Silliness and hatred: A gold mine for social networks

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The sudden impact of social networks in our daily life recalls Frankenstein's metaphor on the ambivalent use of technology. Is technology evil per se? Does it depend on who is using it and to what end?

In the beginning, emerging technologies that make up today's internet took their first steps under the promise of making easier instant communication and becoming a reservoir of global knowledge: "a big universal and technological brain."

But, has it actually happened? It has if we only take into account communication. Internet has proven useful to find relatives and friends to whom we did not know for a while and to get in touch with them no matter the distance. As for its role as reservoir of global knowledge, I am not so sure. Although internet treasures much of the human knowledge, statistics are not necessary to understand that, even though people are reading today more than ever, they are actually reading trash.

The Italian semiotician and writer Umberto Eco said it best when he pointed out that tools such as *Twitter* and *Facebook* allow "fools" to gain same relevance as "Nobel Prize winners. Social media give the right to speak to legions of idiots who first spoke only at the bar after a glass of wine, without damaging the community."

What happened? As in Mary Shelley's novel, did the founders of Silicon Valley drop the bottle containing "the big universal and technological brain" at the last minute and had no choice but hiring some idiots.

Where did the promise of internet democracy go, under which we would all have, on equal terms, freedom to self-expression?

The so-called social networks, if they ever were, stopped being so when they became — thanks to the profits generated by users' data sales, content promotion, and insertion of internet advertising — the most thriving and lucrative companies in the capitalist world.

The greatest psychological experiment of the world, based essentially on the human beings' natural need of acceptance, lured millions of naïve individuals who bought the story of having their voice finally heard in a small place within this new virtual world. Mesmerized by the charm of new technologies, they call themselves "computer experts," "journalists," "*Youtube*'s showmen" and even stellar films directors of *Tik Tok*'s videos.

These "free" social networks give us the Narcissus' mirror, where we show off ourselves in selfies, and the mirror of the Evil Queen from the Snow White's fairytale, a mirror that speaks itself through *likes* and positive comments boosting our ego: "Yes, my Queen. You are more beautiful, wiser and funnier than anyone else." But it is not always like this, and instead of positivism, it sometimes shows insulting hatred generating unhealthy curiosity in others.

A propos of hatred, a group of celebrities including Leonardo DiCaprio and Kim Kardashian, actress Jennifer Lawrence and actor Sacha Baron Cohen, have just suggested a boycott against the social network *Instagram*, in protest against *Facebook* — its parent company — as it has failed to tackle hateful content and misinformation.

It is not the first time it happens. In late June, a group including nine organizations such as the Jewish Association against Anti-Semitism Anti-Defamation League (ADL) and the organization for the defense of equal rights for African Americans (NAACP) launched the hashtag **#StopHateforProfit**.

The complaint, nonetheless, fell on deaf ears. Early in July, *Facebook*'s CEO Mark Zuckerberg met with representatives of the movements, who demanded ten immediate actions. But he only agreed to one: the naming of a high-ranking leader with expertise in the defense of civil rights.

I just never thought that hatred, bullying, and verbal violence would become a source of profit. The explanation to the emergence of this new gold mine lies in the fact that attacking others generates huge amounts of visits, reads, which are important for announcers to advertise their products. The more they advertise, the better for social networks in terms of profits.

The same applies to silliness or fake news. According to experts, fake news in *Twitter* are read six times more than verified news. As for the idiots Umberto Eco was talking about, the best evidence is the prevalence of *youtubers* whose sole merit consist of having great talent to spread nonsenses. As hatred, silliness is also popular. Therefore, it is profitable for the new owners of the virtual world. And numbers prove it. The more trash content you read, the more trash content you get. A very sad and terrible pandemic to the detriment of wisdom.

Luckily, more and more people — including some Silicon Valley experts who were involved in the creation of this Frankenstein — are questioning the role of these human brainwashing social networks. They have been used as weapons of war to undermine governments — Cuba is a very good example — or laud presidents in other nations — responding or not to imperialist interests. Social networks, with their hateful discourse, have evolved into a boomerang to the US domestic policy itself.

There is a growing number of people accusing *Facebook* and its likes of playing a major role in "inciting violence, disseminating violence and hatred, and contributing to the misinformation on the US electoral process." Is it happening that, as in Mary Shelley's novel, the Frankenstein-like monster, is turning against its own fathers?

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