On Motherhood in Cyberspace: Archetypes and Other Factors Influencing Involvement in Online Charitable Initiatives

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Summary

In a social context marked by accelerated digitalization, cyberspace has become not only an extension of everyday life and an expansion of the public sphere – where the crystallization of public opinion follows increasingly complex and refined mechanisms – but also a favorable space for shaping personal identity and for performing the art of impression management (Goffman, 2007) in an amplified manner. This process is in line with the heightened theatricalization of experiences through the digital lens, often granting a cinematic halo to forms of digital self-presentation. Notably, cyberspace provides a framework for the often-instantaneous calibration to reference groups, can favor the emergence of cognitive biases, but also acts as a facilitator for mobilizing communities toward common goals. The role of algorithms, which function as amplifiers of influence in this new context, offers digital platforms a novel key to accessing users' psychological mechanisms, enhancing both the benefits and the risks of online interaction. Indeed, the cyber effect (Aiken, 2019) of amplifying behaviors in cyberspace is fundamental in this new environment.

Within this framework, the present research set out to investigate how motherhood manifests and redefines itself as an intense and transformative identity experience in a world that has itself been reshaped by the digitalization of interactions. Maintaining the relevance of social validation needs and conformity (Noelle-Neumann, 2004; Goldsmith et al., 2005; Berger, 2017; Aiken, 2019) – even more pronounced in this new identity stage – mothers tend to seek answers to the inner turmoil of identity recalibration, and cyberspace provides them with an accessible and rapid solution. The trajectory of their identity crystallization was traced and analyzed in this thesis.

Situated at the intersection of psychological, sociological, and communication theories, the study examines a phenomenon often marked by heightened emotionality: the rapid and complete

transfer of trust toward a group of strangers through interactions mediated by digital platforms, which subsequently become a reference group for the individual seeking social validation and identity consolidation. Thus, classical group theory is itself recalibrated in the new hyper-digitalized context.

The thesis analyzed interactions on Facebook groups dedicated to mothers, using the *La Primul Bebe* (LPB) community as a case study. This community illustrates how digital interactions – ranging from seemingly routine actions (like, comment, share) to actual involvement in online charitable campaigns and the allocation of resources to these efforts – can coagulate substantial collective energies and resources. In general, this type of online community represents a particular form of echo chamber or resonance chamber, where social validation, emotional support, and human solidarity intertwine with factors that foster opinion polarization and with mechanisms of influence, sometimes overt, sometimes subtle (Castells, 2013; Aiken, 2019; Berger, 2017). Beyond the negative aspects often associated with echo chambers (Brugnoli et al., 2019; Garrett, 2009; Geschke et al., 2019; Nguyen, 2020), however, the present research has uncovered the amplification of human solidarity in such online communities, as a form of expanding the positive potential of group cohesion.

The study also aimed to analyze how archetypal predispositions manifest in cyberspace, starting from the concept of archetype as theorized in Jungian analytical psychology and subsequently developed into a modern taxonomy of 12 typologies, which maintained the concept's relevance in contemporary times. These archetypes influence both the ways in which mothers relate to their own identities and the ways in which they engage in online charitable campaigns. For instance, the Protector archetype is associated with a readiness to provide support, yet also with an exacerbated empathy that may sometimes lead to inaction due to self-protection needs; the Hero archetype, characterized by a strong desire to contribute to life-changing causes, is action-oriented and inspires others to join; the Sage is linked with roles of mediation and interpretation; and the Ruler is associated with initiative, coordination, and guidance. These typologies provide not only an interpretive lens for individual involvement but also help explain group dynamics, in which different behaviors complement each other to generate coherent mobilization, amplifying the cumulative effect of the community. The use of archetypes as an analytical tool is thus not merely a framework for interpretation but also an original contribution of this thesis, through their application to digital philanthropy and online motherhood.

Accordingly, the theoretical part of the thesis addresses the evolution of the concepts of public opinion and public sphere in the digital environment, the role of algorithms, opinion polarization, the spectacularization of behaviors, and the archetypal manifestations of motherhood in cyberspace. In Habermasian tradition, the public sphere was conceived as a framework for rational deliberation, oriented toward consensus and logical argumentation. However, the reality of cyberspace is configured differently: interactions are fragmented, often emotional, and marked by mechanisms of social validation and conformity (Noelle-Neumann, 2004), which align the dynamics of online groups more closely with the logic of affective resonance than with rational deliberation. Castells (2013) highlights that digital networks multiply voices and increase diversity of opinion, while simultaneously accentuating polarization, transforming the digital public sphere into a field of tension between debate and emotionality. In the case of mothering communities, the emphasis falls rather on emotional solidarity and affective exchange, confirming the transformation of the digital public sphere into a context where emotionality prevails over rationality.

Methodologically, the research combined netnography, quantitative analysis, and qualitative focus groups to identify psychosocial and situational factors that determine involvement in online charitable campaigns. Findings indicate that social validation, archetypal predispositions, and community valorization are significant factors contributing to the stimulation of solidarity and collective mobilization in cyberspace.

Guided by a rigorously structured set of research questions and hypotheses, the study explored, among others: the extent to which time spent on Facebook correlates with charitable involvement; whether the perception of time as well invested influences participation; how declarative involvement relates to effective behaviors (financial donations or volunteering); the role of archetypes (Protector, Hero, Sage, Ruler) in predispositions toward involvement; how motivations (altruistic, emotional, social) are configured; what barriers (time, financial resources, emotional availability) limit participation; and the extent to which community valorization and the need for social validation predict involvement and donation.

To answer these questions, the mixed-methods approach comprised three complementary stages. The netnographic stage involved the researcher's immersion in the *La Primul Bebe* digital community, providing an exploratory and contextual perspective on group dynamics. The quantitative stage, conducted through a survey with a sample of 105 respondents, allowed for

testing hypotheses and quantifying relationships between psychosocial variables and engagement behaviors. Finally, the qualitative stage, based on focus groups, brought depth and subtle nuances to the analytical endeavor, capturing how participants interpret the motherhood experience, negotiate identity roles, and explain their motivations or reservations regarding participation in charitable campaigns. In practice, this methodological triangulation ensured a balance between descriptive breadth, statistical rigor, and interpretive depth.

Netnographic results revealed that the *La Primul Bebe* group functions both as a framework for emotional support and for normalizing maternal experiences – especially in the early stages of motherhood – and as a space for rapid mobilization toward humanitarian causes of major social impact at the national level. With over 10,000 posts in each charitable campaign and nearly 6 million euros raised in 12 years of activity, *La Primul Bebe* stands as a benchmark of best practices in stimulating interactivity among Facebook users and in fostering effective philanthropic involvement.

From the perspective of quantitative research, several hypotheses were confirmed: time spent on Facebook is positively correlated with involvement in campaigns; perceiving time as well invested increases the predisposition to participate; declarative involvement is associated with actual donations and with the frequency of other charitable behaviors. Furthermore, archetypal analysis revealed differentiated influences: the Protector and Hero archetypes are associated with consistent involvement, while the Sage and Ruler tend to foster roles of guidance or inspiration. Community valorization proved to be a significant predictor of involvement, while the need for social validation correlated with frequency of participation.

Qualitative results complemented this picture, highlighting participants' subjective experiences. Mothers described the community as a "safe space" where they could share vulnerabilities, but also as a network of informational resources and a space of continuous emotional support. Motivations for involvement ranged from altruism and solidarity to gratitude and the desire to pass on the support they had once received. Yet emotional ambivalence was frequently present: the desire to help was often confronted with limitations of time, resources, and energy, and sometimes with a form of self-protection that led to avoiding distressing or emotionally overwhelming stories. Focus groups also underscored the role of leadership in stimulating engagement, with the emblematic figure of the community's founder acting as an important catalyst. Her ability to inspire, convey authenticity, and create consensus partly explains

the community's cohesion and the success of its campaigns. In the absence of such a central figure, mobilization would likely have been more limited or fragmented. Perceived consensus and group validation also proved crucial in maintaining cohesion and stimulating involvement.

The conclusions of the thesis indicate that the maternal digital space represents a privileged framework for collective mobilization and for the manifestation of solidarity in charitable forms. Archetypes emerge as a useful interpretive lens for understanding engagement behaviors, while the need for social validation and community valorization contribute as well. The original contribution of this work lies in articulating an integrated explanatory model that combines Jungian archetype theory with the analysis of psychosocial and digital communication mechanisms. By operationalizing archetypal predispositions as relevant variables for studying online philanthropic behaviors – an insufficiently explored direction thus far – the thesis provides both theoretical innovation and methodological validation of triangulation in digital community research.

From an applied perspective, the thesis offers recommendations for enhancing the effectiveness of online charitable campaigns that can serve organizations (NGOs, civic movements) in optimizing their initiatives. Among these recommendations are the following: leveraging authentic and credible leaders; crafting emotionally charged, narrative-based messages; fostering a sense of community belonging; and integrating mechanisms of social validation to stimulate participation. Moreover, identifying barriers related to resources, time, and emotional load offers a starting point for adjusting communication strategies to reduce risks of overexposure and emotional exhaustion among community members. These recommendations are not limited to maternal communities but can also be adapted to other digital support groups, civic movements, or online social campaigns.

The limitations of the research – namely, the relatively small sample size and the focus on a single case study – open avenues for future studies to compare multiple communities or analyze differences across demographic categories.

In conclusion, this thesis contributes to understanding how cyberspace transforms classical mechanisms of solidarity and philanthropy, offering a perspective on digital motherhood as a complex social phenomenon in which everyday interactions intertwine with large-scale mobilizations, and individual fragility is converted into collective strength.