Acculturation in the Social Media: a myth or reality? Analysing social media led integration and polarisation.

Special Session for Academy of Marketing Conference 2017

This special session calls for new empirical evidence and theoretical scaffolding to examine and analyse social media’s role in promoting and/or inhibiting human acculturation to “others”. We aim to expand on and advance the concept of acculturation and in so doing invite scholarly works that investigate human interaction with “others” of different lifestyles, professions, political views, religiousities, ethnicities and ideologies. The main motif of the special session relates to the theme of the Academy of Marketing Conference 2017 – transformational power of marketing, as we seek to identify and analyse social media’s roles in forming the future of social, cultural and organisational dynamics.

The Internet now enables people from most part of the world to engage and interact with wider populace that often goes beyond their own communities, without the need for physically travelling abroad and/or meeting in person. Therefore instead of focusing on ethnic minorities’ acculturation experience, strategies and outcomes, as a result of their physical movement (Peñaloza; 1994; Berry, 2008; Cleveland, et al., 2009), a newly emerged stream within the acculturation research tends to discuss how social media such as Facebook and Youtube facilitate people to better connect to the “others”, outside their existing group memberships (Forbuash and Foucault-Welles, 2016; Jafari and Goulding, 2013).

Yet the convenience and connectedness provided by social media do not always promote more assimilation, integration or acculturation to the “others”, but perpetuate further engagement with the same groups that share our own views and beliefs, regardless of geographical distance (Phillips, 2008). Often the diffusion of messages on social media is not content neutral and the collective generation of content on social media reflects and reinforces existing group memberships in reality (Lipizzi et al. 2016; Cappellini and Yen, 2015). This further fuels the debate between technological determinism and social shaping of technology (Mackay and Gillespie, 1995) by indicating to the reciprocal influence between technological innovation and social structures/systems (Phillips, 2016). As such, technology use goes through recursive and iterative interactions between technology and its users within a given social context (Orlikowski, 1992; Jones et al. 2004; Dey et al. 2011).

Furthermore, technology can have paradoxical outcomes (Mick and Fournier, 1998). As evidenced by the recent US presidential election, by creating, reinforcing and perpetuating interactions within the in-groups, rather than connecting the out-groups, social media leads to increasing social polarisation (Phillips, 2008; Hussain et al. 2016), failing to facilitate further acculturation between groups (Cappellini and Yen, 2015).

Acknowledging the social media paradoxes in relation to acculturation and social integration, this special session encourages researchers to further discuss how, why and to what extent social media enable, facilitate and/or inhibit our acculturation to “others”. For instance, to explore how social media led interactions trigger the polarisation, segregation and separation in political, social and cultural spheres which contradicts generally held belief that social
media connect individuals and communities. We believe it is timely to revisit the notion of acculturation in current world wherein extreme and conflicting views proliferating and competing on online and offline media. A debate on how we acculturate to “others” beyond ethnicity or nationality can potentially advance and enrich our understanding of acculturation. Studies are also encouraged to consider the contingent effect of mainstream/majority versus minority in this debate.

Whilst innovation, subsequent use and appropriation of technology evolve through a dialectic process which leads to social and economic changes, following a non-linear, uni-directional circular move (Phillips, 2016), we also call for more attention given to how the paradoxical outcomes created by social media could be solved through new technology innovation that better facilitates and encourages our acculturation to “others”.

This special session aims to stimulate discussion on the following themes as an illustrative but not restrictive list at macro, organisational and individual levels. We are inviting abstracts (not more than 250 words) from interested contributors who may consider empirical and conceptual work on the following:

Macro level:

- How, why and to what extent social media enable, facilitate or prohibit our acculturation to “others” of different communities, nationalities, faith groups, professions or those who hold different societal/political views and beliefs?
- Global consumer culture in social media marketplace
- Cultural hegemony in social media
- New solutions that address such social polarisation created by social media
- Diffusion of ethno-religiosity, religious extremism and justice campaigns on social media and the consequential societal impact and technology innovation
- The recursive interactions between technology innovations and the changing social media landscape, whether by reinforcing existing community territory, promoting new connections between out-groups or facilitating the development of further technology innovation?

Organisational level:

- Social bi-polarisation in social media marketplace: a debate between the in-group and the out-group(s).
- Co-creation of brand and cultural identity through social media
- Professional cultures and collective platforms facilitated by social media, e.g. LinkedIn, ResearchGate and effect.

Individual level:

- Consumers’ identity projects on social media
- Self-presentation on social media and how that is influenced by the dialectical interrelationships between various communities in the online and offline world.

Special Session Conveners
References:


