vocation. An encounter becomes authentic when the conversation is open and sincere and this unicity is necessary in order to be able to discover ourselves through others and for the others to be able to discover themselves through us.

Man communicates through words not only the thought, but also the joys and the pains and even the communication of thoughts is a joy and sometimes a pain that he eases this way. The joy communicated through word increases because it adds to it the joy of the one to whom it is communicated. The pain communicated through word decreases, because its burden is taken by the other: "To have a man beside you means to have a power that decreases the power of your own pain"³³.

We must say that sometimes only the presence of someone can change the disposition of a man, the words are not always necessary to transmit something. It is rather known the example from Paterikon in which we are told that: "Three fathers used to visit holy Anthony every year. And two of them asked him for their thoughts and for salvation and the third always listened and never asked anything. And after a long time avva Anthony asked him: you've come here for such a long time and you never asked me anything! And the brother answered and said: for me it's enough only to see you, father!" Sometimes a simple look is enough, if our sight is capable to go beyond form, to go to the essence of all things.

How many pages do we need to describe the silent dialogue that took place between our Lord Jesus Christ and what each of them felt when "The Lord turned and looked straight at Peter. Than Peter remembered the word the Lord had spoken to him [...]. And he went outside and wept bitterly" (*Luke* 22:61-62). Here the communicational process for that matter is not strictly

³² Anthony Coniaris, *Taina persoanei: calea către Dumnezeu*, ediția a doua, trans. Diana Potlog (București: Sofia, 2012), 153.

³³ Dumitru Stăniloae, *Iubirea creștină* (Galați: Porto-Franco, 1993), 77.

involved, consisting as we may see only of a look, but it involves the three and a half years that they spent together with all the joys, sorrows, concerns and fulfillments. And, especially, with the immense love that connects our Lord Jesus Christ and His Holy Disciples³⁴.

In communion the development of persons takes place, a spiritual strengthening of each of them, and this growth happens only after the love between the persons is strengthened by the love of the Creator³⁵. To this respect, father Dumitru Stăniloae says that the real dialogue has a Trinitarian character:

“The dialogue between person and person is under the power of God, as the one who takes care of our persons and made us so important to each other and capable to help each other and to enrich our existence through each other. It is a dialogue between three persons and between all of us, if we take into account the fact that two persons who speak to each other often speak about their responsibility for a third or more persons. But this responsibility is imposed by God, as a factor on which they all depend. Thus the human dialogue has a Trinitarian character: it is between man and man, but it also includes the dialogue with God”³⁶.

Communion is relational and what is revealed through it is the presence of another subject, which is a force, and this presence and force imply inseparable relationships. Outside this communion characteristic to the divine image in man we come to the loss of unicity of the human existence, man becoming a being like any other being, with no “identity”, with no face: “Only the presence of another transforms completely the personal situation and in the encounter of another subject we must transform ourselves, we must cope with the need of communication, which from now on denies us the pause in our evidences”³⁷.

Instead of conclusions

In the first part of the study I presented some considerations regarding the fact that the person is ontologically a communicational being, an important fact for the present study because this reality indicates us that we need communication naturally and we can grow only by interacting with the others. In the second part of the paper I presented a few advantages and limits of the communication through social networks. What must draw our attention in this part is that these networks

³⁴ Dan Miron, „Educația – dimensiune a vieții,” *Mitropolia Moldovei și Sucevei* 7-9 (1983): 405.

³⁵ Iloaie, *Responsabilitatea morală personală*, 272.

³⁶ Dumitru Stăniloae, *Studii de teologie dogmatică ortodoxă*, (Craiova: Editura Mitropoliei Olteniei, 1990), 208.

³⁷ Vasile Cristescu, *Persoană și comuniune în creștinism și filosofie*, 23.

have many advantages that we may benefit from, but there are also a few limits among which the lack of nonverbal and paraverbal language as well as the retrenches that occur because of the physical absence of the persons, in which case the unicity of the person is very hard to be noticed. That is why the last part of the study underlines the importance of transmitting a message or other values only by personal presence.

As a conclusion of what we have presented within this study, we may say that although there are many studies that emphasize the negative effects which may occur as a consequence of the irrational use of the social networks, however there are many persons who consider that the direct relationships between them and their close ones are not affected by the use of these networks.

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