

Pitfalls and Dangers of Social Media: Psychopathological Analysis

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Abstract

Review Article

Social networks, a recent phenomenon driven by the continuous development of information and communication technologies, have invaded the intersubjective and social space of exchange and communication. The intense activity of information production and circulation unfolds there in real time, instantaneously, linking receivers (Always available and waiting) and givers/senders (Driven by a constant creative dynamic) within a dialectical relationship of transmission and influence, as well as a complicity that often stems from simple faith and highlights the dangerous and progressive loss of all critical thinking.... The clinical psychologist, witnessing the havoc wrought by these networks in shaping individual identities and consciousness, the reliability of information disseminated, often for the purpose of manipulation, and, more generally, the addictions that are thus created and the resulting consequences, is therefore particularly called upon, from a dual perspective: the theoretical and scientific mastery of the phenomenon on the one hand, and the indication of possible therapy for the effects of social networks and in particular the addictions they create, the individual and social consequences of which are numerous.

Key concepts: addiction, identities, personality, clinical, cybersecurity.

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I - INTRODUCTION

Social media, a recent and pervasive phenomenon

With the indefinite advance of progress, with recent and current developments in technologies, particularly with regard to the transmission of information and the communication of thought (digital technologies), we are witnessing the emergence of social networks, the latest of the media, which are, by their very definition, websites or mobile applications that allow the development of social interactions and thus, the creation of a network of acquaintances, friends, people sharing the same beliefs or professional relationships, with which one interacts in real time.

Let us first note, at this initial level, the creation of a link via a range of digital means between individuals or legal entities, as well as the essentially interactive nature of the communication established there; let us then note the instantaneous nature of the reaction of those to whom the information is transmitted. This already raises the issue of the delay between the receipt of information and the recipient's reaction to it, which leads us to question whether the instantaneous nature (or at least the expectation of such a reaction) can coexist with a critical distance that would demonstrate the capacity of the individual or organization receiving the information not to always react in line with the expectations of the

sender or the one relaying the information. What must also be noted is the massive, intensive, and invasive nature of the social media phenomenon, which can have a viral influence, for example, with regard to various forms of economic and political propaganda emanating from parties or corporations. Finally, it should be noted that the areas of influence of these social networks are now no longer at the local level (a society, a region, a state area) restricted in space, but at the level of the entire planet which has truly become a "connected global village".

The massive, intrusive, and invasive nature of these social networks places the two poles of communication in an asymmetry from which arise the main problems and recurring dangers (disinformation, invasion of privacy, the establishment of violence in relationships between individuals and partners, etc.) that clinical psychologists are called upon to address. This is indeed the source of all addictions, as well as the pathological phenomena that emerge, foremost among them violence, the breakdown of social bonds, and societal harmony. How can we ensure that the credulity and blind trust fostered by social networks cease to dominate and give way to the capacity for reasoning stemming from rational critique? How can we ensure that the subject ceases to integrate or internalize the message

transmitted by social networks in a primarily affirmative and redundant manner, and is not modified, shaped and formatted in its very interiority, in order to escape the unique shaping of identities within the whole planet?

What should be done, in what direction and from what perspective should action be taken, and who should therefore do what, given the diversity that characterizes our society in terms of skills and responsibilities? Isn't it, then, the whole of society that is actually being called upon, and not just the clinical psychologist or some other specialist (psychoanalyst) in the treatment of various addictions? Before outlining, as we will in Part III, ^{some} therapies for the dangers that social networks pose to individuals and societies themselves, analyzed in Part II we will begin with a phenomenological description of the functioning of these networks, which constitute a sign of the times and clear evidence of the evolution of the current world.

II - Social networks in action

The characteristics of how social networks function are: - **a**) - the massive and instantaneous flow of information, - **b**) - the fragmentation of the world of initiators and recipients, - **c**) - the assertive and redundant nature of the information conveyed, - **d**) - the lack of formal identification of initiators and sources from the outset, - **e**) - the operational and strategic purpose of the transmission, within the framework of a selective and fundamentally biased amplification of the interests of those who benefit from the transmission...

II - 1 - A constantly massive, instantaneous accumulation and the simultaneous flow of information.

One notices at first glance the indefinite plurality of social networks that are constantly being created by their initiators, in every corner of the planet. It may be a group of friends, linked by the same passion, for example a particular sport, a particular board game...; it may be members of the same profession, engaged in the same research, facing the same difficulties and sharing the same intellectual or practical experiences in the exercise of their profession; it may be members of the same community of religious faith or political ideology, the network thus allowing the sharing of convictions, arguments in defense and dissemination of the ideological or faith message, to reinforce it, in a context of pluralisms and antagonisms; It can also involve members of technical and professional clubs placed at a decision-making level, encouraging a certain harmony of practices and objectives, particularly in matters of trade or distribution/sales in an economic context of extreme competition and conflict...

The endless plurality of social networks, some of which are traditional, institutional, and essentially open to the entire planet (WhatsApp, Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, etc.), can and must naturally be linked to the dynamism of information production. Content is made

available in real time worldwide; thanks to extensive coverage provided by media outlets whose techniques and tools are constantly being refined. Distance and time are thus challenged, and closer connections are fostered to ensure the sharing of information, objectives, and any difficulties encountered, as well as the potential for solutions to be found through the exchange of experiences.

Along these lines, in **The Transhumanist Revolution **, for example (2016, PLON, p. 253), Luc Ferry speaks of the "gigantic volume of raw or already structured data, public or private, that circulates constantly on all networks worldwide due to our email exchanges, SMS messages, our web browsing, particularly via Google, or our multiple interactions (music, photos, written messages, etc.) on social networks (Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, etc.), but also of connected objects which, increasingly numerous, also constantly send gigantic amounts of information onto the Net. The volume of this digital data has increased exponentially over the last few years."

II - 2 - A fragmented world: destinations and recipients.

This dynamic of mass production and instantaneous circulation of information and messages thus consecrates what can be called a fragmentation of the world, that is to say, the opening to all horizons: the spatial horizon first, through the practical annihilation of distances, the annihilation of the ideological horizon second, insofar as everything is (or seems) permitted, due to the weakness or non-existence of normative control bodies for the content of messages and transmissions, bodies which must strive to establish a *modus operandi* relating to ethics and values...

However, the fundamental problem of which ethics to refer to (and there are so many!), which values to prioritize in a society in the whirlwind of values (multiculturalism), arises, given that we find here a dynamic of the production and modification of information content according to interests that are difficult to control and the purposes sought by the authors of this content... What meaning and what value should we therefore give to this data, to this diverse information whose purposes are also diverse, some of which can be quite abominable when they serve causes such as cyberterrorism?

II - 3 - Information with an affirmative and redundant nature.

This is where the fundamentally affirmative structure and redundant nature of the conveyed discourses come into play, both methodologically and strategically. While the redundancy or repetition aims to influence and even confine minds, the affirmative nature of the content itself aims to numb any critical distance or questioning in the name of the truth and rationality that are supposed to characterize the message. The

information incorporated into ever-denser flows is presented as the expression of an irrefutable truth, which must be accepted without criticism or questioning. The inevitable, even deliberate, consequence is the impairment of the recipients' capacity to judge, discriminate, and personally assign value to the data to which they are, so to speak, overexposed. Luc Ferry, in *The Transhumanist Revolution*, (*op cit* , pp 255 et seq) characterizes, for example, by four Vs (Volume, Velocity, Variety, Value) what is now referred to as *big data* , the informational data of the Net, which appeals to everyone, accumulates, data which must be analyzed in real time in their diversity, an analysis which can reveal a qualitatively diverse value of this data.

II - 4 - Initiators, sources and purposes of information not formally and a priori identified

Generally speaking, unless they originate from institutional networks (and therefore have the reach of those networks) or personal accounts, the information disseminated rarely reveals the identity of its originators. This raises questions about the competence and good faith of these originators and leads us to question the relevance and veracity of the data disseminated. This is where we can situate the problem of *fake news*, which consists of stories that are created and circulate at high speed. This *fake news* poses a real challenge for societies in crisis, such as our Cameroonian society, due to its influence and its dangerous, harmful, and toxic nature. Fake news can indeed include erroneous links, misleading content ("*the deceptive use of information to undermine a cause or harm an individual*," as Patrick Eveno points out in his article " *Fake News: What Influence? What Dangers?*", in *Diplomacy. Strategic Affairs and International Relations*. The Major Issues, no 41, October-November 2017, pp. 40 ff.), false contexts (authentic information used in an erroneous context), fallacious content (the source of the information presents itself as authentic), manipulated content (authentic content altered to deceive), and fabricated content (supposedly new information that is entirely false, with the clear intention to harm). This *fake news* does not constitute clear, relevant, and detailed information; it is therefore part of the complex practice of misinformation or disinformation. Regarding the identity and more or less toxic motivations (passion, provocation, partisanship, political influence, propaganda, etc.) of content creators, Patrick Eveno focuses on the methods of dissemination of these fake news (involuntary and unverified sharing on social networks by individuals, deliberate sharing on social networks to influence public opinion, disinformation campaigns using bot networks, etc.).

II - 5 - The operational and strategic purpose of the transmission: to manufacture "everything identical everywhere"...

The purpose of social networks cannot be simply the dissemination, circulation, or exchange of information. To believe otherwise would be to

demonstrate a profound shortsightedness regarding their increasingly dominant purpose: the manipulation or shaping of minds in order to fabricate a new human identity. This new identity would then be characterized by:

- a) The subject's exit from himself through a decentering in relation to himself, and his eccentricity or his anchoring to what is intended to be done with him, without him and even against him;
- b) The programmed modification of the interiority of this subject who internalizes through reinforcement a certain number of ambient values which have become dominant, supposed to best reflect "the spirit of the times";
- c) The creation of this new human identity, that of the at least partial dissolution of individual specificity in favor of a common identity, having the same configuration, the same aspirations, the same values,
- d) The potential infringements on privacy and individual freedom by social networks that selectively focus on implementing projects, programs, and the economic, ideological, political, and strategic interests of various lobbies. This constitutes a well-established process of selective and opaque amplification of the interests of those who benefit from and set in motion the transmission of information...

Thus, the functioning of social networks, briefly described above, suggests that many Downsides and dangers can arise from their impact on the personalities of individuals as well as on the overall functioning of society. We have just gained some insights or general indications from the descriptions provided, namely: - **a)** - the construction of a new identity for the individual, - **b)** - the dual movement of decentering and eccentricity that characterizes extroversion, which is an orientation of the personality towards the outside world, towards others, through identification and submission, - **c)** - the creation of a unique, specific, and common personality, fluctuating and capable of "constantly molding itself to adapt"... - **d)** - the progressive modification of the individual's inner self due to the internalization and reinforcement of the dominant ideas and values of the environment... Does the individual thus subjected to the pressure of the not always reliable content of social networks still belong to themselves as a conscious subject and master of their own destiny? The question remains, indeed, unanswered...

III - Downsides and dangers of social networks

Social networks, which are essentially communication networks and spaces for socialization, simultaneously unfold on cognitive, identity-related, relational, and socio-political levels, exposing users to multiple, even major, risks, both for the individual and for society as a whole. These risks are psychological and clinical, social and relational, cultural and

anthropological, political, ideological, and ethical. Therefore, as a preliminary to a more substantial discussion, we present here a brief analytical overview

of these risks, Downsides, their effects, and the multiple issues arising from their widespread use.

Analytical table of the risks and main effects of digital technology

Items	Phenomenology and risks	Effects and consequences
Attention and dependence on the subject	Total capture of the subject's attention and behavioral dependence through psychological mechanisms such as intermittent notifications, dynamic digital dependence on shares and views, and external self-evaluation of the subject...	Digital addiction, compulsive reinforcement or constant scrolling, loss of time control, emotional dysregulation, decreased academic performance among young people and decreased professional performance for workers...
Identity and narcissism of the subject	Staging of lives and aims, and idealizations detached from reality. Identity distortion, narcissistic fragility, damaged self-esteem and self-devaluation.	Mental health disorders, depression, anxiety, mood disorders, digital dysmorphia (body image distortion)
Cyberviolence and traumatic exposure to networks	Disinformation and manipulation (algorithms favoring content that evokes emotion, polarization, and triggers engagement)	Proliferation of fake news (disinformation), mind control and radicalization, political and commercial manipulation
Disinformation, manipulation, vulnerability, and cognitive closure	Information filtering by opaque algorithms, making it impossible to control and track the data and the principles behind its valuation. Cyberbullying, digital violence in various forms, hostile, threats, public humiliation, denigration, defamation (anonymity and virality ...)	Reinforcement of prejudices, diminished capacity for dissent. Hence: - psychological distress, - suicidal attempts, social isolation, - impact on the functioning of democracy - unequal access to digital technology - identity theft
Tracking, surveillance and privacy violations	Surveillance and unintentional or malicious exposure of personal data, destruction of confidentiality, resulting in identity disturbances and vulnerability	Tracking of personal digital data by operators, states, browsers and websites for commercial exploitation, geolocation...
Relationship Downsides: illusion of closeness and real isolation	The paradox of loneliness and isolation of the hyperconnected individual, emotional dependence on information requiring the individual's approval	Distortion of interpersonal relationships, hypersexualization of interactions, compulsive concern with appearances, extroversion, loss of autonomy
Mining exploitation and environmental hazards	Loss or distortion of the relationship to reality and weakening of the subject's identity construction (new identity construction influenced by the algorithmic gaze)	Development of multiple identities by young people, low frustration tolerance, constant search for digital validation (extraversion)...

III - 1 - 1 - social media at the heart of addictions

The concept of addiction is generally used in the context of dependence on psychoactive substances (drug addiction). For example, Norbert Sillamy (1999, *Dictionnaire de psychologie*, Larousse-HER, p. 7) states: "Today, we speak of addiction when we want to characterize a person's dependence or strong inclination towards a substance (drugs or alcohol, for example) or towards an activity such as gambling, work, or...using the internet." Addiction thus characterizes the subject's exclusive attachment to something practical or ideal, stemming from a shift in the individual's preferred hierarchy of values and activities; it creates a situation of subjugation or vassalage for the subject, and therefore extends beyond the sole realm of drug addiction. As the table above indicates, social networks do indeed create addictions, fostering an alienating subjective dependence in individuals whose lives become preferentially centered on social media content to the detriment of other emotional or social investments. Social networks thus

become truly "toxic," like drugs and other toxic substances, even if digital addiction appears different from that linked to traditional drug addiction, which is practically irreducible.

Digital addiction (a phenomenon of dependency that creates stress, anguish, and anxiety) stems from social and cultural determinism, that is, the formation of a social bond, a new group, or a new society to which the individual affiliates and identifies through interactivity and feedback that create synergy and symbiosis through the shared, both experienced and imposed, values of the network. The network functions paradoxically, both open and closed, constantly enclosing more and more members based on certain criteria that interfere with daily life, work, interpersonal relationships, and overall health. Hence, the following are representative criteria of this addiction:

- a) - a difficulty or impossibility for the subject to resist the allure of digital technology, that is, to expose it, to judge it, to subject it to criticism,
- b) - the experience of pleasure, relief, and satisfaction of varying intensity upon contact with the content of these networks,
- c) - the growing impossibility of renouncing or abandoning the use of digital technology, which the individual has now integrated as a reassuring dimension in the face of the urgent need for avoidance or effort imposed by the conditions of existence,
- d) - the perpetuation of this addiction even when the individual is aware of its destabilizing, disruptive, and therefore toxic nature.
- e) - the possible ambivalent nature of digital addiction, which can operate in the mode of desubjectivation and integration of given meaning, and in that of rupture, as transgression and confrontation with other traditional sources of meaning...

The causes of the phenomenon of addiction are therefore to be referred to the personality of the subject (biological and psychological aspect) and also to the general social context.

III - 1 - 2 - Etiology of digital addiction (cyberaddiction).

Among the causes or sources of addiction, and beyond the explanations offered by psychoanalytic, psychobiological and hedonic approaches, it is to the biopsychosocial approach that we must refer, in order to understand the subject of digital addiction in his experience, in his problems and his personal history, to understand that addictive dependence, an individual evil but also a social evil, can constitute itself as a process of substitute or compensatory satisfaction, as a diversion from the possible loss by the subject of self-control, from the decrease in the feeling of self-esteem, an essential condition for the individual fulfillment of the subject and for the assignment of meaning to his existence.

The way social networks function is the etiological source of digital addiction; their disruptive characteristics include their closed nature, the assertive nature of content designed to persuade, redundancy and repetition, the potential for mind confinement, the numbing of consciences, the absence of critical distance and questioning, and the sheer volume of information to be absorbed. It is therefore crucial to question the competence and good faith of those who initiate these processes, as well as the relevance and veracity of the data disseminated, lest we create an attitude of credulity and passive acceptance of these fabrications and *fake news* (whose methods of dissemination Patrick Eveno outlined in the preceding paragraphs). This would lead to blind submission to the content conveyed by social networks and their underlying objectives.

III - 1 - 3 - Digital addiction. Loss of critical thinking and the capacity for rational discrimination...

The persuasive power of social networks fosters in individuals a capacity to believe (a belief that is not necessarily rational and experimental but rather personal and sentimental) or to place faith in information from these networks, thereby diminishing or even extinguishing the capacity for rational and discriminatory reasoning, and thus the ability to question these messages, which have therefore crossed the threshold of mere plausibility to be considered irrefutable truth... This is what constitutes the power of social networks and the media, namely their capacity to generate, in individuals as well as in crowds and societies, faith in the information transmitted, without any doubt about the veracity of their statements, the unhesitating mobilization of feelings and behaviors in the desired and programmed direction in order to satisfy interests that have not been questioned beforehand or afterward, which fundamentally disrupts political and social communication. The information war of influence waged at the global level thus consists, for States, lobbies and *think tanks*, in getting interlocutors and partners to adopt the vision of things, in particular the values they propose, by changing their own paradigm of thought, judgment, positioning, and thus to make loyal friends on whom to rely or to manufacture enemies to destroy according to their interests and strategies...

III - 1 - 4 - Violence that continues to develop

It is a dynamic of continuous creation, fueled by the constant refinement of transmission tools in terms of technical performance and the increasing number of users who manipulate information, that produces the data disseminated by social networks. This dynamic of creation has become a criterion for presence and successful integration into the new civilization of big business. Data, characterized, according to Luc Ferry, by the four Vs (Volume, Velocity, Variety, Value). The informational data on the Internet indeed develops a real violence: it is massive, cumulative, challenging individuals and inviting them to react in real time despite its diversity and complexity... Many specialists have questioned, for example, the possible destructive effects of the Internet on our memory; the following lines from *Science et Vie* (January-February-March 2017, "The Genius and its Mysteries," p. 58) are illuminating in this regard: "*Since the Web entered our lives, Cassandras have been warning internet users against this uninterrupted flow of information available everywhere and at any time: the hours we spend surfing are supposedly making us stupid! By replacing our own memory, the all-knowing Google is turning us into superficial beings, barely capable of clicking from link to link. Catastrophism or real threat?*" What scientists are certain of is that surfing the web for even just an hour a day alters our neural connections. This is perfectly normal: learning to read or any other new activity produces the same effects.

Violence here takes on a variety of forms:

a) - firstly, the *modus operandi* of the relationship to the Internet and social networks, which can be characterized as violent since its attractiveness stimulates a dynamic of research against a background of permanent dissatisfaction of the internet user, invited or else registered (more or less against his will) in a kind of clicker to open without limit new pages;

b) - then, on the one hand, there is the saturation of information received without its assimilation being ensured, and on the other hand, the constant strain placed on the brain to "move forward" in the discovery of information. The individual focuses, in terms of time and energy (intellectual and spiritual), on constantly new objects, more or less useful or necessary, and this addictive focus often turns pathological when it involves recreational objects (as in the case of television), without any stated objective of transforming reality.

c) – Furthermore, the denial to the individual of the very possibility "of putting new facts into perspective, of organizing our ideas in a relevant way, of taking a step back to think differently...in short, of thinking intelligently" (*Science et Vie*, January-February-March 2017, **Genius and its Mysteries**, p. 58). The disinformation they spread constitutes a serious attack on the individual's personality, with the alteration of their private, personal life...

d) - informational content is itself a form of violence, with *fake news* whose conscious or unconscious toxic objective of disinformation is evident in its various forms: erroneous links, misleading content, false contexts, fallacious content, manipulated content, fabricated content....

e) - the virtualization of life, which clearly demonstrates a headlong rush and the dual possibility offered by social networks: to escape immediate real life with its contradictions, and to immerse the individual in a more or less imaginary life that constantly presents itself as a promise of success and happiness. Here, there is an illusion, even a self- deception, which refers to a distortion of reality due to the diminished waking consciousness that makes absence (the absent/desired object) present and invests it with reality.

III - 1 - 4 - A new perception of time: what relationship to the past (capitalization) and in the future (projection)?

With social media, a new vision of time is emerging, essentially a present perpetually open to a future constantly recreated once the past is more or less erased. For the individual, this represents a new hierarchy of time: the primacy of subjective time, the time to be prioritized, the time of immersion with little possibility of respite, the time of personal interests imbued with value that captivates and imprisons you, a time experienced by the individual as desperately short... We can then fear a certain failure to capitalize on the positive aspects that the increasingly obscured past can contain, and a continuous projection toward a more or less illusory or utopian future imbued with all qualities and supposed to transcend the present. Now, the

individual is shaped or molded by their affiliation with a network that dictates the value of everything and everyone; they experience in this affiliation a decentering of themselves, since they value themselves based on the image reflected back to them by their network, or rather their various networks...

III - 1 - 5 - The new self-perception: a fragile and unstable personality...

For Alain de Mijolla, self-representation refers "to the image evoked by the subject based on their interpretation of it. It simultaneously constitutes one of the factors of the Self and its representation as a 'differentiated, real, and permanent individual entity' specified by a history and a mode of being, experiencing, thinking, and acting that are unique to them" (*op. cit.*, pp. 1533-1534). Given the aforementioned decentering, a new vision, perception, or representation of self emerges from a subject shaken by the desires and conflicts linked to their integration into reality. This is a subject in crisis, weakened in their foundations of identity, with a blurred ideal of the self due to the fluctuating nature of identifications, at least in part linked to the contributions of networks in terms of projects, values, priorities, and rejections. This is especially true for adolescents, as adolescence is a sensitive period in the process of personality and identity formation and stabilization...

Does personality remain stable and identical, characteristics that make a person both similar to and different from others? Doesn't the instability of personality then stem from the fact that the subject internalizes the inherently unstable image reflected back to them by their networks, with adherence (or rejection) to the content of information on these networks also being unstable and characterized either by a rigid adherence to behavior that practically transforms this informational content into truths of faith on par with religious dogmas, which are absolute truths demanding total adherence, or by fluctuations in behavior, signs of anxieties on the part of the subjects, anxieties that can lead to new, equally random adherences... The effects of social networks mentioned above on individuals (addictions, new self-perception, new perception of time with a focus on a confining present, increased violence...), are also found at the level of society as a whole.

III - 2 - Global society and its functioning

III - 2 - 1 - Subjects and societies in extroversion

In the new context created by the functioning of social networks, individual autonomy is undermined: individuals are in a state of permanent extroversion, anchored to groups of belonging (networks) which thus structure their psyche and erode their singularity, an erosion stemming from the multiplicity, emphasis, and recurrence of information emanating from the networks. These networks encourage individuals to take a new look at themselves and others; they endorse the intrusion of

the other, of ideals, ways of thinking, and desires; they encourage identification with the new models presented, which are linked to the upheaval of identity markers. These models are supposed to be better, more dynamic and rewarding, which implies the rejection of traditional cultural references and models, culture being, as Winnicott reminds us in the following lines (cited by René Kaës : 2012, *Cultural Difference and the Sufferings of Identity* , Dunod, p. 159) , " *an intermediate space which articulates the personal psychic code (for example, the structure of identifications, fantasies, object relations, defense systems) and the social code (belief systems, values).*"

This identification, however, appears essentially ambivalent: it is not always total or automatic for all its elements, which are susceptible to being objects of attraction or repulsion, with violence erupting in the case of repulsion or rejection. The ambivalence of identification simultaneously creates this attraction, which leads to the modification of traditional societal models, and, through repulsion, to identity-based retreats and confinements, which are themselves sources of competition between groups and between societies, and above all, generators of violence, as is certainly the case in our changing Cameroonian society.

A - Subjects uprooted from themselves, through attraction and mimicry: the modification of traditional societal models.

The modification of traditional societal models is the result of the ambivalent movement of attraction and repulsion exerted by the new models offered by social networks. Generally speaking, it involves a cultural shift, with the introjection of new practices and values compared to those of the traditional culture, without, however, a radical upheaval of the individual that would disconnect them from their inner self (self-disengagement). These new practices and values thus lead the individual to an adaptation that distorts the self, given the urgency of reality. Alberto Eiguier, in " The False Self of the Migrant" (*in René Kaës : Cultural Difference and the Sufferings of Identity, op . cit .*), presents this adaptation, which distorts the self, for the migrant individual. In our rapidly changing society (population explosion, openness to other cultures, ways of thinking, and values, thanks to the dynamics of information and communication), networks are created, maintained, and fiercely compete (*YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok*) to attract the most users and the best and broadest real-time interactivity. This is particularly evident for commercial enterprises where the primary objective is seamless communication to ensure customer loyalty, which is at risk of fluctuating at any moment due to aggressive competition between companies.

The new societal models and the new values they propose thus reveal themselves to be syncretic: they constitute amalgams with no other principles of sorting

or adoption than the power and redundancy of the communication of the messages that the subjects receive, messages with which they identify, appropriating their contents to which they give absolute value.

B - Ebb and flow of identity and confinement

Regarding the construction of personal identity, we observe – **a** – for the individual, the creation of a new group identity, and → **b** – the confinement of individuals within this newly created identity, with all the violence, antagonism, and disruption to the harmony of living together that this entails. The new group identity, which could be mistakenly equated with free self-construction, emerges from the individual's inclusion in group solidarity, intended to annihilate all social class differences through ever-greater openness to diverse horizons, based on an imagined identity and equality, real-time sharing of information, and possible courses of action. This solidarity, by creating an illusory or merely superficial symbiosis and synergy within the group, thwarts the aforementioned solitude, a source of anxiety, while revealing the confining and integrative nature of the new identity, which invites individuals to project themselves identically, to anchor themselves to the same values, and to progress towards the same objectives in a conformity of the individual, potentially negating the very originality of the self-project...

The creation of a new identity, and the confinement of the individuals it creates, constitutes a real time bomb for the balance and harmony of living together. While multiculturalism brings together a plurality of groups, ethnicities, and religious or ideological affiliations, social media then reveals the expression of radicalized differences, the rise of rivalries between groups, and open, even organized, conflicts between these groups, ethnicities, and affiliations, in defiance of the principles and rules that prescribe tolerance.

III - 2 - 2 - Social networks, instigators of violence, And of ideological, political and social struggles ...

In our current context, marked by strong identity polarization, the proliferation of rumors, and a public sphere that various groups seek to monopolize, social media platforms (Facebook, WhatsApp, TikTok, X) are experiencing a surge in power, with massive connections, particularly among young people, within a framework of institutional crises and challenges, as well as a general challenge to state media. They thus constitute a powerful vector of ideological and political violence; with all the implications this has for the harmonious functioning of society and politics.

The functioning of these social networks, emotional outlets for a fundamentally frustrated population, characterized by an exacerbation of emotion as a stimulus for discussion, a rapid circulation of information without standards or filters, and an incitement to clash and antagonism, is essentially

reactive and polarizing. There is, therefore, a veritable banalization of evil, due to the lack of clear criteria for distinguishing between good and evil. As a consequence, individuals are unable to grasp the complexity of social and political situations because of the information overload coupled with the progressive blurring of the

lines between the public and private spheres. The various forms of political and ideological violence thus reinforce this banalization of evil. We present below a brief synoptic table, including a summary of the forms of violence and aggravating factors.

Figures of political and ideological violence and aggravating factors

Figures	Variations
Violence Discursive	Ideological and political radicalization, whether in attack or defense, insults and political denigration, political humiliation, threats against public figures and other internet users
Symbolic and identity-based violence	Strong identity-based implications of conflicts and antagonisms, and social networks reinforcing ethnic affiliations, stigmatization and antagonistic functioning of groups, development of a victim mentality or superiority complex between ethnic groups.
Cognitive violence	A massive influx of information, rumors, and video and other images whose relevance (truth) or erroneous nature the subject cannot establish, manipulation of collective emotions, loss of bearings, and adherence to simplistic and radical views.
Organized collective violence	Organizing disinformation campaigns, orchestrated harassment against various public figures and especially against media personnel, systematic manipulation of public opinion, and cybermobilization of communities
Factors aggravating factors	Lack of tools for critically examining and verifying information sources to identify misinformation and fake news, and to understand the various mechanisms of manipulation; ethnic and political polarization, with community identities organizing themselves according to a logic of war, partisan rivalries, and suspicions towards traditional public media.

IV - Operative Part

Our operational part will consist of two main elements: the presentation of some clinical cases on the one hand, and the analysis of the data collected which is interesting from a clinical point of view, which may indicate some avenues of research into the elements of therapy for digital addictions.

IV - 1 - Clinical vignettes and analyses

IV - 1 - 1 - Case of André

A - Presentation

This vignette presents a case of digital addiction and psychological disorganization. André, 23, is an economics student at the Faculty of Economics and Management at the University of Yaoundé II. He is seeking help for various problems: extreme irritability and sleep disturbances, which appear to be the direct causes of his steadily declining academic performance. He spends several hours a day (almost 10 hours) on various social media platforms: Facebook, WhatsApp, TikTok, etc. Although aware of the dangerous consequences of this addictive use of social media, André claims that it is impossible for him to stop connecting to these platforms because disconnecting causes him anxiety and a feeling of emptiness.

B - Clinical analysis

André's case clearly illustrates that he is a victim of behavioral cyberaddiction. André has indeed lost all ability to manage and control himself; he can remain connected to the networks for hours and hours, which implies excessive concentration on these networks and a decreased interest in everything else—a decrease in interest that we could call psychological withdrawal.

This is how the connection to these social networks constitutes a narcissistic compensation mechanism for André, whose identity has become fragile and who now lives in a deep existential anguish.

IV - 1 - 2 -. Case of Marlyse

A - Presentation

This vignette presents a case of fragile identity formation coupled with a quest for recognition. Marlyse is a 25-year-old woman currently unemployed. She is referred for consultation due to distress and acute feelings of self-devaluation. This distress and self-devaluation arose following demeaning comments on her personal photos posted on Instagram. She is convinced that recognition and likes on social media are essential for genuine existence, as the number of positive reactions (likes) constitutes, for her, proof of her personal worth.

B - Clinical analysis

Marlyse 's case clearly demonstrates that social media, rather than simply serving as a conduit for information and communication, transforms into a tyrannical mirror of identity where the individual sees a reflection of themselves; a negative and ungrateful reflection in Marlyse 's case, leading her to experience an external dependence for her self-worth and exhibiting significant vulnerability, with a propensity for depression and self-harm. This is a classic example of the confusion between being and appearing.

IV - 1 - 3 -. Andy's Case

A - Presentation

This vignette presents a case of Cyberbullying or online harassment resulting in psychological trauma for the individual. Andy, a 15-year-old middle school student, was referred for consultation due to various issues: anxiety, sleep disturbances, and recurring nightmares. Andy complained of being the victim of mockery and relentless attacks, day and night, from his classmates, as well as the distribution of humiliating images in the WhatsApp group to which he belonged.

B - Clinical analysis

Andy's case, a victim of cyberbullying, clearly illustrates how social media operates: its continuous and essentially intrusive nature, the creation of persistent psychological insecurity with no possibility of refuge, and the concomitant creation of traumatic stress. In Andy's case, there is a profound disruption of his sense of internal security, a prerequisite for any psychological equilibrium.

IV - 1 - 4 - Case of Victor

A - Presentation

The following clinical vignette presents a case of psychological radicalization resulting from manipulation strategies using social media. Victor is a 26-year-old man from a modest background, currently unemployed. Faced with harsh living conditions and a lack of genuine opportunities, Victor develops an increasingly radical discourse expressing intense hostility towards certain individuals and social classes. His personality is becoming increasingly altered and polarized following intensive exposure to the ideologically divisive and hateful rhetoric disseminated on social media, especially Facebook and YouTube, as well as the algorithms that employ insinuations and recommendations.

B - Clinical analysis

Once again, the way social media operates clearly demonstrates its capacity to trap the individual in a cognitive bubble, a closed mental space allergic to any otherness, resulting not only in a narrowing of rational, vigilant, and critical thought, but also in affective and ideological radicalization. This is indeed a form of psychological rigidity or inflexibility, with Victor's defense mechanism being the illusion of finding meaning in the absurdity of his actual situation as an unemployed and marginalized person, and a feeling of belonging—but a virtual belonging to a new camp capable of transforming the surrounding situation.

IV - 1 - 5 -: Case of Junior Pierrot

A – Presentation

Clinical vignette number 5 presents a case of a breach of privacy resulting in paranoid anxiety. Junior

Pierrot, a 35-year-old administrative professional, feeling under surveillance, displays excessive, even pathological, mistrust regarding this surveillance and the wiretapping of his conversations and communications. Junior Pierrot bases his profound anxiety on the claim that he has repeatedly been the victim of online scams or fraud, although it is impossible to be certain of the possible line between objective reality and mere fantasy.

B - Clinical analysis

The clinical analysis of Victor's case highlights the disastrous consequences of digital surveillance and tracking, which constitute a series of fundamental infringements on privacy and the stability of identity and personality. Digital surveillance and tracking create and even exacerbate anxieties of persecution by weakening the psyche of individuals and fostering the persistence of anxiety.

IV - 2 - Elements of therapy for digital addiction: from miracle to mirage

The uninterrupted deployment and massive use of social networks have serious consequences for individuals and for society (addictions, psychological suffering, changes in personal identity, subjective freedom and self-image, due to the adoption through extroversion and mimicry of new social models and ideological content that can be questioned...). Beyond this individual psychological suffering (and in particular the inner void created), numerous alterations are observed (alterations in social relations, in the overall functioning of society with the radicalization of groups that oppose each other, in the educational institution, in its content which must be redesigned as well as in the methods of its transmission, or in the professional environment as a whole, which is undergoing a transformation).

Social networks are therefore not neutral: they are not simply tools. Numerous clinical and ethical issues arise from their now widespread use, and these issues require us to reflect on the individual, social, and institutional approaches to the prevention and treatment of addictions and mental health disorders that are emerging in our society, where digital activity is becoming central because it shapes thought, emotions, and the organization of daily life.

We have therefore developed the table below in order to present, as a sketch, some clinical elements of prevention and therapy of digital addictions at three main levels: the individual level, the family level, education level and, overall, the level of social institutions....

From prevention to therapy of addictions (therapeutic approaches)

At the individual level	Identify the underlying lack or void in order to end digital idealization only after identifying the defenses. Master and transcend the psychological dependence on digital technology (limiting digital use (time and frequency), reducing notifications and compulsions, restoring self-control).
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	Safeguarding narcissistic and relational registers. Education in the critical use of digital technology. Development of digital hygiene. Necessary refocusing of The subject focuses on itself, but without confinement. Learning to distinguish between the real and the virtual, and the overall rehabilitation of the person...
At the educational and family level	Essential training in digital technology and media in general, with a focus on developing critical thinking skills. Community work and social debates should be organized around evaluating digital content and its impact on the identity it helps to shape. Support, particularly for teenagers, is crucial to promote responsible digital use.
At the institutional level	Establish a regulatory framework (laws and regulations) for social networks, which are psychosocial environments that foster social connection (through the collection, processing, and regulation of digital content). A relentless fight against <i>fake news</i> and cyberbullying is essential, to punish all transgressions. (But education should be geared towards a policy of <i>prioritizing repression</i> .) Platforms must be held accountable for the protection of digital data and psychological and social well-being in general. A firm policy is necessary to ensure digital security and the creation of meaning outside of social networks.

V - CONCLUSION

Facing the downsides and dangers of social media: ethics, critical vigilance and pro-action

The clinical, ethical and socio-cultural challenges of social networks in our changing social context are numerous, with regard on the one hand to the coexistence of traditional cultures and values with the practices and values introduced by the opening to the new world, and on the other hand to the instability of values caused by hyperconnectivity made possible by the development of digital technology, the resulting conflicts of reference points (ideological and cultural, religious, political reference points, etc.) and the resulting psychological vulnerability, particularly among young people who are increasingly trapped in digital cognitive bubbles which, as we can see, are both identity refuges and psychological traps.

Therefore, an integrative and transcultural psychoclinical approach must be implemented in our country. Since social networks have become symbolic objects of addiction (regulating anxiety, providing narcissistic repair, filling the void of identity and loneliness, etc.), the essential objective will be to help individuals break free from the cognitive bubbles and addictive patterns in which social networks place them. This involves introducing the symbolic fissure in closed systems of meaning to foster openness to otherness and intersubjectivity that is not virtual, and to rehabilitate critical thinking, doubt, and the questioning of certainties. For the individual, the goal is less about total disconnection than about regulating the connection in a way that promotes personal balance. This would then

allow for a reconnection with the self, less fluctuation of identity, free and informed expression, as well as the production of meaning and new symbolic forms.

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