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Interpersonal Relationships Development and Impression Management Online before IRL Encounters in an EBSN

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INTRODUCTION

This study explores the role of computer-mediated communication in intimate relationship development through Event-Based Social Network (EBSN), which are platforms where people can interact online before meeting "in real life" (IRL) for face-to-face group activities (Ricken et al., 2017).

In communication studies, the modality switching of communication has been identified as an important factor in relationship development (Ramirez & Wang, 2008). However, few researches has explored the relation between modality switching on EBSN, relationship development, online communication activities and impression management.

We conducted a **content analysis** on the French EBSN "OnVaSortir" (OVS) in order to explore how the users manage their impression online through their profiles and interactions in the comments section before and after face-to-face meetings.

METHOD AND PROCEDURE

We randomly chose 41 OVS events who took place during the same week last year in the city of Paris.

Then, we extracted the messages of the comments feed in order to analyze them and **describe the communication dynamics between OVS users before and after the event**. We also analyzed the strategies of impression management through the users profiles and their online interactions.

For this study, 627 messages and 251 profile pages have been extracted and analyzed with two distinct analysis grids that we created.

RESULTS (1)

Analysis of online conducted communication activities

We make a distinction between three kind of users given their role : organizer, participant to the event and other OVS user (who takes part to online exchanges but not to the IRL event)

Before the event

- We observe **expression of self-disclosure** from all kind of users but in a minimal way.
- The comments feed is essentially used for the **coordination** of users (*e. g.*, "Tickets OK." ; "I'm here with [...]. We are next to the cash registers'," etc.).

After the event

- The post-event comments feed is essentially composed by acknowledgements to the attention of the organizer and other participants.
- Participants only evaluate positively the course of the event.
- Participants **express way more self-disclosure** than other users after the face-to-face event.
- Relationships are more intimate after the face-to-face meeting (acknowledgments, positive feedbacks, etc.)

RESULTS (2)

Analysis of users impression management

Through profiles

- There is a **quite normative use in the way personal information** are voluntarily shared through the public profile among all users.
- Organizers **tend to self-disclose through profiles**, unlike participants.
- Organizers profiles are more complete than participants ones because their role is to create an event for potential unknown people who need to be reassured (Berger & Calabrese, 1975).

Through online interactions

- Organizers' interactions on the platform are dedicated for the coordination of users in order to facilitate the meeting of everyone. They mostly answer to other users questions and notify them of any changes probably because of the importance of first impressions online (Bacev-Giles & Haji, 2017).
- Participants generally do not interact online with the organizers before the event but when they do, this is in a minimal way (*e. g.* "I'll come."). They just collect relevant information about the event.

CONCLUSION

On this EBSN, users don't seem to use the platform to develop social links but mainly for the event coordination.

The self-disclosure and the impression management are important factors for relationships development (Altman & Taylor, 1973 ; Hu, Zhao & Huang, 2015). However, our results show that the occupied status (the "role") seems to be a determining factor in the choice of the strategy to adopt in order to develop interpersonal relationships.

Organizers' strategy consists in reducing the uncertainties of potential participants through their profile and interactions (*e. g.*, provide relevant information for a successful coordination).

Participants' strategy consists in collecting information about people and events first and then self-disclose after the first face-to-face meeting in order to maintain the new social bonds.

As we know that OVS is a way to create relationships (Pharabod, 2017), our future researches need to explore if EBSN user's use another online medium to develop interpersonal relationships and determine whether IRL events are the only way for this population to develop relationships.

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