

How Can You Not be on Facebook?!

A Digital Ethnographic Exploratory Study of Portuguese Users

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Abstract

Regardless of age, people are living their lives through social networks with Facebook leading the way: how much can one know about someone else's life using Facebook pages, that is, one's daily activities, thoughts and ideas, through the activity of sharing content and status updates? The main objective of this exploratory study is to find mass mingling trends among a sample of Portuguese adult Facebook users (N=18) and further, to find how much can one know about one's life using this social network, to conclude that despite stereotypes of online creating isolation, people are living large parts of their lives online through social networks using also mobile Internet access to socialize or simply stay in touch.

Introduction

This article is about an ongoing research that focuses on Portuguese Facebook users, to understand if globally appointed trends, like mass mingling, can be applied in this context. The continuous growing number of Facebook users in Portugal as well as this network popularity as led to the development of several assumptions concerning online social networks and their relation to social context. The daily activity of Portuguese users in Facebook shows that people are living their lives with and through Facebook. The main objective of this exploratory study is to find mass mingling trends among a sample of Portuguese adult Facebook users (N=18) and further, to find how much can one know about one's life using this social network. Our approach crosses multiple references in relation to audience and media studies, approaching the cultural and technological convergence of media culture, following Deuze (2007, 2010) or Gauntlet (2000, 2004, 2007); audience in relation to media and the web (Blumler & Katz, 1974, Rubin & Windahl, 1986; Rubin & Rubin, 1985; Katz, Gurevitch and Hass, 1973; Palmgreen, 1984; Levy and Windahl, 1984,

1985; Hoffman and Novak, 1995; Morris & Ogan, 1996; James et al., 1995); cross media audiences (Hasebrink and Popp, 2006; Couldry, Livingsstone and Markhan, 2007; Hartmann, 2009; Schoder, 2011); social connections and identity (Turkle, 1995, 2005; Jenkins, 2004; Fuchs, 2008; Bauman, 2000, 2005); social networks and Facebook (Boyd, 2007, 2008; 2010; Papacharisi, 2011; Lampe, 2011).

As a communication and interaction platform, Internet integrates public and private spheres, social and interpersonal contexts, information or entertainment interactive contents, as an instrument of socio-cultural change. Communication practices are today highly influenced by Internet utilization and the incorporation of online activities in our everyday life. The social web, with social networks and social media, represents contemporary Internet usage as a virtual space for worldwide publications with all kinds of contents. Internet usage around the world, the growth in the intensity of use, as for frequency and time of connection, and the use of online applications of all sorts, has consequently been involving people in the communication processes. Most users spend most of their time immersed in media with simultaneous consumption of different types of media, enhancing multi-tasking media behaviour. This will also consolidate the user generated content stage, by associating individual creativity to online tools, reinforcing the horizontal flow of communication in which communication is established between a community of many-to-many, allowing also self-communication, without the mediation of institutionalized media. Nevertheless, the active, participant and independent audience keeps on being faithful to the mediator, but uses the online platform, combining news coverage from traditional media with a large number of sources and self media, editing, sharing, reproducing, also assembling contents in online networks and digital devices: "the Internet may be considered not merely as a competitor to established media organizations, but also as an alternative source of information and entertainment and as a means of access to new and incessantly renewing

channels and platforms, some of them provided yet again by those same traditional media, it is also a tool, available for multimodal usage not only by administrations and business, including once more the same media corporations and organizations, but also individuals” (Taberner, Navarro & Tubella, 2008: 275).

In the late 1982, Rosenstiehl wrote that networks would define our age. Following Castells (1999), we consider a network as a set of interconnected nodes that provide a valuable tool for the complexity of the configuration of contemporary societies in the informational paradigm. This is the key concept to characterise the interactive configuration of contemporary society in which everything and everyone is interconnected, surpassing the six degrees of separation formerly conceptualized by Karinthy (1929, in Newman, Barabasi & Watts, 2006). Boyd (2007) define online social networks as social network sites, web-based services that allow individuals to construct a profile in articulation with other users, their list of connections and others within the system. Online social networks are web-sites that allow users to create their own personal space; publish and share content; communicate with their networks of contacts, which, by definition, include their friends and friends of friends. Virtual social ties contribute to social identification since most individuals are both online and offline, trading experiences, communicating and relating with others. Bastani & Zarandi investigated the influence of Internet on social connections: “far from alienating people from their richer relationships, the Internet has not changed the relationships significantly (...) it has increased their social contacts” (2008: 305).

Online identity is now part of our own identity while part of our social experience. Identity is defined through the interrelationships between on-line and off-line lives. We have a social identity in online communities, online social networks and websites. Furthermore, the more a person publishes or interacts on-line, the more he or she reveals about herself, combining the real “me” with the metaphor that can be created using the real name, a pseudonym or by presenting themselves anonymously. People interact and want to socialize, gathering a rich and complex diversity of beliefs, expectations, likes and dislikes, ideas and traditions in cyberspace, as Angleman (2000) defines. Although social hierarchy and restrictions may be undersized, they can also contribute to define the online identity. Social sites and online social networks are places of expression, allowing individuals to expose in a virtual sphere what they sometimes can't in real life. From user profiles in social networks or online dating services to blogs, the web establishes the virtual public sphere where people can define (or redefine) their identity, express opinions, share interests, knowledge and information. Levy (2000:133) explains that in cyberspace each one is potentially a transmitter and a receiver in a qualitatively different space, not

fixed nor provided by users. People gather virtually not by their names, geographical locations or social status, but according to interests within a common sense and knowledge. Access to communities through an electronic link may seem to be soulless, but the emotion to participate is contagious. This is a new way for people to reunite, with deeper emotion and contacts sharing than within face-to-face meetings. This new relationship paradigm, wavering the physical presence is changing the way we build and maintain identities. Virtuality is also changing the thinking and the organization of our identity by the permanent meeting between an unlimited numbers of possible conditions. As Turkle (1997: 12) points out, “the history of the construction of identity in the culture of simulation, experiments can be understood only as part of a wider cultural context. This is the context of the history of erosion of the boundaries between real and virtual (...) self-unitary and multiple self, which is occurring (...), in the patterns of everyday life”.

Communication as its own cultural context, and although the decline of contact in contemporary society, seems to be happening, people are using social network-aided “mass mingling” to come closer together, both online and in the real world. People have the fundamental need of interacting with other people, which has become easier with online social tools and networks. Mass mingling is the most recent trend (TrendWatching, 2010), referring to the way people will be spending more time online, engaged in different activities which incentivize meetings in the off-line world. Media also contribute to extend this trend, by creating several happenings on Facebook. Examples from Cordeiro (2010) show that for radio stations, it is a very good way to promote their own events or the events that radio stations are sponsoring. For radio stations, Facebook is used as a marketing tool to promote cultural and recreational activities, by creating pages and related events, mostly party, concerts, plays and gigs, in a way to find innovative ways to engage with the audience, relating with people's lifestyle and to find them within the sub-cultures emerging from the mainstream culture and aesthetic practices. Mobile web helps to further deepen this trend, blurring the boundaries between the virtual and the real world, as people connect online while participating in a real world event, posting about their daily life while location based or on the move, as we came to find in this exploratory study.

Mingling on Facebook

We have been following samples of Facebook users to develop a digital ethnographic exploratory study of Portuguese users, mostly to understand why are people using this social network and how do they connect online and in the real world. The analysis developed follows the daily

Facebook activity of a group of people from different backgrounds, using Facebook's statistics for Portuguese users for a period of one month. Portugal has a total of 3 293 240 Facebook users (growing on a daily basis) with the large majority of users among 18 to 44 years old: the user age distribution is of 25% among 18 to 24 years old, 34% within 25 to 34 and 18% on 35 to 44 years old, and growing steadily among 45 to 54 year old, with a gender ratio of 51% male and 49% female. Our sample (also growing on a daily basis) is of 600 Portuguese Facebook users, within these age groups. The study has been developed with two different sub-samples, according to the objectives and methods in use: an online inquiry was applied to a sample of 600 users, with a 10% participation rate. Life story (narrative interview) combined with in-depth interviews for an interpretative analysis based on the wall description, attending mostly on the meanings of publications, was also developed, using a sub-sample of 10 Portuguese Facebook users.

The methods in use cross an exploratory with empirical research, using a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods. The main purpose of this work is to identify and structure the mass mingling through Facebook, testing feasibility using empirical evidence expressed in walls of sample of users. Baring this in mind, we seek to understand user's behavior and reasons that drive them, through interpretative analysis of walls, complemented with life story descriptions and in-depth interviews to a sub-sample of users. In order to systematize and find relationships around observed phenomena, an online inquiry, though snowball sampling method, made of open-ended answers. This inquiry focused on reasons to have a Facebook account, the use of Facebook to communicate and interact with friends, identity, and mass mingling and gaming. We used an innovative snowball sampling method, asking friends respondents in several Facebook groups to answer the questionnaire, covering a wide range of interests and age ranks, to get as most diversity as possible. We had 63 answers in 7 days of online access. From these, we considered 60 valid answers, that were submitted to statistical and content analysis, representing, hence, 10% of our sample. The sampling method brings limitations on the potential of representing the universe, but that was not our goal in this study. We prefer an in-depth reading that makes possible to talk not about "Facebook profiles", but to focus our sample individuals as "Facebook users", the agent that uses this network service, with a user account and a username (or screenname). These findings will help to sustain main ideas from the sub-sample qualitative analysis.

There was several research questions in mind: Has Facebook brought us all closer? Do we have more face-to-face interactions due to Facebook interaction? How do we relate to online connections with those from the real world? Does Facebook mirror my identity? Is Facebook a

communication tool that helps real friends to come closer? Does Facebook improve our social relationships? Do we mingle on Facebook and use it as a social agenda, arranging meetings and gatherings? Do we actually attend the events we're invited for?

In this study we want to find identity as a social construction but most importantly, the way Facebook has contributed to improve social relationships as well as the kind of social relationships it strengthens – former ones or new ones developed through the social network. We created the following hypotheses: Portuguese users use Facebook to be in touch with their friends; Friendship games and applications help people to feel closer to each other; Facebook profiles and walls help to self represent one's identity; Facebook contributes to increase social gathering among Portuguese users.

General categories were observed in the sub-sample of 10 Portuguese Facebook users, for a one month period (January, 2011): participating in events (virtual and real world); daily life information (as for activity or location); posting source (web or mobile); intimate thoughts; games and apps; posts from friends. This data was associated to life story interviews referring to Facebook usage, and time spent observing the social networking activity, while at work, home or on the move, developing in-depth interviews to get accurate descriptions of the user's trajectories in Facebook and uncover specific patterns of social relations and the processes shaping them (six hours of observation to each sub-sample user in January, 2011).

Findings

The on-line enquiry was applied to a sample of 600 Portuguese Facebook users, with an age rank between 18 to 54 years old. As one can see, the average educational capital of the sample is high – respondents are part of a special interest group in Communication (academics and professionals), Music Marketing (practicioners and students), a Radio Station (practicioners and listeners) and undergraduate students from a Public University.

Among reasons to have a Facebook account, to keep up with friends activity is the most important, followed by the need to keep up with the news, socialize and entertain. Since this was an open-ended answer, it is curious to find that as for information, respondents mean that they want to keep up with news from their friends, rather than breaking news headlines. It is rather difficult to find, among respondents, one sole reason to be on Facebook. Nevertheless, friendship and relating with family have a total of 37 references. When asked about the kind of communication established through Facebook and the tools in use, respondents use them simultaneously, using mostly the comments to posts, pictures or videos, complemented by

messages and chat room, for “simple and immediate things”, with 39 references. Some state that usually “talk to friends on Facebook chat”, representing a change in the concept of talking with friends, by using an online platform that only allows them to write, mixing the oral and written discourse. For these respondents, sharing content or posting in friends wall is also a way to communicate with them, as well as using the “like” button or tagging friends in pictures and videos, with 32 references. “Although superficial”, Facebook is thought to be a way to be closer to friends (real life friends), with 40 references, combined with being a very good complement to friendship, with 12 references. For some, this idea is just “an illusion”, since 10 respondents don’t believe that Facebook can help them to be closer to their friends. When asked about mass mingling trends, respondents find very interesting the way Facebook helps people to meet: they simultaneously use it to arrange meetings with their friends and participate in events (39 and 36 answers, respectively), but are aware that Facebook “is not yet a social agenda”.

Results in relation to participative observation, in-depth interviews and interpretative analysis of walls of a subsample of 10 Portuguese Facebook users corresponds, to a large extent, to the results of the questionnaire.

USER 1 is a recently employed journalist, 22 years old MA student, who posts using the web, while at work or at home. Has 532 friends and from her profile information, one can say that she is a music lover, as stated on the “about” information. Nevertheless, it wouldn’t be difficult to conclude so, since in a one-month’s activity, shared 11 music videos and 7 music news, from a total of 44 updates on her wall. She attended one music concert and responded to an invitation confirming her presence in another concert, using the Facebook events. Her arts and entertainment likes are mostly about music, following bands and artists, as this was her first objective, when she created the Facebook account. She describes the use of Facebook like a blog. Music is her favourite content write about and share.

Her comments on each video portray passionate information about music and artists, as well as information about upcoming events, mostly because this User works in the music industry, as journalist in a web-based music service and content provider, MyWay. Some of these videos and news are artists or event promotions through the company website that she works for. Nevertheless, there’s no subversive intention, since these sharing corresponds to her expectations, likes and dislikes, assuming to promote artists when it happens, as sometimes stated in the post or comments in response to her friends. Of her 21 posts from friends, 7 were related to games and applications, the rest mostly related to friendship.

From the comments, one can easily find that User 1 uses Facebook as an inter-personal communication tool, also for commenting about being online, for chats or even calls to

be available on MSN, which she ignores because today she prefers to comment on posts and photos as a way to communicate with her friends. Nevertheless, although she uses Facebook in this sense, she’s not posting from mobile applications and rarely uses Facebook to arrange meetings with friends. She accepts every friendship request, isn’t fond of the Facebook chat room and doesn’t like to arrange these meetings in public (using post comments, for instance).

USER 2 is a 21 years old post-graduation student, with 425 friends. He rarely uses location and activities to post. Although his profile doesn’t give much information about who he is, what he does and what he likes, his profile pictures and videos show that he’s a bodyboarder and sports lover. Contrary to other men of this sample, User 2 often posts intimate thoughts and these portray details and emotions. He admits that he’s not afraid to show his feelings and share his ideas. As for content sharing, like User 1, music videos are predominant in his posting activity, but also media generated content and news about curious findings. Most interesting are his comments to videos and photos, most of them about his mood: he posts music videos to express his feelings. Posts from friends on his wall aren’t representative of mass mingling trends, nevertheless, in 55 posts, 21 are from his friends, sharing thoughts or news content. In one case, an invitation for a date. Games and applications aren’t representative. User 2 is following the mobile trend of social network usage, posting sometimes from his mobile phone (5 posts in a total of 52 posts)

USER 3 is a 29 years old MA student and journalist at Vogue Portugal, with 344 friends. For her, Facebook is a sort of a wailing wall and a way of shouting to the world her dissatisfaction, sharing information about her best and worst moments of the day. Her profile represents her personality, or, as she says, the way she looks at herself and the way she wants to be seen by others.

There is not much information on the profile, although arts, entertainment and fashion are the most important features presented. User 3 is a journalist in a worldwide known fashion news magazine and that is relevant information to understand the profile and wall updates, most of them fashion related. These shareable products or concepts often seek acceptance to position herself as a trendsetter. Sharing content through social networks is becoming a way for people to say something about themselves and User 3 shows the world her appetite for fashion design, brands and icons, as well as the media content about it. This user also helps us to understand why presenting updates about the where I am; what I like; what I’m doing and intimate thoughts is so important: it is a way to express and relieve stress. Feedback and conversations are another way for sharing thoughts and ideas, gathering opinions and laughing about them. It is also a way to show ourselves to the world and make others envious (if for instance we are

at a great location) or pious (if we are somehow in trouble). Nevertheless, seeking personal affirmation and social acceptance, as the comments from the user friends clearly prove, by supporting the User post, offering help or just, being really jealous. Curious findings show that comments come from the same friends during the time of analysis, proving in some way that, although your connections can grow through social networking, in the end, you get to be close to the same friends and number of friends that you were before. From her 36 posts, 8 of them were posted through a mobile application. Although she's not following mass mingling trends, in some situations, the meeting idea begins in Facebook.

USER 4 works in the Portuguese Army, she is 30 years old, a bachelor degree and she's in a relationship. She has 331 friends and regardless of her identity, the Facebook profile doesn't help us to define who she is and what she likes. Nor does the music, photos or her thoughts tell us much about her. The information page, which has poor information about arts and television, music or other activities, being this a personal option, of someone who thinks that this is enough information, which also means, that she is aware of the implications of giving away too much information about herself and her likes, to keep her life private. It is curious to see that there are more posts from her friends, through friendship applications than from herself. Sometimes she posts about where she is or what she is doing, but these posts are all concerned with her leisure time, fact that isn't related to her professional life, since she usually uses the computer in her daily work. It's a personal option of someone who doesn't want to take too much time updating her profile. We found that she has a total of 22 posts, while her friends posted 44 times on her wall, using friendship applications and games, which, by definition, helps you to find out more about your friends. She uses Facebook to communicate with her real friends (those formerly known), by commenting their posts, using the messages and chat room, as a means of getting closer to friends, interacting more, due to Facebook, with some of these friends. Curiously, she hasn't met people using Facebook and isn't planning to do so. Facebook isn't also being used as an online agenda, because previous communication tools still regulate her social life, as the mobile phone SMS service. She only posts from the web, not using her mobile phone to do so.

USER 5 is a PR professional of 35 years with an University degree, married, with 406 Facebook friends. She uses Facebook as a sort of a digital diary, posting her concerns, activities and ideas, sharing intimate thoughts but being aware that these can be read by all of her online friends. Hence, we can see her personal thoughts, but not those from her most intimate private sphere, reserved for her real life friends. Her daily activity is posted on her wall, as well as (and mostly) her social, cultural and leisure

activities. References to her work are very few, but most of the posts show that she is hard working (not only those about being at work, performing working activities, but also those explaining that she will take some minutes to rest), also spreads the word about the organization for which she works, its products and initiatives, being aware that she's using Facebook to promote the company among her friends and her friends, friends reaching an ever increasing community.

Contrary to other users, User 5 Facebook page is about herself, her life, concerns, personal likes and dislikes. She shows herself to the world through her routines and social life: she is very in to arts, culture and music, likes to be with friends and rest in the comfort of her home. A bit workaholic as she says, she sometimes works late and uses Facebook in her spare time when she can't sleep, but also when she's happy with something or attending an interesting cultural event. Her profile doesn't have many posts from friends (5 posts out of 37 posts), friendship applications (1 out of 37 posts) or games and she mostly post through her mobile phone, particularly because most of her posts are about location and activity: where I am and what am I doing (18 posts on 37 posts), generating comments from her friends. Although friends don't post much on this user profile, they comment about her activity and make suggestions about meetings in the real world, for dinner and chat, using Facebook as a tool to communicate and come closer. As she states, sometimes the Facebook message system is used as an SMS system, to communicate with friends and arrange gatherings – mostly visiting friends at home or going out for dinner.

USER 6 is 37 years old, married economist with an university degree. As some of the others users observed, music fills his arts and entertainment profile. I've found, in fact, his hobby: he's also a guitarist in a rock band, and a Dj, reason why most of his posts are related to music. Judging from some posts and comments, which later we've confirmed, Guns'n'Roses are his favourite rock band. He attended two different events organized through Facebook, using also this information to post about his location and activity. User 6 assumes no to be a heavy social network user, logging in to check for updates from his friends or to post whenever he finds something interesting to share. When the website he is visiting has the sharing functionality, or, in most cases, whenever he remembers to. Five of this User's posts are from friends and one posted using a friendship application, proving, in fact, how light this user is. From his 10 posts, one was posted through a mobile application.

USER 7 is a 47 years old experienced marketer with no academic degree. He's married and a father of two young adults who also are in Facebook. One curious thing about his profile is the number of family members he has in Facebook, in a total of 14 family members, which is much

more than any other user of this sample has, fact that he tried to explain, relating it with cultural traditions and family closeness. For him, Facebook is an extension of us, a place for self-representation, helping others to perceive our identity and personality. Although User 7 has privacy concerns, he's fully aware that once in the network, you start to take part of it and sometimes, to live your real life through the network. He started to use Foursquare and more recently is using Places. Therefore, most of his wall updates are currently about his current location. Although this User isn't afraid to post about himself and his life, it is hard to find whom he is through his wall or his profile information. It is through his pictures and comments in pictures that we get to know a little bit more about his political views, social life and family. He doesn't consider Facebook as a mood enhancer and even lesser as an online journal. We rarely find posts with intimate thoughts or emotions expressed in his wall but, when it comes to politics of sports, this User often expresses his opinion and generates conversations about these topics among some of his 1734 friends. Facebook wall is also a tool to communicate with friends, posting on his friends wall, and having posts from his friends in his wall. Personal messages are also on comments to posts. He agrees with the idea that his Facebook page is a sort of platform for real friendship networking: most of his friends are friends from the real life, or, at least, for those who constantly interact with him.

He works as a freelancer and uses Facebook to promote the brands he's working on: most interesting is the fact that he's a music marketer and, therefore, these brands are artists and bands. As said before, content sharing is very usual in this user wall, mostly for media generated content with 58 links; location (21 posts using Foursquare app), 16 posts related to personal thoughts and ideas, 15 posts from his friends, 14 videos shared through YouTube, 13 posts concerning friendship applications, 8 posts related to his work and 5 invitations to events, that correspond to a total of 151 posts during this period, with 90 of them posted from a mobile application.

USER 8 is a 25 years old post-graduation student and also an actress and photographic model, using Facebook "just because", since that for professional issues she rather uses other social networks, such as LinkedIn. Most of her posts are arts related, with alternative artists, happenings, exhibits and music that she shares and comments with some of her real life friends, among the 682 Facebook friends. Facebook wall is the place for her daily routine, without exposing her current location of activity, expressing, although, her life, things she likes, places she visits and Facebook events she's invited for. There aren't posts about her work, exception made for some pictures of two recent photographic sessions that she made. There are 8 posts with personal thoughts, about things she would like to see happen. Music videos through YouTube represent 16 of her

38 posts. Posts from friends are few, as well as friendship applications (3 posts). Location and activity posts are in relation to Facebook events (5 posts) and although some pictures accompany her media generated content posts, she only has 2 posts with pictures of herself. There are no posts from mobile applications. As she explains, it isn't affordable for her to have a smartphone and mobile Internet access.

USER 9 is a trainee in a communication agency, with a graduate University degree. He's a very recent Facebook user, but as he explains, it was just a matter of getting started. Today, he has 672 friends and interacts with some of them on a daily basis. As other users, interactions on Facebook are established through comments on posts and posts from real life friends. Although he's working in marketing, he's an avid cinephile and music lover, easy to identify by his profile definitions and posts on the wall. He participates in a Facebook film challenge, posting about his favourite movies and commenting on his friends' posts. And since this is a 30-day challenge, most of his posts during the observation period were related to cinema. Nevertheless, we asked him about his current activity in Facebook and since he considers himself a "Facebook rookie", he states that it is rather hard to define his wall activity. Analysing previous months, one can find, again, cinema and music dominating the posts, videos, media and user generated content. From a total of 40 posts, 8 of them were personal considerations accompanied by music or film videos and news (media generated content); 4 posts were wall to wall posts from friends; 5 pictures (pictures from media generated content and friends tagging him in pictures); 23 posts were related to the 30 day film challenge. This user doesn't post from mobile applications: not only he has mobile Internet access, but also although he currently relates with his real life friends through Facebook, he still tries to separate his online and offline daily life.

To sum up, our findings suggest a clear relationship between the questionnaire results with the combined analysis of life stories and Facebook walls: calls for real life events through Facebook foster new behaviors but aren't yet a common activity within our sample of users. Portuguese users Facebook activity is associated with the need to stay in touch with real friends. Although most of our sample representatives accept friendship from people they don't know in the real life, they interact and establish an online relation with their real friends, using Facebook as a tool to stay in touch and keep track of their friends' activities. For them, not to take part of online experience is to be disconnected from reality, as hyper reality integrates their off-line activities. Although friendship games and applications seem to be very popular and all of our sub-sample of users has friendship games/applications posts in wall, the sample of users in study isn't devoted to use them. Indeed it seems

paradoxical, and its use is probably related to other factors that were not part of our analysis.

Facebook walls can be thought to be a mirror of ourselves, representing who we are, our likes and dislikes, our activities and places, sharing where you are, discover new places and follow friends' on the move. For these users, online and offline identity is today, interchangeable: this construction is blurred by social constraints and the influence of others, as happens in the real world. Nevertheless, there is physical separation of users and sometimes an anonymity that allows defining different fields of action, but there is no real separation between virtuality and reality, with both instances being complementary and in permanent connection. It is, after all, to be running simultaneously differing contexts.

Regarding mass mingling trends, there isn't a clear evidence of increased social gathering among our sample of Portuguese Facebook users. Despite stereotypes of online creating isolation, people are living large parts of their lives online through social networks and many times, using mobile online access to socialize or simply stay in touch. The most interesting is that not only people mingle online, commenting posts, sending messages through each network system, chatting or posting in each other's profile, but they carry this mingling to the real world. Through social networks, people create virtual events and send invitations for real world events, with numerous real world activities happening due to this participation in social networks.

Conclusions

Although our sub-sample of Users accepts almost every friendship request, they tend to communicate with their real friends. One can see that the private sphere has enlarged, since people share thoughts and ideas with more than close friends. Nevertheless, although they recognize that they have more social connections than before, our sub-sample of users don't feel that they have made new friends. And for the proximity factor, Users feel that they get to be in touch with their friends, but some clearly state that friendship is not strengthened.

People communicate through the wall using posts and comments to feel closer to friends. They all have stated that Facebook helps to stay in touch, to regain contact with old friends from school or previous employments, as well as not to lose contact with those that, although are friends in Facebook, are not close friends in real life.

Curious findings show that on the whole sample comments come from the same friends during the time of analysis, proving in some way that, although your connections can grow through social networking, in the end, you get to be close to the same friends and number of friends that you were before. From our sample, three quarters of Users have

a Facebook account to be in touch with friends. A minority has an account for professional networking or branding (concerning their line of work).

Facebook doesn't consolidate relations, providing however that contact between people isn't lost. People, with whom Users cannot interact in a daily basis, can, at least, read the posts and sporadically comment. On the other hand, Users also get to know something about others through Facebook's news feed. Friendship is not deep, but Facebook compels Users to keep others in mind, as they episodically post to tell one another "this or that". Friends, as some of our sub-sample of Users state, become easier to access, keeping them closer. It happens in greater extent with those abroad, with friends posting in their wall comments about missing them. The majority of Users in our sample comments posts or photos as a way to keep in touch with real friends. Some state that don't accept friendship requests from those they don't know in real life. Both the sample and sub-sample of Facebook Users agree that this a communication tool that helps them to get closer to their real friends, in a social-cultural context where people have less time for traditional face-to-face interactions and with those who are geographically apart.

"Know your friends", "truth about your friends" and other kind of friendship games and applications seem to be used by those who have lower academic degrees. That present less information on their arts and entertainment pages, as well as pages of activities that relate to mainstream activities and not culturally significant, almost characteristic of low culture, to use the determination of cultural theorists. In the examples found (56 in a total of 195 posts from our sub-sample of 6 Users, much more were found in the sample of 600 hundred Users), we tracked down the profiles of each user who posted one of these applications (in our sub-sample of Users) to find that either they are aged under 20 years old or Facebook Users with few or non-existent references to books, movies or music, particularly those that are recognized worldwide with high aesthetic and artistic value. For instance, User 1's friend is a heavy user of these applications, as well as some friends of User 4. In the first example, we've been through her page to find that although there are many references to independent music, books, films and TV series in her page, but within her friends, who use this kind of friendship applications, arts and entertainment likes all are part of the mainstream popular culture that describes the lifestyle and tastes of the majority of younger people, as in User 4 and her friends. One hit wonders, in the music industry, or blockbusters, in the movies, both due to audience response and high-budget productions based on marketing campaigns aimed at mass markets, define their success and popularity, as examples of pop culture, the mainstream productions disseminated by the media, available to the general public and within the corporate interests of cultural industries. Most curious is

the fact that within our sample and sub-sample of Users, everyone saying that these quizzes are quite annoying, time consuming, therefore, never playing. We wonder how do they get to have, at the same time, so many of these apps on their wall posts...

Facebook pages represent who you are, what you like or what you do. We managed, besides our sample, to track around 600 hundred profiles to find that in most cases, people share news links, media links and photos that are directly concerned with their field of work. For those who are not yet employed, their personal likes and interests can be found in Facebook. Media experts or academics, for instance, place in Facebook links related to their field of study, news and reports, content that used to be exclusively on weblogs. Reporters share information about factual stories they are covering. PR's tend to externalize their professional activity and people in the music industry often promote the bands they working with, upcoming gigs and concerts. Politicians share information about their political views or media content about national or international news.

Concerning intimate thoughts, most of the time one can't easily understand what the user is posting about, or what his friends are commenting about: shared thoughts and ideas are still private, based on their life which is not exposed online, referring to puns that only those involved can understand. It's not as if people don't want to be understood: Facebook users simply don't take it in to consideration. They are posting what they feel; to those that will understand them. Sometimes, pictures and thoughts come together (these are often related to nice places to visit or food, while dining out). Facebook Users are concerned about what they are posting and aware that this may be interpreted as a self-representation of them.

Mobile applications allow us to access social networks and they are a way to be part of the new social context, since updates using mobile applications are growing steadily. Nevertheless, they are directly related to income by defining the kind of mobile phone one can have, and the type of mobile access.

As for mass mingling trends, Facebook contributes to social gathering, since it is already being used as an agenda to arrange the User's social life. It is used either as an event promotion platform and a complementary communication tool for people to arrange meetings. Most particularly, helps people to stay in touch and this could be the trigger for people to meet in the real world, linking the two levels of their daily lives: online and offline. There are already those who do it, and there are also examples of events created and mediated through Facebook groups that have joined more than 300 people. In several cases of our sample, Facebook is used as a marketing tool to promote cultural, scientific and recreational activities, by creating pages and related events.

In our sub-sample, Facebook Users don't do it regularly, but they state that they know people who create events that end up joining many people. In many cases, users get to know of events through the Facebook and join them because of a friend's recommendation. In other cases, users sometimes cast themselves the idea of such a meeting and they end up promoting it. We also found that this happens mostly among younger users, who use this functionality on a daily basis, from the simplest idea to the complexity of gathering a large group of people. Although this is still an emerging context, the fact that people communicate through messages, chat and, above all, use the comments to posts to generate ideas for future meetings outside Facebook, is a sign that the way we meet socially is in a process of change.

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