ESSAY

Social Media "Teleco-presence" Theory of Identity

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Abstract

This paper examines the issue of social media interpersonal human interactions. The onslaught of social networking sites on the Internet for inter-human synchronous and asynchronous communication has revolutionized interactive communication. The fragmentation of audiences from the cultural, gender, class, race and value perspectives has complicated a unique theoretical dimension for understanding these forms of communications on social media. This paper attempts to conceptualize a theoretical benchmark for understanding identity formation when it comes to interpersonal communication level.

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The virtual universe of communication has ushered in a puzzling phenomena in relation to self-awareness and self-disclosure between two or more persons engaged in a dialogue (Ahn, 2011). Kimmons (2014) has emphasized that New Literacy Studies (NLS) with respect to Social Networking Sites (SNS) are generating identity problem on social media. That not withstanding, this paper examines this identity saga through the lens of a priori socio-cultural co-presence that can dovetail to the virtual teleco-presence sphere. The tendency to 'like and dislike', 'friend and unfriend', and 'follow or 'unfollow' on social media platforms has helped to paradoxically validate this symbiotic relationship between co-presence in the physical world and teleco-presence in the virtual world of communication. By identity, we mean the innate sense of imaginary psychological state of mind rooted in the real world of socio-culturally driven awareness, what Anthony Giddens beautifully captures in his "Structuration theory" (Haslett, 2012, p. 40). According to Giddens, "we enrich our understanding of space, time, and social presence across social systems" (Haslett, 2012, p. 42). Given that SNS on social media are socially interacted systems, the need to extend this theory to identity formation and creation on social media becomes necessary, as our lives are increasingly dependent on electronic communication.

Since 2004 when social media platforms mushroomed in our communicative sphere between people of all colors, religion, gender, class and ethnicity, there have been problems of multiple identities on the Internet (Gilpin, 2010; Kimmons, 2014). Kimmons emphasizes "situated context" (p. 94) for identity creation to gain a

foothold between interactants. That situated context is psychologically informed by cues that are triggered by socio-cultural in-person contacts initiated in the real world. This paper has attempted to stretch Giddens theory of structuration by suggesting that the relational hierar-chical dynamics that is sustained in the real world is in-variably maintained in the virtual world. This is where trust can 'possibly' be established. Genuine trust eventu-ally will give birth to identity certification.

        To begin with, the Shannon-Weaver model of com-munication between sender and receiver and using the en-coder and decoder matrix has been challenged by new me-dia communication platforms (Langmia, Tyree, O'Brien, & Sturgis, 2014). There are multiple encoders and multiple decoders as a result of the sender acting sometimes as the receiver and decoder of his or her own message(s). More complications emerge with Twitter where hashtag "#" en-codes are directed to the public, the 'unknown masses' and "@" tag encodes supposedly to one known receiver may be retweeted to other receivers making messages viral to the entire virtual world (Langmia & Mpande, 2014). The end result can be anybody's guess. This is what can create identity problem on the Internet because multiple parties have transmitted and retransmitted the same message(s) to 'unknown' receivers.

         With respect to interpersonal electronic Face-to-Face (Skype, FaceTime, Google Hangout, ooVoo, etc.) where images are involved, identity construction can be partially resolved if we agree, to a large extent with Baroncelli and Freitas (2011) on establishing some form of recognition through Web 2.0 because there is some sense of identification through the transplantation of images us-

ing apps from the real world onto the virtual world. Schlesselman-Tarango (2013) coined the term "searchable signatures" (p. 5), meaning "user-generated tags" (p. 5) that could help in recognition and identification on virtual media communication. Images that authenticate and seamlessly coalesce the virtual with the real help create confidence and trust. Communication using texts alone with no images can only create trust and confidence for the two parties engaged in communication acts in the virtual world when there has been a priori in-person contact in the real world between them or at best, through electronic face-to-face (FtF) using either Skype, FaceTime, Google Hangout, or ooVoo where image connection was previously initiated.

Of Identity and Identification

This paper situates the term identity from the Freudian psycho-analytical thrust that contextualizes it to the conscious and the subconscious. It has also appropriated Vladimir Rimskii's current definition of identity that sees it as a perception by an individual in social roles through communication and forming "stereotypes of behaviors and assessment of reality through the use of practical patterns" (Rimskii, 2011, p. 81). This paper argues that social media interactive engagements between two or more interlocutors without conscious trust create 'false' identity. The lack of genuineness embedded in the bidirectional interchange is what makes it "false." Interactions can be expanded through extended interactions between both parties to establish trust for 'true' identity to be revealed. What even complicates it further is the deployment of symbols during the transmission process that create

identification problem for the encoder and the decoder (Genosko, 2010). In his argument using the transportation model from a technical communicative stance, Genosko argues that identity problems are created in two fronts: semantic and philosophical. But the argument is that this happens because the "interactants" are using electronic symbols to communicate meaning in the electronic universe and when that occurs, half-truths may take precedence over complete truths. Mindful of the fact that truths in the virtual world and the real world are not forcibly identical, the presence of falsity and glorification of half-truths rest virtually on the shoulder of interactivity between communicators in the virtual world who seem not to be in the same 'universe of trust'. Meaning, there is no thread of verisimilitude that exhibits itself invisibly through their mind's eye. That explains the plethora of anonymities and fake identities that have invaded the cyberspace.

A study by Rainie, Kiesler, Kang and Madden (2013) showed that 59% of respondents were of the view that in this day and age one cannot achieve complete anonymity online but 37% in that same study said it is possible. We are concerned about that 37% because they seem to use skillful short cuts to avoid detection and by engaging in untrustworthy message transaction. The social media user's consciousness of a lurking anonymous user preying on his/her postings online or seeking to follow him/her is what creates identity psycho-cognitive uneasiness and there has to be cognitive apparatus to aid users to sift the truth from falsehood and that seems to be a constant battle. This is not to say there is a complete absence of trust and verifiable truths on the virtual communication. But,

such an instance can only occur if there is trust between the parties that can be traced to the real cultural and social world of a prior interaction or some shared intergroup ideological connections. Therefore, when the two dovetail, identity constructed can be formulated between the encoder and the decoder. We are not in any way insinuating that 'truth' does not prevail between two completely anonymous "interactants." But that truth is partial, void of sustainability to make it complete mainly because of the absence of trust.

Freedom of expression and reduced rate of inhibition (Rosenberry, 2011) are the two advantages for anonymous online newspaper forum interactions. But accountability, which is a link to trust, can hardly be established. When people are free to air their opinions on a political issue on a newspaper site, anonymous contributions are in fact encouraged but trusting that posting will necessitate more findings outside the online world. The same can be said with respect to business to business (B2B) or business to consumer (B2C) interactions in a given social media site (Meshing, 2013). Thus, genuine trust cannot easily be established through anonymous interaction on social media even if the context of anonymous interaction is permitted.

Self-disclosure in Virtual World Communication

In order to disentangle this seemingly lock-jammed communicative imbroglio, the real world contextual interpersonal or intergroup relationships should be transplanted or superimposed on the virtual realm of communication between the parties. That way the interpersonal or intergroup "shared meaning" of communication can be achieved and trust can be restored in the virtual world of

communication (interpersonally and intergroup wise). This can easily be a workable solution on YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, Skype, FaceTime, Google Hangout and ooVoo. Through bidirectional self-disclosure, social media identity can be formed and the real and the virtual can constitute a symbiotic relationship. But where message anonymity and personality traits operate in opposite tangents for the sake of Internet freedom, identity construction can safely occupy the backbench. But this paper proposes a bidirectional process of trust through identification.

When Marshall McLuhan boldly predicted that the electronic communication between humans will take precedence over in-person communication little did he know it was going to cause a irreversible communication paradigm shift. The media, according to him is the "extension of man" and "the medium is the message" (McLuhan,1964, p. 11). But I think it is no longer the medium is the message but the media muddle the messages as a result of the mushrooming of mediated communicative platforms mostly called social networking sites (SNS) that compete to transmit messages. It becomes difficult to decipher truth from falsehood. This is causing a chaotic paradigm shift in the communication discipline. That paradigm shift has created a seismic dent not only on interpersonal communication but on the entire mass communication discipline as a whole (Carey, 1981; Gillespie & Robins, 1989; Havick, 2000; Lang, 2013; Stevenson, 2010). McLuhan's dictum, "the medium is the message" in the '60s with respect especially to television communication, should rather be revised as stated above to respond to the changes in communication. Texters are seemingly becoming lonelier than talkers (Reid & Reid, 2004) and as more

and more people choose to be texters —especially with increasing high birth rates of apps like "Whats app," "Viber" and "WeChat"— there is every reason to bridge the gap between the two users so as to facilitate the transition from in-person to electronic Face-to-Face (FtF) communication. Individuals of all creed, culture, race, gender and class now move head downward with little finger thumps browsing messages and images by scrolling up and down their mobile gadgets in airports, crossing busy streets and crowded alleys; bumping into strangers and cars as they make their way to nowhere. There is ample reason to believe that texted communication between two or more digital interactants can only be sustained because there is innate belief that the message will remain between the parties that trust each other. But this is not always the case because we are now breeding a generation of more texters than talkers (Lenhart, 2012; Reid & Reid, 2004; Rettie, 2007). Mbarkho (2012) reports interesting findings in Lebanon that as a result of the fact that identities are difficult to ascertain online, most users only engaged in extensive bilateral chats if they can relate with the chatter with the aim of eventually translating what he calls e-face-to-face to real world face-to-face of marriage or engagement.

Recent studies (Baym & Boyd, 2012) have shown perplexing and complicated data on how to deal with the "publicness" of issues on social media communicative sphere. According to them, dealing with "audiences" and the "publics" is tricky on any given social media platform. Interacting with a friend, loved one or family member on Facebook or Twitter create a comfort level but that is a public mediated domain because that interaction can be

visible to your supervisor at work. Users have vented their anger on their managers and supervisors on social media but that anger though directed to friends or loved ones has gotten them fired from their job (Feds, 2010).

Younger generations are particularly vulnerable as they ride the waves of texting, microblogging, tweeting as much of these are having cognitive and behavioral effects on them (Watkins, 2010). Baulein (2009) calls them 'the dumbest generation' and adds that the future may be at stake with this excessive virtualization of communication. Other scholars, especially within the digital divide discourse (Warren, Stoerger & Kelley, 2012) have demonstrated youth dominance and age gap with usage. It is rather possible for us to join hands and ride the wave of new communicative techniques with the millennials because being an onlooker or indifferent to 'techies' will allow you to wallow alone or deepen yourself further and further into abysmal hole of social media credulity. The younger generation has to be aware that identity formation has to be constructed by merging the two worlds of media communication (real world and virtual).

This is where we now find ourselves. Whoever is on that other end receiving messages from a sender and resending them back or scrolling through images and clicking on video links from the sender is supposed to be the same person. But that is not always the case. It can be a friend of the receiver or a significant other. The issue of credulity or incredulity of what transpired or is transpiring in the electronic sphere is seriously affecting interpersonal and intergroup relations in the real world. This is indicative of the communicative malaise that is plaguing our entire communicative sphere in the two worlds of com-

munication. But if the intention of social media transaction was meant to be generic like using hashtag tweets for public consumption then other preemptive sensitive decisions should take precedence. The nature of the public, its structure and ideological makeup normally informs the crafting of the message. In other words, the sender is conscious of the flak that may boomerang or push backs from opponents. That kind of identity awareness is different from a genuine interpersonal and intergroup message construction by the encoder. A sizeable majority of Internet users using social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter have fallen prey to enormous solicitation from spammers asking for money and other amenities (Houghton & Joinson, 2010). If identity formation was complete through the laborious process of self-identification the danger of putting out confidential information on the net could have been averted.

Image and Audio Transmission on Social Media

Through electronic process of image and audio transmission from the real world to the virtual (using video), some elements of contextual truths about the person and context can be difficult to decipher. So, some caution and restraint should be maintained. If someone's voice is transmitted through the microphones, some originality is lost, the same can hold true for video. Even though we maybe having a conversation with someone we know using ooVoo, FaceTime, Skype and Google Hangout, we still have to be cautious because another person may be hidden away receiving the audio feeds of our conversation. It is this caution that creates another version of identity formation with online communication. Or how do we know that

our conversation is not being recorded in the background. At least in the real world, when we meet a friend accidentally at the mall or at the park, s/he and us will not be carrying a hidden tape recorder to record our conversation because s/he did not even know we will be there but with online interaction, these are preplanned events and even if we accidentally log on at the same time on any of these sites, there is still a possibility for our conversation to be recorded if the recorder is on the desktop, laptop, smartphone, Ipad or on the site itself. How do we know we are being recorded if the system does not alert us and the interlocutor fails to alert us? This is where trust becomes an issue and relational dyads between persons through teleco-presence on any given social media platform is problematic.

This issue becomes murky when dealing with online text-only interactions (synchronous chats on FB, Whats App, Viber or Twitter) in the sense that it becomes somewhat difficult to distinguish between messages from a known encoder and an unknown encoder. In order for decoding and feedback to be meaningful, the source of the message is as important as the sender. But in the world of social media with the plethora of anonymous messages, the question of deciphering the known from the unknown is daunting more in the virtual world than in the real world and so, some measures have to be taken to establish trust. This is covered extensively under the subsection titled: Public identity vs private identity online.

Communication and Freedom

The advent of online communication has opened the road wide enough for communicative freedom. Indeed,

wide enough! Being anonymous online seems to be the buzzword for airing out dirty laundry lists in the public. This is where heads of states and government officials are insulted on a daily basis without being brought to justice at least in the advanced world. Message anonymity on the Internet creates the greatest opportunity for human-to hu-man communicative freedom. Users register fake names and aliases so as to post angry outbursts and cast asper-sions on those they claim as enemies to their freedom and ideology. This is being done under the guise of Internet freedom but this at the same time creates identity confu-sion. Since no one is clearly being identified, no one bares responsibility. In the long run, the issues raised whether with respect to human rights, race, class or gender equal-ity, nothing can happen except persistent recurrence of it that policy makers may start to take notice. But unless a human face is associated with it or a whistle-blower de-cides to come forward in the real world sometimes accom-panied by a lawyer, these issues oftentimes go unad-dressed. So, social media communication has created an-other version of identity ambivalence when it comes to vir-tual communications. And the way to resolve this ambiva-lence is through a system of identity checks and balances as already argued.

Public Identity vs Private Identity Online

Identity has been one of the thorny issues to fathom in inter-human relationships for decades. Reason being that people can easily assume different persona, work on it and act on it but that may not really be who they are in actuality (Haslett, 2012). People are known to have transformed their identities through disguise and

false names, sometimes for a just reason and sometimes for no just reason. Joseph Luft and Harrington Ingram created the Johari window to map out individual selfhood made up of the blind self, the known self, the open self and the hidden self but this made identity knowledge of 'the other' more complex and complicated. Even when stereotypically speaking, people wanted to put other outside groups in a box, by stereotyping them, that could not help but make matters worse. The result is that humans have decided to form their own conception and perception of the other person based on socio-cultural and often times ethnic affinities especially in the offline or real world (Rimskii, 2011). Imagine how complex this issue has been handled in the in-person world and what others prefer to call the face-to-face world with the online world especially with respect to this new form of communication and relationship-building call the social media.

　　　　To trust the message of senders on social media is increasingly becoming an arduous task as the myth of Sisyphus. In this day and age when " big data" discourse are heard on panels at communication conferences and academic seminars (Neuman, Guggenheim, Mo Jang, & Bae, 2014; Procter, Vis, Voss, 2013; & Salah, Manovich, Salah, & Chow, 2013), and NSA surveillance saga ravaging the intelligence community (Toxen, 2014), credibility and trustworthiness seem to be the safety net. Another issue worth examining as it pertains to identity and social media is the notion of subjective agenda engineered by the propensity to advance individual goals and aggrandizement. The craving for self-gratification by hook or crook is churning in enough unpalatable stuff for Internet consumption. And since the Internet has been vulgarized and,

to a much larger extent, sanitized by hackers, spammers and scammers (Fisher, 2005; Kuster, 2007), it is becoming easier more than ever before to assume a different personality by creating false identities either by visual or textual representations. It is not uncommon for Facebook users to post a different profile photograph of themselves pretending to be the sweet sixteen but posing as sexual predators and sending friendship solicitations. Credulous users unaware of the fixations and masquerades usually fall prey and disclose valuable information including bank account numbers, residence, social security numbers, etc. The only safety valve that is an attainable and feasible option is to create veritable identity construction process as aforementioned on any given social media platforms or social networking sites so that interpersonal and more importantly group dialogue can be diagnosed constructively and confidently between the parties with full knowledge that the other person in the other virtual realm of communication is actually who s/he says s/he is. This is where we give full self-disclosure on that social networking site when we are communicatively engaged with one another.

The solution lies in a theoretical model wherein race, gender, religion and ethnicity can be ascertained before a message is decoded and feedback provided on social media. This can be done through a theoretical model of word choice and context identification using a multi-pronged triangulated frame of reference by following these patterns:

a) *Social Media and Cultural Identity:*
Meaningful human communication through social media can occur when both parties, through synchronous and

asynchronous online communicative dyads have shared socio-cultural repertoire. Zhao (2004) calls the synchronous interaction of those parties "consociates" but attributes asynchronous dialogue to "contemporaries" because they may not have shared in-person knowledge. But synchronous and asynchronous can be consociates. This is initiated through 'friending' someone who hails from your "socio-cultural sphere (ethnic background, religious affiliation, family and friendly ties). This identity could be gleaned from the images (photographs and video posting by the follower with respect to Facebook and Twitter) or through other audio-visual uploads on blogs or Instagram. When identity is ascertained and assured, some of the socio-cultural norms that pervade in the real world can exhibit itself online through a process we can call "mutual mind's-eye intelligibility" as the case maybe. This is where the "We-relationship" seamlessly becomes the "Us-relationship" sharing between the interlocutors. A case in point is when an Arab meets and Arab on social media, an African and another African, an Asian and another Asian but it becomes an arduous task to decipher identity and create an atmosphere of trust when an Asian meets say and American on social media and each of them is asked to follow the other. That could be possible under another social circumstance that I will cover below. When a Caribbean social media user requests to friend another of its kind through Facebook, Twitter or Instagram, the cognitive process of 'who might that be' psychologically begins to unravel. This could be done through a simple direct one-to-one message to the requester asking him/her to identify himself or herself better or an instantaneous acceptance because they both can share a cultural space in the real

world. Mind you, before someone agrees to follow or accept the friendship request from another, he or she checks the profile online. This is very possible especially with LinkedIn where profile building is key to establishing and managing contacts. As opposed to Facebook, Twitter and Instagram where live chat with both image and text could be possible, LinkedIn utilizes more texts than images and so trust can be ascertained mainly through user profiles. By the way, the process of identity starts with name identification and since most people prefer aliases for online communication, the need to utilize this laborious process of identification is necessary for a healthy interactive communication dialogue between human beings in the virtual world.

b) *Social Media and Political Identity:*

Belonging to a political or ideological group could qualify as group identity and this can trigger intergroup virtual dialogue with a certain element of trust. Trust that the other group share common political affiliation and that could be a justification for mutual information exchange. A good example is exchanging political vitriolic on a Facebook page by militants of a given party. There is the supposition that those who subscribe to that site share the same views and so that constitutes a comfort zone for followers or "friending" someone whose views you identify with. Here, the virtual world communication become a stand alone trustworthy communicative dialogue that does not necessitate someone's mind's eye retreating to the real world to gain confidence. The only difference with cultural identity is that privacy and certain confidential information are not shared as one would have had with cultural

context social media interaction wherein concrete real world friends and family "interactants" can go as far as sharing phone numbers, and home address. Therefore, the kind of identity that one can ascribe here is semi-holistic because it is restricted to group affiliations only and does-n't go beyond that.

c) *Social Media and Linguistic Identity:*

The only reason why this subheading is separated from cultural identity is because with respect to social media it plays a significant role by itself. True language is the vehi-cle of culture and should be integrated with cultural iden-tity in order to establish trust with online communication. But the truth is that when one reads and writes the same language with one another on social media that is not one of the Western languages, there is a salient understanding that that person on the other end actually shares some fil-ial ties with the interlocutor. A good example could be Chi-nese, Japanese, Arabic, and Bantu languages from Africa. A Facebook request or Twitter follower writing in the lan-guage peculiar to the culture of the target person, would create more room for trust in the mind of the person than someone using a Western language. In that case, the vir-tual communication between the two could gain some credibility because they seem to share language unity. De-pending on the context, language seems to carry with it some element of confidence when interpersonal communi-cation is concerned.

Space and Time in Social Media

Global communication has squeezed space and time. A 120-character tweet can be read and retweeted si-

multaneously by every user around the world within seconds. The same is true for generic comments, likes and photographs uploaded on Facebook and other social networking sites. This has helped to create more puzzles in the virtual universe of communication with respect to who says what, where, when and to whom? The concept of time and space has been narrowed down to minutes and seconds and more often, users are inundated with messages that they don't know the tangible source. An additional Google search of the sender(s) and where they are located in the world can be the barometer for which to measure identity and accuracy. This is what has created a much more heavy lifting job for journalists across the world. That is checking sources and making sure that the messages on social media are verifiable before being broadcast to the rest of the world. This is becoming a challenge. McKie (2000) even goes as far as introducing the invisible audience, that is, participants who take part in reading online posts but don't repost. She refers to this phenomenon by stating it "encourages emotional distance tantamount to digital voyeurism" (p. 115). This contributes another piece to the puzzle on identification. In fact, not all intended message receivers of a given message solely consumed them. They may consciously or unconsciously share it with none intended receivers as Twitter and Facebook have made that option an open possibility. Given that the sender and the receiver were actively engaged in an interrupted dialogue or any given platform, the tendency for the message to stray away to a third party is an open-ended possibility. The timelessness and placelessness — at least from the virtual world—renders identity formation and construction more and more difficult to achieve. At

least in the short run the process has been able to grow between the initial parties and the gap for error has been narrowed to a considerable length. Under the discussion on public and private identity online, there was the presupposition that the message sender was conscious of the two to a certain extent. But in the case where there is little or no knowledge about the "other" consumer(s), users have to assume that the intended receiver(s) through the use of "@" or "D" sign are the 'actual' message recipients. But that may be a stretch when looking at virtual chats on social media. Another phenomenon that is gaining steam is the issue of spammers, hackers and scammers getting ahold of one's account information.

Social Media Identity Management

a) Co-presence and Teleco-presence Meeting

The name, topic and context of message transaction could provide clues to both the sender and the receiver. Twitter and Facebook have images of the sender attached to the message and the topic in question could be restricted to concerned parties. When in doubts, initiate direct message with senders for personality recognition. This is the co-presence stage seeking to yoke with teleco-presence. Genuine trust will be established only if, according to Anthony Gidden's structuration theory, the socio-cultural hierarchical setting is known. Virtual interaction (teleco-presence) will now take place in a calm, credible, honest and transparent atmosphere and context. The assumption here is that the two interlocutors, through self-created process of identification, have been able to 'trust' each other and therefore can engage in a meaningful dialogue with shared meaning using what we have originally termed "mutual

mind's-eye intelligibility."

b) *Textization*

Haslett (2012) advocates "textual cues" (p. 45). These cues could help in unraveling the virtual mystery that lies in textual conversation with interactants engaged in a synchronous chat. Through an interesting generic topic debate in a group discussion, an interpersonal dialogue between two seemingly interested parties can ensue and these can develop to a much more sustainable relationship both in the real and the virtual world. As has been said consistently, the sustainability can only be realized through the process of disentanglement of the cocoon that casts darkness in the first place between them.

Conclusion

For social media teleco-presence theory of identity to take hold in any given virtual context, the process of trust as established in this paper could be helpful. Sociocultural a priori knowledge is central especially with respect to message transactions between persons separated by time and space. When this process fails for whatever reason, meaningful interchanges between persons involved in interpersonal or group interaction fails to gain sustainable livelihood and meaning. It becomes ephemeral making it an exercise in futility. Another element worth considering when dealing with social media teleco-presence theory of identity is the overwhelming role of narcissistic tendencies that have gripped some users (Davenport, Bergman, Bergman, & Fearrington, 2014; McKinney, Kelly, & Duran, 2012; Leung, 2013). Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter have been awashed with users flaunting im-

ages and videos about themselves to friends and other followers. This has created a serious implication when dealing with this issue of bi-directionality of interaction and long-term viability of social media.

Another issue put forward in this paper was that we sought to advance the argument that the "Us-ness" in social media person-to-person communication can be achieved meaningfully if the interactants establish genuine trust among themselves. How to achieve that depends on balancing the intricately intertwined relationships between socio-cultural affinities in the in-person world and the electronic world. This could be done through a laborious process of ascertaining knowledge clues from an interlocutor. The solution, as earlier indicated lies in a theoretical model wherein race, gender, religion and ethnicity can be ascertained before decoding and feedback are initiated on social media. This can be done through a theoretical model of word choice and context identification using a multi-pronged triangulated frame of reference as discussed above.

This paper also argued that given that our lives are increasingly depended on social media and since social networking sites are socially interacted systems, the need to extend this theory to identity formation and creation on any of those given sites is paramount because there is no escape from person-to-person online interaction on social media for the foreseeable future.

Lastly, this paper did not disagree with the view that trust can still be established on social media between persons who have no a priori socio-cultural frame of reference to initiate dialogue. Rather, it has argued that even though this is possible from groups of people who share

similar passions say in sports, community outreach, culture, politics, religion, race or ethnicity, the element of genuine trust can hardly take place. In order for genuine trust to prevail, prior socio-cultural knowledge or the process of creating one to the mutual satisfaction of both parties can be established through *meaningful* message exchange. When that happens, the social co-presence in the in-person world will seamlessly merge with telecopresence in the electronic world of communication.

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