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To cite this article:

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Μέσα κοινωνικής δικτύωσης και διαφορετικότητα: Η μελέτη περίπτωσης της δυνητικής κοινότητας "Live Tinted"

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ABSTRACT

The present paper draws on a case study of an online, Instagram community and it aims to explore the connection between social media and the promotion of otherness. "Live Tinted" is a community, whose main goal is to bring into the spotlight of the beauty industry and beyond, individuals who embody otherness and the unrepresented. Content analysis is being employed on the posts (photos and audio-visual content) of "Live Tinted" to comprehend how Otherness is presented on Instagram and whether its content affects the identity of the user and member of the community. The virtual community seems to choose to promote individuals of different backgrounds, religions and distinctly different external characteristics. Through digital storytelling, they share different personal stories about their identities. In this way, they achieve the identification and commitment of the members to the community. The members of the community also show differences. They come from different countries of the world, but share similar personal experiences, strengthening the work of the community.

KEY WORDS: Self, Identity, Otherness, Social Media, Community, Live Tinted

ΠΕΡΙΛΗΨΗ

Η παρούσα εργασία βασίζεται στη μελέτη περίπτωσης συγκεκριμένης διαδικτυακής κοινότητας του Instagram και έχει ως στόχο να διερευνήσει τη σχέση μεταξύ των ΜΚΔ και της προβολής της διαφορετικότητας. Το «Live Tinted» είναι κοινότητα, της οποίας κύριος στόχος είναι να φέρει στο προσκήνιο της βιομηχανίας της ομορφιάς, και όχι μόνο, άτομα που αντιπροσωπεύουν το διαφορετικό και λιγότερο εκπροσωπούμενο. Γίνεται ανάλυση περιεχομένου των αναρτήσεων (φωτογραφίες και οπτικοακουστικό περιεχόμενο) του «Live Tinted» για να κατανοηθεί ο τρόπος με τον οποίο παρουσιάζεται η διαφορετικότητα και η ταυτότητα στο Instagram. Η δυνητική κοινότητα φαίνεται να επιλέγει να προβάλλει άτομα διαφορετικής καταγωγής, θρησκείας και με εμφανή διαφορετικά εξωτερικά χαρακτηριστικά. Μέσω της ψηφιακής αφήγησης, τα άτομα μοιράζονται διαφορετικές προσωπικές ιστορίες αναφορικά με την ταυτότητά. Με αυτόν τον τρόπο, επιτυγχάνουν την ταύτιση και τη δέσμευση των μελών στην κοινότητα. Τα μέλη της κοινότητας παρουσιάζουν επίσης διαφορές. Προέρχονται από διαφορετικές χώρες του κόσμου, αλλά μοιράζονται παρόμοιες προσωπικές εμπειρίες, ενισχύοντας το έργο της κοινότητας.

ΛΕΞΕΙΣ-ΚΛΕΙΔΙΑ: Εαυτός, Ταυτότητα, Διαφορετικότητα, Μέσα Κοινωνικής Δικτύωσης, Κοινότητα, Live Tinted

1. The presentation of Self in Social Media

Individuals gain access to forms of information and communication that are channeled through the media and thus enrich the process of self-formation. Along with the development of media, symbolic resources are being reconfigured. According to Giddens (1991) the self takes on a reflective trajectory where the individual shapes his or her identity through a continuous and constantly revised biographical narrative. Individuals increasingly take refuge in the self in order to acquire, as Thompson (1998) puts it, 'a coherent life project' and the consequences of this 'refuge'.

The beginning of an individual's presence in cyberspace marks the 'activation' of a new life in a parallel, online reality governed by its own rules. Being a relatively more free space, with at least less restrictions than the actual everyday life, the Internet allows the individual to constitute himself/herself and reconfigure his/her identity as he/she wishes Anheier & Isar, 2011), confirming the variability of the two concepts. Individuals edit their personal data, delete or optimize their image, monitoring in an additional way others' impressions of themselves. The individual is asked to make decisions about the image they display to other users. Each cyberspace has a specific framework and guidelines that greatly assist in this process (Suler, 2002).

As Κούρτη (2003) argues, the first conscious constructions of identity on the Internet consist of pseudonyms. They are personas, representative names that replace real ones, but in turns out that they also convey attributes of the individual's personality. Another alternative form of identity are avatars, digital representations of users, which they can create according to their wishes, otherwise they use the available templates. In particular, in the Social Media context applies the acquisition of a public image, also known as a persona, which includes the basic information of the individual, such as name, age, gender, educational level and professional status, but also further information that forms a complete profile of the user. The staged identities constructed by Social Media users are relatively similar, retaining some of the beliefs that distinguish them in the physical world (Marwick, 2013). Don Slater argues that in digital environments the disembodiment of individuals, which also gives the opportunity of anonymity, implies with it the existence of many possible selves and 'hybrid' identities, which are 'characterized by fluidity and interconnectedness' (Slater, 2002, p.536), while Suler (2002) points out that in the internet space, selves that once remained hidden in the imagination or dreams of individuals, come to the fore. Given the distinctiveness of the various Social Media and users' preferences, identity presentation occurs through the «conscious or unconscious disclosure of personal details, thoughts and feelings» (Kietzmann, Hermkens, McCarthy & Silvestre, 201, p.243). Individuals use their real name or become visible through a persona of their own inspiration, or are identified by the particular way they express themselves in their postings (text, photos, music preferences and the like), forming a public image over which they have control.

By scrutinizing how identities change through computer-mediated communication, and in particular for introverts, the role of the internet has proved vital, as it gives them the opportunity to reveal and express their true selves (Amichai-Hamburger, Wainapel & Fox, 2002), thus circumventing the difficulties they faced in actual life. Fullam (2017) demonstrated that alongside mentors and proper education, Social Media still mediate the development of young people's activist identity. By recognizing the benefits of employing them, individuals can learn about volunteer activities, inform and promote their own work themselves (Fullam, 2017).

Furthermore, in the Online Community the social bond and social constitution of the offline community is established and sustained. Chat rooms, forums and personal websites provide anonymity, an immersion in community norms and practices or places for the expression of a variety of identities.

It is about spaces that are in – between space 'on the very borderline'. Based on Winnicot's (1964, 1984) theory, it could be advocated that these spaces are transitional, potential spaces, which can function as facilitating environments, just as transitional objects assist the child or adult to safely experience differentiation and transition.

McLelland (2005) describes them as spaces for 'expansive realisation', in which the Japanese gay men of his study can be made into gay men, since virtual spaces are separated - albeit temporarily - from the constraints of offline identities.

Whereas the physical, identifiable, visible body is often treated as a benchmark of authenticity, the invisibility of the physical body in online communities allows for alternative forms of self-presentation. For example, the issue between disclosure and authenticity is addressed by Bloustien & Wood (2016) in their ethnographic study on disability and identity in Second Life. There are also numerous research studies (e.g. Swartwood, Veach, Kuhne, Lee & Ji 2011; Rossetto, Lannutti & Strauman,(2015) on topics related to how online communities can be employed to work through - and perhaps even circumvent - the rules of mourning that apply in physical reality.

Pelaprat & Brown (as cited in Harley Morgan & Frith, 2018, p. 186) stress that individuals' participation in virtual environments does great service in three instances; firstly, in establishing relationships and bonds; secondly by being obliged to accept an act to sustain that relationship; and thirdly, by the 'fuzzy value' of the act that reinforces the bond between individuals. It becomes comprehensive at this point how in the Online Community the social bond is created and preserved, as well as the social construction of the offline community. The new «mediated interaction» occurs exclusively from person to person, whereas the digital space provides flexibility and velocity in its use.

2. The online team. "Live Tinted" community on Instagram

T he potential of online environments is reinforced by the very action of users, who enter the digital world either with the identity they sustain in the offline environment or with the ideal identities they reconfigure or create from scratch for this purpose (Bozkurt & Tu, 2016). Michikyan, Subrahmanyam and Dennis (2015) studying digital presentation concluded that it is influenced by both gender and racial background. The manifestation of individual identity was proven to be a predominantly male practice, with women displaying their social and racial identity more. While, additional differences were observed among young adults of Asian, European, (Latin) American origin, regarding the expression of their psychological disposition. While exploring identities development in Cyberspace, Al-Kandari, Al-Hunaiyyan and Rana Al-Hajri (2016) included the influence of the users' respective cultures. Specifically, the traditional perceptions of Kuwaiti citizens appeared to be carried over to their online presence, where women have private profiles and post less personal information compared to men.

In the case study of this research, we focus on the Instagram virtual community «Live Tinted». An attempt is being made to explore the use of this social media with regard to the formation of one's identity. «Live Tinted» is a virtual, multicultural community that aims to highlight the

less represented individuals in the field of beauty. By creating the website «livetinted.com» in 2017 and the Instagram community a year later, they provided a platform where members have the opportunity to narrate and share experiences regarding their identity. Today the community counts around 118 thousand on Instagram and the number is constantly growing. In an effort to maintain a sense of community in the traditional sense, the administrators use the term «TintFam» to address its members, meaning that everyone who follows the account is part of the «Live Tinted» family.

The founder of «Live Tinted», Deepica Mutyala, started it all when she posted a video on her YouTube channel, in which she tried to cover the dark circles in her eyes with a red lipstick. Hyperpigmentation is a common condition that bothers both women and men. It occurs when melanin, the pigment that gives skin and hair their natural colour, is produced in amounts larger than expected and causes dark spots to surface. Although these spots are not considered dangerous, they cause distress and annoyance to those who have them.

Deepica's proposal was not only effective and cost-friendly, it gave her the recognition she needed to launch her own vision. Having already spent a decade in the beauty industry, she noticed that there was no fairly distributed representation of all people and different skin tones. Addressing issues around identity, culture and self-love, she invites users to live unconstrained by the image bindings of others, and to embrace «who they really are». On the Instagram platform, members have access to primary and secondary sources, from which they can be informed about important initiatives and news, companies and products that have either taken into account all categories of skin tones or not, learn about other members' stories, and engage in a conversation on all topics.

Identity framing and diversity proposed by the «Live Tinted» community relies heavily on digital storytelling.

Community members share experiences and thoughts and in doing so, members' commitment to the community is achieved (Canella, 2017, p.26).

The community is addressing people who are unable to join groups as there are no references of «belonging» for them. In this particular community, the message of self-acceptance and diversity is pervasive in all the content posted in the community. The founder and her partners identified through personal and professional experiences the problematic situation in the beauty industry, in particular the issue of lack of equal representation i.e. the inability to satisfy the different types of consumers and the requirements of their products. The feeling that certain individuals cannot be afforded a good that will be suitable for them is perceived as an insufficiency of companies to include them.

Given that make-up and self-care is related to self-image, self-esteem and self-confidence and thus self-presentation, this unequal representation raises issues of identity for these individuals. The process of forming the Live Tinted community is identified as an effortin the virtual world necessary to address the marginalisation of these groups. Those who decide to become members of this community engage in an action endeavor (Hughes & Kroehler, 2007) in order to be involved in changing the individual and collective conditions that have led community members to a status of «subjugated out-group» (Starzak, 2008).

3. Research Questions

Social media are instrumental in shaping identity. The experiences of each user within online platforms enable them to assert or threaten the various identities that manifest through them. The online formation of the self, the control of impressions, personal and social maturation are complex processes due to the mediated reality.

The decision to study diversity in social media aims to contribute to research regarding how technology is employed to display and support individuals with excluded identities. The virtual community, 'Live Tinted', which through online storytelling aims to showcase individuals that are being excluded by beauty standards, was chosen as a case study. This community reinforces, through the creation of an 'in-group', the identity of individuals excluded due to certain external, physical qualities.

The research will address the following research questions:

1. How is the identity of the user/member of the virtual community «Live Tinted» presented?

2. How is diversity projected via the community under study?

Social media has been criticized for the type of their promoted messages and their negative effects on users. Samples of studies have been previously reported which have already confirmed this assumption. On the other hand, social media do not seem to be the underlying source of the problem, but rather have the role of mediating the actions of any respective individual user. Building on the first research question, it will be pursued to explore how a community created on Instagram attempts to use this medium by differentiating itself from the existing, filtered content of the medium. At the very same time, the objective of the research is to demonstrate whether the emphasis on diversity that is displayed influences the identity of the followers and members of the «Live Tinted» community.

4. Internet Research and Digital Research Methods

It becomes apparent that the basic qualities of online communication (communication without physical presence, anonymity, distance, loose rules of social behaviour, etc.) make it a favourable space for the development of relationships but also a privileged environment for research. In addition to being a space for information searching, the Internet is also a new field for theoretical and empirical research. The Internet, whether as a research tool or as a field of research, is an immensely valuable area of human activity with an ever-increasing significance in the present and the future. It is a new field of research which both establishes and requires new research and methodological standards, due to the fact that social and interpersonal relationships develop within it, which are distinguished by completely different attributes from those of physical reality (Gazi & Gardikiotis, 2021).

Technology currently defines a new framework for social action, the era of the ubiquitous visualised and connected community, the platformization of reality and the emergence of a new positivism as it generates its own phenomena and its own problems to be solved (Dutton, 2008).

The present study is exclusively based on research conducted on the internet and more specifically on the online platform Instagram.

Digital content analysis was employed in this research. The conventional research method procedure of content analysis was adjusted according to the requirements of internet research. Among the advantages of this are the direct and efficient access and querying of the necessary content without the requirement for hard copies of the material. Storage and retention is achieved within Cyberspace, in this case in the virtual community. Obviously, the often dubious, future of digital resources is a challenge that every researcher has to face, together with the constant modifications of the storage space and the ability of users to edit and delete any publication at any time (Kim & Kuljis, 2010). Careful work at every step of content analysis is imperative ultimately for both the reliability and validity of the research.

The research sample consists of the «Live Tinted» posts, i.e. the photos along with the corresponding caption and audiovisual material, as well as the users' comments. Photos and audiovisual material have been shown to be useful «tools» in communication, since they convey messages directly and/or indirectly. By applying, in parallel, visual content analysis, it is pursued to better elucidate how the «Live Tinted» community is displaying identity and diversity. Audiovisual methods in qualitative content analysis are, as is plausible, concerned with the interpretive 'reading' of audiovisual data. Each researcher «interrogates how meaning is attributed to the data, how meaning is produced from it, and how it is used to frame issues» (Dawson, 2020, p. 369).

In order to identify the most important terms in the data used for analysis, their word cloud was generated using WordCloud[1] software. Figure 2 depicts the word cloud of 2500 terms which appear at least 2 times in the posts, wherein the size of each term is proportional to the number of times it appears.

Proceeding with data collection, it is important to set the timeframes within which the final selection of data took place. In wanting to maintain the direction of the research solely on issues of identity and diversity, the inclusion of publications of a commercial nature was avoided. In particular, it was observed that since April 2019 the community included the promotion of Hue Sticks in the published content, which occupies a significant part of the available material. Although there have been such posts since the beginning of the community's Instagram profile, their frequency is lower in the first year. Therefore, the time period from January eighteen, 2018 to December thirty-one of the same year (18/01/2018 - 31/12/2018) is the time frame of the research study.

The data consist of 320 postings (292 photos and 28 videos). Those publications that referred to the self, components of identity, the role of Others and diversity and, by extension, the sense of community were considered suitable for analysis. Accordingly, community members' comments on each post came under close scrutiny.

The final data comprised 74 photos and 10 videos (representing approximately 25% of the posts).

Figure 1. Graphical representation of the final data clustering
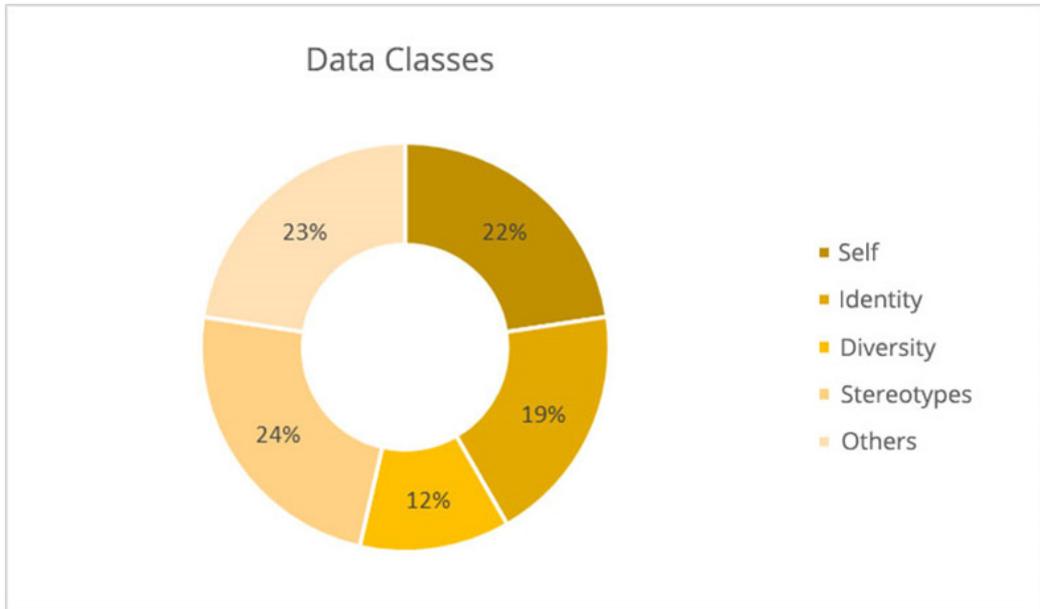
5. Data Analysis
5.1 The Data Class «Self»

The audiovisual material falls exclusively within the "Hue to Know" series, which involves short interviews with individuals who, in the eyes of the community, have a personal story and identity experience that deserves to be displayed and shared among members and beyond.

Self-acceptance was encountered numerous times in this category. Regardless of the posts' topics, the depicted individuals conveyed messages of self-love. Photos that emphasized external features, such as hair and nose, were backed up by personal testimonies of women who reported on the racism they experienced, and the absence of similar references in the media. Many of them stated that the recognition of their uniqueness is linked to the acceptance of their origin and culture. In particular, long hair was perceived as a kind of safety for some of them, because not deviating from prevalent norms foreshadowed acceptance by Others. Whether or not they deliberately got rid of their long hair (in cases where the loss of hair was due to illness) was, as they confided, an act of liberation from the constraints of society and the need to be likeable, but also a sign that they had managed to overcome personal hardships.

Despite the admittance that the views of Others were related to their self-image, they assert how important it is to bring out what one is, without trying to be something different. "You are you, you look like you, you can't look like anyone else…don't compare yourself to anyone else, because you're not them". Photographs of the women's evident confidence are accompanied by their own personal testimonies of what led them to accept their image. They show, without hesitation and without any excuse, their body, their religious beliefs or their skin colour, because they don't feel the need to confine themselves, "…I don't have to limit myself …".

5.2 The Data Class «Diversity»

Part of the mission of the "Live Tinted" virtual community is to foster diversity. In postings that the community exclusively addresses to its members, photos of diverse women were singled out. From their skin colour, facial features, hair and clothing, it is apparent that women of different ethnicities and religious backgrounds are showcased. The tagline "All the shades in between" is consistent with the orientation of the community, also reflected visually.

The topic of cross-cultural beauty is raised, where a trait may be associated with beauty and happiness in one culture but considered a flaw in another. The community encourages members to nominate features that they would like to see restored.

Regarding the multiculturalism of the United States of America, individuals of multiple racial identities reported some difficulties in finding balance among themselves, and also in showing respect for the culture without embracing or identifying with any of its "flaws." By stating "Finally, a one stop place for brown girls", they eventually praise the great efforts of the community and, via the content, they assert that they feel good.

5.3 The Data Class «Stereotypes».

Stereotypical perceptions and discrimination can affect one's identity and idea of the self. The cases that are mentioned in the photographic material, for the most part, show the success of individuals in finally overcoming the stereotypes attributed to them and to the groups to which they belong. It is not permissible for a Muslim woman to be involved in sports, those who play sports are thin, a woman should dress decently, be polite and obedient, acne scars should be hidden in order to have a perfect image, are some of the stereotypes that are associated with women.

Some people reported that they hide behind these perceptions or that there are internalised stereotypes thatthe individuals impose on themselves. In the cases of people of colour, for example, distinctions are being made between shades of darker skin tones. Three sisters from Haiti became aware of the stereotypes attributed to people similar to themselves when they experienced discrimination on the basis of colour. They state that skin color will never define one's identity, "Your skin color will never define who you are as a person."

In its turn, the virtual community created the "Be your own princess" project, with the objective of overcoming stereotypes. This involved five women, one of whom was the founder of the community; they address the racism they experienced because of their physical appearance, the fact that they felt the need to hide their origins in order to be accepted and through this undertaking they sought to restore the stereotypes imposed on them.

Community members apparently agree on the powerful influence of stereotypes. They are being hurt by comments and false preconceptions about themselves regarding their acne, body and in general their image. They acknowledge that they have tried hard to overcome their self-insecurities and now seem to like who they are including whatever imperfections they have. It's a daily routine for them and they constantly do remind themselves to remain authentic. The post with Princess Pocahontas, however, gave rise to a number of members voicing a complaint of "exploitation" of culture by the community. They stated their disappointment at the selection of an Indian woman to represent the indigenous people, saying she was not able "to erase a stereotype that was not hers in the first place". For their part, community managers made it clear that their goal was to display the stereotypes that these women were able to remediate and not to identify with the ethnicity of the Disney princesses.

5.4 The Data Class «Identity»

The term "mixed race" is applied to people who originate from two or more ethnic groups. The latest audiovisual postings are interviews of a man and a woman engaged in the arts. Drawing on their experiences of identity as mixed-race people, they talk about acceptance by Others and representation in the film and music industry.

The photos in the final cluster remain focused on the topic of the multiple identities of mixed-race people. They reiterate statements of marginalisation and intimidation for their colour and their physical traits. but at the same time feel proud of their identity. Instances are being mentioned where Others assist the individual to assert some aspect of its identity, "I do identify most with the black part of my heritage at the moment, mostly because when people see me they see "black" or "mixed". However, there are individuals who consciously avoid defining their identity because they accept the alternating aspects of themselves, "I love how those parts of my identity influence my life, but I am not defined by them". Elsewhere, the binary identity crisis finds an escape in art and allows individuals to express themselves and connect with others. The photographic material even showcases instances of even further identities, such as that of a famous queer singer of color and a paraplegic person of color and member of the LGBTQ community. Although they face hardships due to their marginalized identities, they show pride in them.

As far as cultural identity is concerned, a discussion arises on the influence of the environment, implying that Others perceive and interpret it differently in accordance with personal experiences, and on the relationship of each individual's culture to it. In the latter case, the person depicted describes the homogeneity observed as pathetic and woeful, as it is responsible for the cultural loss.

Members of the "Live Tinted" community, specifically in the "Identity" cluster, are expressing their esteem for its efforts and the variety of personalities featured. In regards to identity, many comments were posted, with members explaining their reasons for identifying with each post, especially the divide they experience among multiple identities. They emphasize the importance of having control over their identities, that is, over those identity traits that define them or they are eager to display.

5.5. Word Cloud in the data used for analysis

The accompanying Word Cloud provides a visual representation of the recurring themes and concepts within the data classes. The emphasis on self-love is evident as these individuals share their personal stories and experiences, highlighting the importance of embracing one's unique features, whether it be hair, skin color, or facial characteristics. The narratives shared by individuals reflect a journey towards self-empowerment, breaking free from societal constraints, and celebrating one's authentic self. The terms "beautiful", "beauty" take on a broader meaning within the context of the "Live Tinted" community. Beauty is not confined to conventional standards but is celebrated in the uniqueness of each individual. The discussions highlight the community's commitment to redefining beauty beyond societal norms, encouraging members to appreciate their distinctive features.

The recurrent mention of "Live Tinted," "Tint Fam," and "community" underscores the significance of this virtual space. Members express gratitude for the community's efforts in fostering a supportive environment that encourages self-expression and celebrates diversity. The

discussions on identity within the community reflect a collective desire for control over how individuals define and present themselves. The word "culture" resonates throughout the data, emphasizing its role in shaping individuals' perceptions and experiences. The community engages in conversations about cultural identity, with members expressing opinions on the influence of the environment and the challenges of cultural loss. The diverse cultural backgrounds represented within the community contribute to a rich variety of experiences and perspectives.

Figure 2. Word Cloud in the data used for analysis

6. Conclusions - Discussion

At first glance, the postings in their entirety indicate a great variety in terms of the profiles that the community chooses to portray. Women are in the predominant part, but there is no lack of pictorial and audiovisual material, in which men and members of the LGBTQ community are «hosted». The presence of people of different skin colour, body type and age is discernible. The individuals identified include celebrities or community members who used the hashtag #live tinted and/or the tag @LiveTinted in their personal posts, and were singled out to amplify the content.   In the overall set of photos, a preference for close-ups focused on spotlighting the external facial features is discernible. Occasionally, emphasis is placed on hair (long, straight, curly) or the lack thereof, on eyes (different colours and shapes) and elsewhere on the colour or condition of the skin (coloured, signs of acne or ageing). Nonetheless, photos showing the entire body are also posted. Comparable content is also encountered in the illustration photos that are complementing the material.

The virtual community is opting to publish both primary and secondary content. With respect to the first cluster and audiovisual material, mainly through the interview series «Hue to Know» one can infer the active role of the administrators and, more broadly, the «identity» of the community. It is through the way each interviewee is framed, the choices in editing and the final screening of the videos that the above observations are reiterated. The representation of different gender, skin colour, background, religion and outlook is pursued. Each audiovisual begins with snapshots of the interviews, showing the interaction of the visitors with the community managers behind the camera. The aim is to attract interest and provide a relaxed mood for the viewers. Due to the fact that they are stored digitally with the support of IGTV created for mobiles, the videos are displayed in a horizontal layout. Very close-up shots emphasize facial details, while interview shots alternate with intervening shots in which the interviewees appear more relaxed, playing with the camera and posing. During the interview itself, subjects are facing straight into the camera, creating the impression that they are addressing the spectators directly.

In particular, in the content of postings (analysis of the accompanying caption of the photos and the total duration of the videos), as observed on the basis of the five separate categories, conclusions were drawn that adequately address the research questions posed at the outset. While the starting point is the topic of beauty and the art of make-up, other issues that fall under the concepts of identity and diversity are also touched upon. Digital storytelling is employed as a tool by both the virtual community as well as the members.

Through the photographs and audiovisual material, the theory of the perception of the self being shaped by the environment, society and the world to which one belongs is clearly confirmed. It was evident that the individuals acknowledge the multiplicity of their own selves and state that they use make-up as a means to switch among them. They stress that making conscious decisions about the self is of great importance, as it affects their self-esteem and self-image. They often reiterate the need for self-acceptance, having shared their hardships in childhood and adolescence.

People of mixed descent and members of the LGBTQ community also speak of multiple identities. More specifically, they refer to the identity crisis they experience due to the divide between different cultures and their references. They feel inadequate and that they do not belong to a group. This stigmatisation is directly related to Others, who may belong to their family environment, the professional world or might even concern complete strangers. According to Cooley (1902) the response of Others is likely to make a person feel ashamed or confident about her or his identity and self. Typical instances from the research data include incidents of racism over the colour of many people's skin, particularly women, who resorted to practices to remove this distinguishing trait. Labelling as a discriminatory practice also results in the stigmatisation of individuals, who perceive their allocation to a minority group as a denial of their individuality. It is observed that individuals are impacted by Others' perceptions of a particular affiliation group. Provided that personal identity is central to an individual, it seems that he or she is able to avoid stereotyping and reduction to minority groupings. For their part, such individuals try to unite and collectively refute the prevailing generalized perceptions of society.

In particular, intra-community references to stereotypes were associated with the negative, generalised conclusions of Others and society. Individuals portrayed in the community argued that their formation lay in ignorance and false assumptions, most notably on issues of race and gender. The inability to classify all individuals into clear categories entails defining them as different and stigmatising them.

Nonetheless, it appears as if the presence of Others has assisted in the understanding of identity. The woman who feels being more closely identified as a person of colour because that is the way she is recognised by Others, or the case of the two Haitian brothers who became conscious of their difference when they came into contact with different groups of people, show the constitutive role of the Other and diversity in the formation of identity.

Scrutinizing the question of the identity of the community members through the analysis of the comments on the posts, it is noted that their engagement with the community took place gradually and steadily. This was apparent, considering that it was the first year of «Live Tinted» that was surveyed. It can be depicted in all postings, for the most part, their positive response to the work of the community, and the persons it chooses to showcase. Members are organized on the basis of their shared beliefs and claims. Digital storytelling serves to identify members with these persons, and by extension strengthens their commitment to the community. They seem to have accepted the term tintfam (Live Tinted family), which reinforces a sense of «We» despite the differences among them. The distance in time and space does not have a negative impact on the members, they develop relationships, interact with each other and contribute in promoting posts to other people.

The Word Cloud aligns with the thematic exploration of the «Self,» «Diversity,» «Stereotypes,» and «Identity» data classes. The recurring terms reflect a narrative of self-empowerment, diversity appreciation, stereotype defiance, identity exploration, community support, and a redefinition of beauty. The «Live Tinted» community emerges as a dynamic space where individuals collectively navigate and celebrate the complexities of identity, fostering a culture of acceptance and self-affirmation.

In conclusion, it is worth underlining that the data concern the image and activity of a community based in the United States of America. Even if the Internet allows communication between people almost all over the world, the collected reports in this survey do not have a universal and direct correlation with all kinds of cultural contexts.

Note

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