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## **Interculturality and communicative rationality: young migrants and their relationships in the online social networks in Spain**

**Abstract**

**Do social network sites promote intercultural relationships between young migrants? Does this type of interaction have an influence on the creation of their digital identity? In order to answer these questions, we will analyse part of the results obtained in the fieldwork carried out in the project “The Social Relations of the Young Migrants in Internet from the Intercultural Perspective” (CSO2011-24376). The Habermasian concept of communicative rationality has been used as the most convenient logic for the creation of intercultural communicative interactions. This theory has been applied in our analysis of the SNS interactions observed in 13 focus groups consisting of young migrants and non-migrants in Madrid, Barcelona and Bilbao. This analysis is based on the four different social actions described by Habermas (strategic action, normatively regulated action, dramaturgical action and communicative action), and then the dimensions and indicators have been extracted in order to identify the interactions in the online social networks. This paper shows that the youth’s online communicative practices tend to be mainly dramaturgical. Through their online practices, they try to create a digital identity and empower their own representation as well as the others’. Thus, they do not respond to a communicative rationality of interaction that encourages intercultural communication.**

**Keywords**

**Interculturality, online social networks, communicative rationality, dramaturgical interaction, young migrants**

### **1. Introduction**

The theories developed on the concept of interculturality are based on the premise that human beings are capable of creating

forms and contents that are culturally different. Culture is not only a series of rituals and traditions developed by a race or a territory, as the classical anthropology argued, but also a result of any association between individuals. This allows us to speak about cultures associated with differences on gender, class, age, and so forth. Thus, interculturality is a consequence of cultural diversity.

In the formation and crystallization of the patterns of meanings that define a culture (Geertz, 1987), there are determining factors that shape them and distinguish them from other cultures. Therefore, cultures are historically and socially structured (Thompson, 1990). Based on this conception of culture, there are two determining factors: the social structural context that shapes each culture and the dynamic relationships established between different cultures.

Interculturality deals with the relationships between cultures in all the environments where there are relationships between individuals with different cultures. Although interculturality aims to study the understanding and agreement between cultures, conflict is also a main area of study when dealing with disagreements or misunderstandings as well as racism or xenophobia. If we focus our attention on the communication field, there are vast amounts of scientific literature in regard to interpersonal and mass communication. On the one hand, interpersonal communication studies the role of language as the main vehicle of cultural transmission as well as the importance of non-verbal communication for mutual understanding between individuals of different cultures (Hall, 1989). On the other hand, mass communication has mainly focused on the study of how the media has created cultural stereotypes and the informative coverage of the different cultures (Van Dijk, 1997). Generally, the mass media operates as actors within a global culture but they are strongly committed to the dominant culture of the nation-state where they belong to (Rodrigo, 1999).

Thus, in the communication field the research on interculturality deals with the influence mediators have on the communication between people from different cultures (language, television, press, Internet, and so forth). This is a dynamic approach associated with a proposal of reconciliation and learning between cultures. In this proposal, the idea of interculturality goes beyond the contact or the relationship between cultures. Its aim is to study furtherly the quality of those relationships. Therefore, coexistence between different cultures relies on the individual's capacity to understand the concept of interculturality, which implies a necessary interchange of messages and an attitude or an approach towards mutual understanding. This involves that "speakers and listeners relate, from the pre-interpreted horizon that their life world represents, simultaneously to something [...] to negotiate definitions of the situation that can be shared by everyone". (Habermas, 2010: 130). Consequently, in order to study the processes that take place in the intercultural communication, the focus should be on the meaning the actors give to their communicative practices.

The diffusion of the online social networks has multiplied the possibilities of interaction between people from different cultures. The temporal and spatial limitations have been released and now they can aim for more than exceptional experiences and coincidental encounters (Slevin, 2000). According to Damien Smith Pfister and Jordan Soliz (2011), online social networks improve four aspects of the intercultural communicative practices: 1) multiple sides of the cultures are promoted without intermediaries, though potentially surveilled; 2) there are multiple ways of communication in the same channel or "space"; 3) many-to-many communication blends dialogue and dissemination on a broad scale; and 4) homogenous perceptions and stereotypes are overcome due to the diverse representation of individuals within a cultural group.

Although not all the social networks are the same, and there is a trend towards an increased diversification, the most extended ones respond to similar patterns and structures<sup>1</sup>. Danah Boyd and Nicole B. Ellison have defined them as “web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system” (2008: 211). What is new on the online social networks in regard to the offline networks is that in the online social networks the relationships we establish with other people are visible to the whole society. What is new in regard to the other online platforms is that since the beginning the social networks have been conceived as egocentric structures, where the community is displaced by the individual in the structure of the network.

In this section, the most distinctive aspects of the studies on interculturality and online social networks have been outlined. The first aspect to draw the researchers' attention was the fact that these networks are used differently in different cultural contexts (Boyd, 2009; Sawyer, 2011; Almansa et al., 2013). This approach suggests that social networks are a variable depending on cultural context and that cultural values predict the use of certain networks (Boyd, 2009; Barker, 2011). Secondly, other studies have focused on the general use of social networks and Internet with inclusive objectives such as training, public visibility of social movements (Jouët, 2009; Resina, 2010; Treré & Cargnelutti, 2014) or the adaptation of migrants (Mehra et al., 2004; Elias & Lemish, 2009). The latter has several empirical studies on teenagers and young adults, due to the fact that it is the age group where the use of social networks is more extended.

Online social networks make possible the establishment of relationships with people from other cultures. However, is the wide variety of channels to interact correlated with better intercultural relationships? This fact is especially relevant for young migrants who must be in contact with people from other cultures online and offline. This article aims to verify whether the relationships in the online social networks between people from different cultures provide a common and positive framework of intercultural understanding.

## **2. Communicative rationality for the analysis of the interactions in the online social networks**

Following the ideas presented so far, interculturality is strongly committed to the quality of the interactions that must seek the understanding above all. According to the theories on social action the knowledge, attitude, intentions and resources that we unfold in order to relate with other people constitute as well a form of rationality. Communicative rationality<sup>2</sup> would be considered the appropriate framework to promote the intercultural interactions. Communicative rationality is presented as “a disposition of subjects capable of speech and action. It is expressed in behaviour for which good reasons exist. This means that the rational emissions and manifestations are accessible to judgment” (Habermas 2010: 47). Communicative rationality is different from other forms of rationality because it analyses as well the forms of discourse and the actor's argumentative conditions.

Communicative rationality is a category that is always present in all areas of social life and it is not an exclusive and distinctive phenomenon of the information societies (Castells,

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<sup>1</sup> For a comprehensive review on the main academic contributions in regard to online social networks see Pérez-Latre, F.J., Portilla, I. & Sánchez Blanco, C. (2011).

<sup>2</sup> For a general view of the evolution of thinking culminating with the concept of communicative rationality, see Habermas (2010). For a summarized version in Spanish, see Boladeras, M. (1996) and Velasco, J.C. (2013); for a critical discussion about Habermas' opinions, see Bernstein, R.J. (1991).

1997). This protagonism has already been pointed out in several papers that explain Habermas' contributions (Johnson, 1991; Soler & Flecha, 2010), raise new dialogic epistemologies in the social research field (Sordé & Ojala, 2010), or analyse social situations in light of the communicative rationality (White, 2012; Serradell & Munté, 2010). The approach of the communicative rationality is also relevant for the research of communication in the Internet and it is not an old-fashioned theory, as some Internet theorists argue, instead, it is especially productive for the critical analysis of the web (Dahlberg, 2001).

The papers that have noticed the benefits of applying the approaches of the communicative rationality on the study of the Internet have their main focus on how the netizens use the Internet. The results indicate a distribution of the uses according to sociodemographic profiles, such as the fact that autopromotional uses are more consistent among young users than among elder users, whose main use is informative. (Petrič, 2006). It has also been applied to measure how the use of specific channels for interpersonal communication (mobile phone, SMS/MMS, telephone, face-to-face and Internet) is connected to any of the types of social actions described by Habermas (Petrič, 2011). In this case, Internet users consider of little importance the social uses of the web "the increasing number of applications for interpersonal communication, such as social network sites, would need a more detailed breakdown across" (Petrič, 2011: 129). Following this approach, other researchers have analysed Facebook as a digital public sphere that blends the strategic communicative processes to control users and other emancipative processes but scarcely oriented towards the communicative rationality (Valtysson, 2012).

For a more in-depth research on the online social networks from the communicative rationality's perspective, it should be make clear the difference between consumption, use and interaction. Web consumption focuses on the act of being exposed to web content and services. The studies in this field calculate the number of people consuming contents, the time they spend and the distribution of this consumption according to different sociodemographic variables. However, in the online social networks the user is not only constructing meanings from the content they interpret, but they are also having an active participation in its production and diffusion.

Traditionally, the approach regarding communicative practices and the use of the mass media was based on the assumption that people use the mass media to satisfy personal needs related with social and psychological origins (Katz, Blumler & Gurevitch, 1974). According to Zizi Papacharissi, the application of the uses and gratifications theory to the studies of online social networks contribute to have "a systematic understanding of the connections between user profiles, motivations, orientations, practices, and resulting outcomes" (Papacharissi & Mendelson, 2011: 228). Nevertheless, we understand that the classic model of the uses and gratifications theory may not be applicable to the whole social use of the Internet for two reasons: a) communicative actions in the Internet may not always be interpreted as responses to content, thus, there is no stimulus from the media to explain the gratification; b) most of the content used for the communicative actions does not come from the stock of "socially shared" content, like the mass media's, but it comes from interpersonal communication.

If the focus is on the interaction, the networks can be regarded as vehicles to live everyday life and to interact limitlessly with other people. With such an active role, it is necessary to develop a new way of studying users, as it has been pointed out by other authors (Livingstone, 2004; van Dijck, 2009). It requires an in-depth knowledge of the social interaction on the Internet, understanding the meaning and the intention users give to their actions in the online social networks. Observing the communicative practices that take place during the interactions allows us to see people as a being that acts within a society through communication.

Online social networks embrace different ways of social interaction but not all of them contribute to intercultural understanding in the same way. Our analysis of the interactions young migrants develop within the social networks in their daily life will be based on the different types of social action described by Habermas (2010) and developed by Gregor Petrič. This brief outline of the types of actions will be useful to analyse their contributions to cultural understanding.

### **2.1. Strategic interactions**

In this type of interaction one of the actors tries to convince or persuade the other actor for their own purposes. These interactions “serve as a means to one’s ends and not as actors with their own purposes and meanings in communication. It is manifested in satisfying practical goals, scheduling, escape, deception, amusement, surveillance and control” (Petrič, 2011: 121). The thoughts of the other actor are not taken into account and the only goal is that they accept the strategic actor’s purposes. There is an increasing number of practices and technical operations in the Internet aimed to optimise the success of their user’s social actions.<sup>3</sup>

### **2.2. Normatively regulated interactions**

Under this concept, the actor is considered as a subject that acts as a member of a community with a set of established norms (not only legal ones). These norms direct the actor’s actions in their daily life and “it is manifested in the activities of establishing and maintaining social relationships, giving and receiving social support, friendship and so on” (Petrič, 2011: 121). It seems that this kind of action is not intentional and that it only seeks to assert whether the actor’s behaviour is appropriate or not in their community.

### **2.3. Dramaturgical interactions**

This type of action exposes the actor’s subjective world. It is based on the impressions the actor evokes in the others, and through these impressions the others will create a conception of this actor’s real nature. From this perspective, the others constitute “a public for one another, before whom they present themselves”. (Habermas, 2010: 118). Unlike strategic relationships, this “use is manifested in exposing one’s identity, presenting oneself, intimate communication and other forms of expressing one’s inner states” (Petrič, 2011: 121).

### **2.4. Communicative interactions**

The theory of communicative action is Jürgen Habermas’ main contribution to the history of research regarding human action. In this case, the aim or purpose of the action exists but remains in the background and the real protagonist is a dialogue between the actors about how to interpret social situations. Dialogue is the key as well as the fact that the actors participating in the interaction must be willing to accept criticism and objections regarding the truth in their arguments, its correction and its authenticity in order to reach a common understanding through a free dialogue. In this regard, communicative interactions are considered as consensus-oriented communications, unlike the other type of interactions. Relationships are communicative when the actors share their knowledge about reality and acknowledge each other. In the Internet, communicative interactions can be defined as the “use of interpersonal communication media which is composed of communication acts that

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<sup>3</sup> In 2013 the Social Media Observatory’s report (Observatorio de las Redes Sociales) shows that most of Internet users have a strategic access in the web. Online: <http://es.slideshare.net/TCAnalysis/5-oleada-observatorio-redes-sociales>

relate to the objective world of facts and artefacts and is realized as giving and receiving information, working on a common project, transmitting knowledge and learning” (Petrič, 2011: 121).

In light of what has been put forward up to this point, we understand that the most suitable type of interaction to promote interculturality is the communicative interaction. It remains to be seen, however, whether young people use the networks’ potential to reach understanding between different cultural identities.

### 3. Method

Do young people use the social networks to build and strengthen intercultural relationships? Do intercultural communicative interactions have any influence on the way they design their own digital identity? In order to answer these questions, we will analyse part of the results obtained in the fieldwork carried out within the framework of the research project “The Social Relations of the Young Migrants in Internet from the Intercultural Perspective” (CSO2011-24376), started in 2012. In order to tackle the large scale of this general purpose, we have designed a complex qualitative research tool based on the technique of discussion groups consisting of young migrants and non-migrants. A focus group consisting of native youths has been included with the purpose of obtaining coincidental results between groups with very different cultural patterns within a context of intercultural relationships. Thus, scarce differences between them have been ignored and the most remarkable common behavior patterns have been the main focus.

**Table 1.** Distribution of the participants in the discussion groups

<b>Cultural background</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Participants by gender</b>
Spain	Barcelona	3 women and 4 men
Spain	Madrid	3 women and 3 men
Spain	Bilbao	4 women and 3 men
		<b>Total: 20</b>
Africa	Barcelona	4 women and 4 men
Africa	Madrid	3 women and 3 men
Africa	Bilbao	4 women and 4 men
		<b>Total: 22</b>
Latin America	Barcelona	4 women and 4 men
Latin America	Madrid	3 women and 4 men
Latin America	Bilbao	4 women and 4 men
		<b>Total: 23</b>
Eastern Europe	Barcelona	4 women and 3 men
Eastern Europe	Madrid	3 women and 4 men
Eastern Europe	Madrid	3 women and 3 men
Eastern Europe	Bilbao	4 women and 4 men
		<b>Total: 28</b>
		<b>Total: 93</b>

Source: Prepared by the authors.

There were 13 discussion groups with a total of 93 youths—registered in high schools where 45% of the students are migrants—in the cities of Barcelona (4 groups), Bilbao (4 groups) and Madrid (5 groups). The participants of these 13 discussion groups were selected

according to gender (48 males and 45 females) and cultural background (Latin America, Eastern Europe, Africa and Spain)<sup>4</sup>. Each group was homogeneous in regard with their cultural background but with both genders present in all the groups between the ages of 14 and 16 (Table 1).

Despite the difficulties entailed in interviewing teenagers in fieldworks (Callejo, 2012), the transcription of the sessions shows a satisfactory participation rate. All the groups followed the same protocol for a duration of two hours. Firstly, the youths filled in a questionnaire with closed-ended questions regarding their socio-demographic profile, home and social environment, and Internet consumption. Secondly, specific aspects regarding the following general topics were raised to be discussed: a) sociability and face-to-face relationships; b) sociability in the digital environment; c) transnational communication; d) intercultural coexistence in their neighbourhoods; e) identity reconstruction in the virtual environment and privacy. Lastly, males and females were separated and asked to create a reasoned fake profile on Facebook after checking a set of images provided by the researchers.

The information that has been analysed in this article corresponds to the data collected during the second part of the discussion sessions. In order to study the data, we have established an analytical protocol containing five dimensions that would allow us to evaluate the youth's roles as producers and receivers and the content of their interactions in the social networks. This analysis model has been the result of a deductive process that includes the theoretical categories of social action described by Habermas as well as a set of indicators developed on the basis of the social uses of technology in the interpersonal communications studied by Petrič et al. (2011). The following table summarises the analysis model applied:

**Table 2.** Indicators for the analysis of interactions via SNS

	<b>Strategic interactions</b>	<b>Normatively regulated interactions</b>	<b>Dramaturgical interactions</b>	<b>Communicative interactions</b>
<b>Relationship with the receivers.</b> <b>Def:</b> Bonds between the users of the social networks and the people they interact with.	They do not know the receivers	They know the receivers and acknowledge them as members of a social group	They acknowledge the receivers as a homogeneous audience.	They know the receivers and acknowledge them as collaborators

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<sup>4</sup>The cultural regions selected include very different realities in order to make the recruitment of participants easier. The use of the cultural background as a variable distributed in macro-geographical regions, without distinguishing between direct or second-generation migrants, is a regular practice in the sociology of the mass media (Miglietta & Tartaglia, 2009; Soriano, 2010).

<b>Orientation towards the receiver. Def.:</b> Willingness to ask for opinions or interpretations to other users of the social networks regarding their own actions in the network.	No interested in dialogue	Interested in dialogue	Interested in dialogue	Interested in dialogue
<b>Orientation towards the producer Def.:</b> User's ability to be a receiver of other user's actions.	Answers showing submission or disobedience	As an actor that conventionally accepts their role	As an audience that assesses the representations they see	As a critical collaborator
<b>Intentions of the interaction Def.:</b> Their purposes behind the use of social networks.	The modification of the receiver's behaviour	Acting according to the norms	Getting recognition	The consensus on the interpretation of the situations
<b>Contents of the interaction Def.:</b> Type of contents that the user posts via the social networks.	Corporative	The values of a social group	Manifestations of the user's identity	Joint action plans

Source: Prepared by the authors.

In order to test the indicators described on the above table, we have initially applied them to the transcribed conversations of two discussion groups. After testing it and improving it, it has been applied to the other groups. After reading several times the discussion sessions, one or more indicators have been assigned, when necessary, to the different interventions.

Lastly, although in the transcribed sessions the analysis model can be applied to each subject separately in order to obtain personalised results from their practices, the results below reflect the general patterns of the young migrants' communicative practices in relationship to the non-migrants' and group the most significant variations registered.



#### 4. Analysis of the results

The analysis of the discussion groups indicates a complex and multi-dimensional reality where we have tried to find a dominant logic. In their conversations and stories, we observe the bonds they have with the friends they have added to their profiles on the social networks, the attitudes and orientations they adopt as producers, the attitudes and orientations they adopt as receivers, and the characteristics of the content regarding format and communicative intention.

##### 4.1. *Receivers seen as an audience: "Why would you add anyone from another country if you are never gonna see him!"<sup>5</sup>*

One of the most distinctive features on Facebook consists in the possibility of adding or accepting someone. This may seem a simple operation but it has an important social relevance where strategic and dramaturgical interactions are observed. Technologically speaking, it refers to the possibility a Facebook user has to add the information and actions of another user into their own database. Pragmatically speaking, this action involves several things. Firstly, it involves authorising another person to be part of a group—the group of the user's friends on Facebook: "It's someone I met in person and then I added them on Facebook or whatever, then I keep on with our friendship through there. But it is someone I had met in person" (Man-Spain-Barcelona). This authorisation allows users to share their experiences, hobbies, preferences, and so forth with all the members on their list of friends.

Secondly, adding or accepting someone means to publicly proclaim the existence of some kind of bond between the users, a bond that normally extends outside the virtual world. It is uncommon to add or accept someone with whom they do not have any relationship, only direct relationships are accepted: "I know people in the social networks who is not outside... There is a limit... for example San Juan Despí, ok and from some other place. But I am not interested in having people from who knows where sending me invitations. (Moderator: Why not?) Because there is nothing in common". (Man-Africa-Barcelona). However, there could be situations in which one of the interlocutors has impersonated online someone else they know offline, so youths usually take some precautions and run some checks. According to them, adding or accepting a friend is an action that can be risky since it could affect their offline social reality: "Sure, once I uploaded some pictures in which it seemed we were drunk and although it was not true some parent must have seen them and got pissed" (Man-Eastern Europe-Madrid) or "It is dangerous because of the pictures you post and because weird people can add you, older people" (Man-Eastern Europe-Madrid).

The interactions young migrants and non-migrants have in the online social networks are fully dramaturgical if the operations of adding or accepting a friend are interpreted as a way of creating an audience. Every youth implicitly casts the users so they can be part of their audience. In order to create their audience, they apply some selection criteria and one of the first conditions is, as we have seen, geographical proximity. This proximity is associated with a previous or future face-to-face interaction: "Most of them live here" (Woman-Latin America-Bilbao); "I have friends from the video games, you may bump into them, talk to them and then you add them" (Woman-Spain-Bilbao).

This evidence supports the validated results provided in previous studies (Zao et al., 2008; Huertas, 2010; Nuñez-Gómez et al., 2012), a circumstance that leads to the hypothesis that most of the digital environment has its own replica in the offline universe. Most of the

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<sup>5</sup> Hereinafter the following note (Gender-Background-Residence) will be provided along with the manifestations extracted from the discussion sessions. In this case the sentence in the heading 4.1 corresponds to Man-Africa-Bilbao.

actions developed in the framework of the social networks reinforce “previously established relationships” (Huertas, 2012: 304).

There is another powerful requirement to be part of the audience and it is more personal, since it involves sharing emotional bonds that reveal some kind of common interests or expectations. Expressions such as “I like him”<sup>6</sup> or “respect and politeness”<sup>7</sup> indicate the existence of a value assessment of their candidates. All these criteria to assess the other user respond to a pattern of familiarity towards the others. They do not like or consider respectful or polite those candidates who are strangers: “People may add you from I don’t know, Pakistan, and from other far away countries, and they add you but I never accept them because I don’t know them” (Woman-Eastern Europe-Barcelona).

Taking into account that the focus groups were carried out in places with an important coexistence of people from different cultural backgrounds, it was assumed that intercultural communications, at least offline, was a common practice. In fact, there are some comments that highlight how normal it is the coexistence of different cultures in their high schools. Nevertheless, this does not mean that this diversity is reflected in the social networks even if the main criteria to add friends (to know them and to be geographically close) are fulfilled.

The act of adding someone is deliberate, it is not a reaction, and it also entails some kind of strategy if the way youths create their own audience is taking into account. Keeping on with the theater metaphor, among the chosen audience there are some subjects who have seats in the stalls—as they are a priority for the young Internet users—and other subjects who are seating in the upper circle—as they do not deserve so much attention. Most of these youths tend to have a varied audience in their profiles because blockbusters can make them very popular. But they actually interact and talk only to a small group of people. They are friends seating in the stalls who have also an influence on their process of socialization and on the creation of their identity.

#### **4.2. Strategies to segment the audience**

The actions to block and segment their acquaintances by type of networks are strategic actions. The blocking or locking options that Facebook offers gives them the technical possibility to restrict the access to their virtual space to certain users on their database. Pragmatically speaking, to block someone means that they interrupt their social relationship, an interruption that could be final or temporary. There is a wide variety of reasons to block a friend: loss of mutual respect, loss of trust, too few common interests, physical or emotional distancing, and so forth. In many occasions, this action is used as a reprisal or response to unacceptable behaviours or actions: “In Twitter many people tell everything about their lives, about what they do every single minute. [...], it’s annoying [...] You end up not paying attention to them” (Man-Spain-Bilbao).

In regard with the segmentation of their acquaintances, most of the participants in the discussion groups claim that they have several profiles, meaning that they accept the fact they “perform” in front of different audiences, who do not necessarily belong to a certain culture or nationality. In the group of Eastern Europeans in Madrid they pointed out that birthplace was one of the criteria they use to segment their audience: “Well, I have more Spanish friends in Tuenti and in Facebook I have more Rumanian friends, from Rumania” (Woman-Eastern Europe-Madrid); “I also make that distinction” (Woman-Eastern Europe-Madrid); “I have Contacti, an Ukraine’s network. I have Tuenti for the Spaniards and the Ukrainian network for my friends in Ukraine” (Woman-Eastern Europe-Madrid); “Me too, I

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<sup>6</sup> “It doesn’t matter where they come from as long as I like them” (Man-Eastern Europe-Madrid).

<sup>7</sup> “It’s normal to accept people from other nationalities as long as you have something in common with them and respect and politeness between the two of us”. (Man-Africa-Barcelona).

have more Polish friends on Facebook, and Tuenti is for the Spaniards, I also have a Polish network, Ka, in there we have relatives, friends, contacts” (Man–Eastern Europe–Madrid).

Young migrants are willing to have communicative interactions with people they know from their home countries using social networks and as a result they keep their emotional bonds with those cultural realities. To do so, they adapt to the different social networks present in each area. This means that the technological boundaries interfere with some potential intercultural interactions. This unusual communicative attitude opened to understanding contrasts with the strategic use of many of them when distinguishing between friends and relatives as receivers in the social networks. In this kind of segmentation, the young Internet users have a different social role in each network: “All my family was on Facebook, so I stopped using it” (Man–Africa–Madrid); “I use Tuenti and WhatsApp, and Facebook is more for my family” (Man–Africa–Bilbao).

Social networks can be a space where young people share and develop initiatives within their home environment. The reasons why young people segregate friends from family in their use of the social networks are beyond our study but it confirms, in our case, that many young people have established this segregation as something natural to do and that also shows the way they are.

#### **4.3. Orientation towards the producer and the receiver**

According to our observations, in order to add somebody to their contact list, it is required to have some previous knowledge about the subjects. Thus, the action of looking at their profiles can be considered as a social action. In some of the groups there were common expressions such as: “I look at their picture and if they seem nice I accept their request” (Woman–Africa–Barcelona). This means that their relationships with the others are subject to a previous examination. The fact that it is a non face-to-face relationship allows to openly examine people, an action that in face-to-face relationships is carried out secretly, and besides this action is widespread globally. There are different levels of examination: either a very basic examination of other people’s profiles where physical appearances are the main focus, or a more complete examination that includes hobbies, place of residence and so forth. At this point, the boundaries between looking and gossiping become unclear pragmatically speaking, but they are pretty clear for the young users. The first action corresponds to their own actions and the second one corresponds to the same actions but carried out by other people.

Regarding this issue, it is important to highlight the discussion group in Barcelona that consisted entirely of youths from Morocco. Most of them, especially the women, claimed to assume a passive attitude since they never posted pictures of them, but they did check other people’s pictures. The following comment explains in detail this kind of behaviour: “I don’t post my pictures. If someone sends you a request, and you have a good relationship with them, then they ask you, can you show me a picture? And that’s it. If they know me then I tell them, you’ll see me tomorrow, so why do you want to see it? I never post it (a picture) but I do like checking other people’s” (Woman–Africa–Barcelona).

The analysis based on the transcriptions of the discussion groups provides some inappropriate examples in a dialogic interaction. In some cases the receivers show a biased attitude towards the producers. Expressions such as “moors”—in Spain is considered as a derogatory term to refer to North Africans—, “gypsies” and “fiesteros”—a specific community from Latin America—are evidence of xenophobic attitudes among these youths who live in a culturally diverse environment.

Despite this, it must be highlighted that there are differences within the groups regarding the level of tension the young participants discerned in their daily life environments. In the discussion groups carried out in Barcelona, the conflicts detected

involved mainly youths from Africa and Latin America. An example of these prejudices can be observed in the group that consisted entirely of youths from Morocco. The young participants of this discussion group showed an explicit discriminatory attitude towards a specific Latin American group.

Woman 6: “If your parents see you hanging out with a guy, well they think there is something going on. It’s better to hang out with girls, with men... they will think there is something going on. And if it’s a boy friend (laughs)”

Man 3: “If the father’s girl sees you with her, they will think badly. He thinks that...”

Man 1: “But that’s only in this culture, or in this religion. For Spanish parents, for Western parents that’s totally normal”.

Man 2: “For the Ecuadorians, if their father sees them with a beer, they would buy him another one...”

In other discussion groups, prejudices targeted other ethnic groups such as the gypsies with this kind of clichés: “Gypsies are always robbing” (Man-Africa-Madrid).

The Latin Americans in the discussion groups try to get rid of the stigma they have been labelled with carrying out actions that distinguish them from some of their country fellows who reinforce these prejudices: “The Spaniards, especially, say that they don’t like to hang out with latinos, because they drink, but it is not the common thing [...] there are girls in Latin America who dress in a way I don’t like, we want to be different from them” (Woman-Latin America-Madrid).

On the other hand, Eastern Europeans did not show a biased attitude towards any other ethnic or cultural group, and they did not mention any comments regarding the prejudices other people may have towards them. There is only one exception in the group of Barcelona, where a Romanian girl pointed out the mistake some Spaniards make when considering all Romanians as gypsies: “It’s one thing to be gypsy, it’s another thing to be Romanian” (Woman-Eastern Europe-Barcelona). They have also defined the gypsy ethnic group with derogatory terms such as “copper-extractors” (Man-Eastern Europe-Barcelona) and “the ones with the trolley” (Woman-Eastern Europe-Barcelona).

In their stories, the youths mix the face-to-face situations and their interactions on the social networks. When they speak about other people they do not distinguish between online social networks and face-to-face interactions, thus, their interactions are displayed as a continuum of both spaces. The same continuum is observed regarding their role as producers and as audience in the online social networks. Generally, the prejudices some youths show towards certain social groups impregnate their orientations as producers and receivers.

#### **4.4. Content and intentions of their interactions**

Being present in the social networks is very important for young people, to such an extent that many of them lie about their age, since the most relevant social networks in Spain have set 14 years old as the minimum age to have a profile without their parents’ authorisation. The main function of the social networks is to interact with friends, although in many groups it has been pointed out the existence of classroom pages for learning support, to inform about group activities and to share homework. Some youths claim that they do not have a profile, however, their comments are evidence of a vast knowledge about how the social networks work, a knowledge that may have been acquired by being close to a friend who participates in these networks. Thus, none of the youths is completely unaware of how the social networks work.

Mainsach (2007) considers social networks as a space where youths from ethnic minorities can create a new identity. This aspect can be applied to any other group since the digital environment has modified the traditional conditions in which it was managed, (Zhao

et al., 2008) and for the youths it has replaced the private sphere with the public sphere. According to Giones and Serrat (2010), “these young digital users show an exhibitionist and multitasking attitude, and for instance, what it used to be a personal diary or a private conversation, now it is a blog or messages posted on a social network”.

Photographic documents define their digital identity as they would rather use images than words to talk about themselves. The natural attitude they are supposed to display in their photographs must be of fun because this condition generates more views, and therefore, a greater degree of popularity.

The information that the photographs convey will determine whether this person’s request is accepted or not, in case this person does not belong to the user’s circle of friends or acquaintances: “We check out whether they’re pretty or not: The picture” (Man–Spain–Barcelona). But pictures can be fake or hide behind a fake interlocutor, although after analysing most of their comments, most of them show a certain insecurity when explaining some of the techniques they use to recognise them “if a person has three or four old pictures, it stinks. [...] They send you the request just for the sake of it and to have more friends, they say ‘I am a photographer, if you want I can prepare you a photo book’. And another one, ‘I work as PR in a night club’” (Man–Eastern European–Madrid).

Images seem to replace words in the online social networks and despite the mass media threats about its dangers and the warnings in their home environment, the young participants argue that: “In the Internet you are more daring, there is more freedom” (Man–Latin America–Madrid). In this regard, the comments about the images the youths say they upload confirm the conclusions reached by the studies aforementioned. Most of them document their daily reality with images of different moments of their lives: “If I go to the theme park, I take a picture and then I upload it to show I’ve been there” (Woman–Spain–Madrid). However, not all of them play this role in the online social networks. Some of them explain they avoid this kind of exhibitionist attitude reporting everything they do and they would rather play a more elaborated role.

Throughout the content they share and the sense and intention they give to their performances, youths are able to be what they really want to be in the online social networks. According to Goffman: “Performers may be sincere –or be insincere but sincerely convinced of their own sincerity– but this kind of affection for one’s part is not necessary for its convincing performance (...) This suggests that while persons usually are what they appear to be, such appearances could still have been managed” (Goffman, 1993: 32).

## **5. Conclusions**

After studying the communicative practices carried out by the young migrants in the online social networks, understanding them as means of interaction, we can assure that cultural background is not, in principle, a determinant factor of their performances in this environment. The inclusion of a discussion group containing native youths corroborates this trend since it shows very similar patterns within the different groups that have been analysed.

The analysis model has been proven to effectively reveal a complex reality and warn about the risk of trying to label it. Although there seems to be good conditions for the creation of communicative interactions within the young migrants’ practices (multicultural coexistence, freedom to carry out communicative practices in the web, high-school education), communicative interactions are not preferential and there is no exclusive interaction either. This happens as well among the non-migrants who live in neighbourhoods and attend high schools with a high percentage of people coming from different origins. The social interaction that corresponds to their performances in the social

networks is the dramaturgical interaction, combined with different strategic uses and practices.

It is dramaturgical because the type of relationship that they establish with their online friends is similar to the relationship an actor has with his audience. The user considers their friends in the social networks as their audience and in order to select this audience they use different reasonings and arguments than the one they use in their offline relationships. Thus, while offline social relationships are mostly spontaneous, online social relationships are deliberate and/or planned actions.

In this regard, it could be said that youths interact dramaturgically since they see their receivers as a potential audience of their performances. Nevertheless, after a further analysis of the way in which youths build their custom audience, this first impression is combined with a strategic logic of interaction. The action of adding or blocking certain friends, acquaintances or relatives shapes their auditorium which they will later organize according to legitimate affinities.

However, in a further analysis of their interactions with youths from different cultural backgrounds we have detected in-between indicators: both strategic interactions (they are not looking for a dialogue) and dramaturgical (when they surf the Net judging the representations of the others). In their manifestations no communicative practice is clearly prioritised over the other ones, although most of the youths show an inclusive approach, probably encouraged by the school environment. In fact, the analysis in detail of the relationships the youths have with other specific cultural groups shows they have biased attitudes and they highlight their differences instead of showing an understanding attitude.

The dramaturgical nature of the young migrants' interactions in the online social networks is especially evident in the analysis of the content and the intentions behind their communicative practices. Regarding the content, as it is not a face-to-face context, the interactions between the Internet users lack of expressive techniques. Among the youths in this fieldwork, pictures are the most popular format to share content. Therefore, in the online interactions it is more difficult to fake dramaturgical actions than in face-to-face interactions.

Regarding the content and the intentions behind it, their presence in the social networks entails a redefinition between what is the front and the backstage, between what is public and private. In this role as actors, youths perform dramaturgically when they play this scene as themselves. This dramaturgical use entails their doubts and insecurities regarding what they should or should not reveal about themselves on the networks. The actor works hard to play their best role, a stylised image of themselves (Habermas, 2010). In this regard, the actor in the online social networks has a greater control of their virtual image or identity. On the other hand, the audience is less committed because the interaction is less binding.

The efficiency of the dramaturgical model developed by Goffman to interpret the uses of technological devices such as personal webs, blogs, chats, dating websites or social networks has already been object of study by other researchers (Miller, 1995; Serrano-Puche, 2012). The users of the social networks have a profile with textual and visual information and they use this information to create an identity that they present to the world. Intercultural relationships have an influence on the way youths create their own digital identity, but it does not have any influence on their communicative practices. Their updates and comments in their profiles, the recommendation of links, their personal pictures and videos show the user's inner self to their audience and let us know how they would like to be seen by the others. From our point of view, what we consider new is the study of how these practices contribute to an intercultural communication. In light of our analysis model, the practices of the young migrants in the online social networks do not meet the requirements for a communication that seeks intercultural understanding. In their

interactions, the projection of the inner self is stronger than the search of dialogue and interlocution, and in case there is any kind of dialogue, it is focused on the user's outward appearance. In the contents produced by the interactions, the potential of the language as a tool to reach, firstly, an understanding of the social world and, then, to take action is reduced to a minimum. The online social network becomes a social club rather than a means to open to the world where they can participate critically because the user is permanently performing before an overindulgent audience.

The communicative practices carried out by young migrants—as well as non-migrants—cannot be defined as intercultural because they do not respond to a communicative rationality. Following Habermas' theories, we have identified this form of rationality as a distinguishing feature of the type of interactions defined as communicative interactions. Searching for a free dialogue in order to accomplish a collective action and to open to the others, as well as the constant review of our own opinions are distinguishing features of this kind of interactions, and, by extension, of intercultural communication. The practices carried out by the youths in the online social networks have a scarce orientation in this regard and their inclinations point out to another direction.

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