

The Algorithmic Generation of the Culture of Banality and the Labyrinth of Communication in the Post-Truth Era.

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ABSTRACT:

Our research explores a digital issue arising from how users are represented across online platforms and the evolving nature of communication, which has become fluid, placing users in a digital maze created by their interactions and the trivial content they generate. This content is often aimed at gaining digital recognition and building a fan base, lacking ethical oversight or digital accountability. The intensity of this issue has been amplified by the algorithmic structure of communication networks and mechanisms like hashtags, trends, and filter bubbles. This creates an uncertain digital era where objective facts hold less sway over public opinion than the emotions and feelings presented by digital influencers in a superficial manner.

Keywords :

Culture of banality; communication labyrinth; post-truth era; social media algorithms.

Introduction :

The advent of digital freedom and the proliferation of free electronic publishing have given rise to various socio-digital cultures. These cultures have significantly transformed users' perceptions of their social realities and self-images within a globalized context, influenced by the ideologies of communication network proprietors and algorithmic frameworks. This transformation has resulted in the diminishing authority of traditional media gatekeepers and the decline of unidirectional communication. Consequently, the authority in publishing has shifted to the users, who leverage this digital freedom and power to construct a digital persona. These individuals, often referred to as digital leaders or digital content creators, seek to cultivate a following and gain recognition within the social system. In pursuit of this, they may produce content that challenges societal norms or engages in triviality, thereby contributing to the formation of a trivial digital space.

The advent of artificial intelligence (AI) and algorithms governing communication networks has amplified the dissemination of trivial and superficial content. This phenomenon places users in a state of digital anesthesia, compelling them towards the incessant consumption of such content and leading them into an inescapable digital labyrinth characteristic of the post-truth era. This era is marked by an uncertain media landscape and the mass illusions generated by digital technology, wherein emotions and feelings exert a greater influence on public opinion than social facts, which have faded into a set of artificial and false images.

The communication algorithms and their mechanisms, including hashtags, trends, and filter bubbles, serve to orient users towards a superficial digital proposition that aims to homogenize mass consciousness. This process inevitably leads to the creation of a digital labyrinth that generates material profit for the proprietors of communication networks. Consequently, this proposal seeks to illuminate the nature of algorithmic triviality generation within digital spaces and its contribution to the formation of digital labyrinths in the post-truth era. This discussion prompts the following fundamental inquiry: **What is the impact of algorithmically generated trivial content on the formation of a digital labyrinth in the post-truth era?** To further explore and analyze this question, we can pose the following sub-questions: What is the digital labyrinth?

- What constitutes the digital labyrinth?
- How is the post-truth era defined?
- What characterizes the culture of triviality?
- What mechanisms do algorithms employ to propagate the culture of triviality within digital spaces?

Theoretical framework of the study:

Chapter One:

1-Digital Blogging and the labyrinth of Communication in the Post-Truth Era :

1.1The inevitability of the digital communication labyrinth in the post-truth era

The philosophy of communication within digital spaces has undergone significant transformation, particularly owing to the increased number of participants in the communication process and the diminishing authority of traditional gatekeepers. Recipients now actively contribute to the creation of messages that have consequently diminished in value and are often characterized by artificiality and fabrication, driven by the pursuit of material gain. The digital accessibility of these spaces has facilitated the emergence of numerous practices and cultures that are foreign to Arab societies, such as the culture of banality and proliferation of low-quality content produced by numerous users. This phenomenon is often aimed at garnering a fan base by challenging societal taboos and manipulating algorithms to construct an artificial digital reality in which facts become obscured. This situation was described by the Oxford Dictionary in 2016 as a post-truth era, wherein objective facts exert less influence on public opinion than emotions and feelings. This shift has been exacerbated by the evolving media landscape and digital revolution, which have created an information-rich yet turbulent environment. In this context, fabricated and false narratives, along with conspiracy theories, are disseminated with the intent of undermining facts and eroding trust in government institutions. The influence of these dynamics is amplified by the rise of digital influencers.

In consideration of the evolving media landscape and its algorithmic framework, which has resulted in the proliferation of ideologically driven, artificial, and trivial discourses, there emerges an inevitability of navigating a digital labyrinth. This labyrinth, as defined by Al Abdullah (Al Abdullah, 2020,pp178) ,is akin to a cognitive game comprising various simple and complex methods that necessitate resolution and the identification of the correct path. Within digital spaces, this phenomenon can be examined through the lens of algorithmic structures and their mechanisms such as reels, storytelling, hashtags, and trends. These elements play a significant role in promoting trivial content and elevating the number of individuals who produce such content by increasing their visibility and recognition within the societal framework. This dynamic contributes to a decline in societal awareness and the capacity to instill moral values within the communicative space, particularly in the context of digital soft warfare.

In this context, the emergence of the digital human and the evolving philosophy of communication under technological dominance has become an inevitability, referred to as "The inevitability of the digital labyrinth." The proof of existence is no longer grounded in Descartes' assertion, "I think, therefore I am." Instead, it is now framed as "I communicate, therefore I exist," (Al Abdullah, 2020,pp187) within the logic of new technology ,This digital presence, facilitated by digital freedom and the expansion of digital spaces, has become confined to a digital labyrinth. As time and space contracts and the principles of information globalization prevail, the digital divide widens, its stakes increase, and its actors multiply. These actors engage in various practices, such as digital self-promotion and the public display of personal details, through numerous self-marketing strategies in digital spaces, including mini vlogs, the close friends list policy, and conflicts among social media influencers. In this context, researcher May Abdullah articulates her theory, "The Theory of the Social Media Labyrinth in the Public Space." A digital labyrinth is composed of several elements: uses, which are reflected in user interactions such as likes, comments, publishing, and marketing

both tangible and intangible products. The second element is stakes, which includes rumors, misinformation, digital soft warfare, lies, and trivial content. Additionally, there is the element of affordances, which involves personal development, entertainment, and lifestyle. Finally, the actors include systems, media, influencers, and governments.

1.2 Mechanisms feeding the digital labyrinth in the post-truth era:

The complexity of the factors constituting the digital landscape is heightened, particularly in relation to the mechanisms of algorithmic systems and the influence exerted by major corporations such as Google, Apple, Facebook, and Amazon (GAFA). These entities are instrumental in shaping and commodifying attention, a process central to the concept of surveillance capitalism, which seeks to implement the strategy of the attention economy. This strategy involves a dynamic interplay between capturing users' attention and their personal data. Herbert A. Simon was the first to address the concept of attention economics, recognizing that attention serves as "the bottleneck of human thought" and that an abundance of information results in a scarcity of attention (Ben Saghir, 2023, pp150). The proliferation of digital spaces and the openness of information have led to a diversification of information sources, which in turn has contributed to the fragmentation of users' attention amidst the plethora of brief videos produced by content creators. Many of these creators employ various strategies, which can be summarized as follows:

1-Politics of Buzz:

Content creators on digital platforms strive to cultivate a following through the politics of "buzz," a socio-cultural phenomenon emblematic of the image-centric era. The primary objective for individuals in this era is to generate the highest levels of "buzz." To comprehend "buzz" as a digital phenomenon, it is essential to consider its linguistic origins, which refer to the sound produced by the flight of flies. The incessant movements of flies encapsulate the essence of "buzz." In the realm of advertising and publicity, "buzz" is associated with the repeated discussion of a specific product to stimulate its consumption and demand. Consequently, "buzz" becomes a mimetic phenomenon, enabling individuals to perform theatrically before others, adhering to the conditions of theatricality to ensure engagement and accumulate clicks and monthly metrics. These metrics are often exploited by focusing on provocative topics such as religion, sex, and politics (TRT Arabic, 2019). This approach aims to influence algorithmic systems and their features, such as hashtags and trending topics.

2. Passive Scrolling through the Reels Policy:

To elucidate the interactions of users within digital environments and the excessive consumption of content provided by creators, particularly in the context of the TikTok application's rise to global prominence due to its emphasis on reels and short videos not exceeding 60 seconds, which subsequently proliferated across other social networks such as Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube, a novel habit has emerged among users. This habit, characterized by continuous screen scrolling, is referred to by researcher Melissa Hunt as (Ben Saghir, 2023, pp151). This phenomenon is exploited by company owners and social network proprietors to propagate policies, ideological discourses, and globalized ideas, thereby framing users under the guise of digital freedom.

Chapter Two :

1-Manifestations of banality culture in digital spaces:

1.1 The culture of triviality: A reading of the concept and principles:

The meaning of the word triviality in Arabic dictionaries revolves around triviality, meaning, and worthlessness; this phenomenon has become a "culture of triviality." The culture of triviality" is sought through digital spaces through what is known as one of the most prominent manifestations of triviality is that it is based on the leadership of trivial people who influence the following audiences, especially the rising generation known as Generation Z, which feeds and promotes triviality.

Alain Deneault posits that the digital era and communication networks constitute a system of banality, facilitating numerous inconsequential digital practices. From this perspective, a banality system is

fundamentally rooted in the triviality of all things. When examining communication networks, it becomes evident that the creators of the most prominent content, who successfully cultivate a substantial audience, prioritize strategies grounded in the principle of banality. This concept can be further elucidated through the following points: (Alain, 2020, pp28-60-61)

-Spectacle (showiness) and vulgarity:

Some individuals aspire to achieve enduring recognition through what is termed "selfish fame." This phenomenon is exemplified by numerous celebrities on platforms such as TikTok, where the live streaming feature is utilized to deliver provocative content and challenge societal norms for monetary gain.

-Exaggerating details:

The strategy of exaggerating details and proselytizing is prevalent among those who engage in such activities, particularly within the Arab digital context. This trend is characterized by the dissemination of cultural globalization standards and the integration of Western cultural elements into Arab societies. Examples include the public revelation of fetal gender, the celebration of Halloween, the display of opulent residences, and the decline of traditional fashion under the influence of prevailing trends. In this context, Thorstein Veblen (1857-1929), an American economist and sociologist, elucidated in his work "The Theory of the Leisure Class" that the primary activity of the affluent class is "conspicuous consumption." With technological advancements, this pursuit has become a central objective for millennials and digital opinion leaders.

-Wooden language:

The most important linguistic tool for banality is the wooden language. Hollow speech, valid for all times and places. It also refers to tautology, which can be found in user comments and live broadcasts across digital spaces, such as: Press press, I want a lion,

2.1 Reasons for the Dominance of Triviality Culture:

The Distortion of success standards is one of the reasons for triviality created by interactive virtual spaces. There was an old saying that went, "If you want to achieve success or fame, you must do something that almost breaks the norm." Therefore, only those who deserved fame for their heroic deeds or accomplishing what others could not celebrate. However, in our current reality, we see a saying that goes, "The more trivial you are, the more famous you become." Just look at youths using digital spaces and the time they spend. Simply search for the worst thing you can find, and realize its trend. Simply search for those who violate ethical rules or public morals, and you will know that this is the main topic of discussion today. You will have opinions debating it, and the public will engage with it day and night. Alternatively, even more dangerous, you will find some recipients who delve into this discussion, giving it a significant portion of their digital usage and unaware that they are deepening, impacting, and expanding this triviality. If we trace the reasons for the spread of the problem of triviality and its increasing effects, we find that they revolve around: (said, 2023)

- ❖ The phenomenon of triviality emerges from diverse and overlapping sources, contributing to a continuous and far-reaching flow of superficial content. It is not confined to specific individuals, platforms, or time periods.
- ❖ The endorsement of trivial figures by major institutions—including media, political, social, and cultural bodies—legitimizes and normalizes trivial content in the public sphere.
- ❖ Commercial enterprises reinforce the status of trivial influencers by recruiting them to promote products, thus strengthening their visibility and public appeal.

- ❖ The success of trivial content depends on its ability to entertain and emotionally satisfy audiences without challenging their preferences, often at the expense of ethical values, truth, and critical thought.
- ❖ A lack of meaningful purpose and direction among many youth renders them vulnerable to the influence of triviality during a critical phase of identity formation.
- ❖ The fragmentation and weakening of personal and cultural identity, particularly the erosion of a strong Islamic identity, undermines resistance to external ideological influences, including anti-Islamic narratives.
- ❖ The decline in religiosity and spiritual awareness creates fertile ground for the spread of triviality and the absorption of dominant, often conflicting, cultural norms.
- ❖ A sense of emotional and moral emptiness deepens the appeal of shallow and entertaining content, replacing deeper sources of fulfillment.
- ❖ The abundance of environments that promote triviality, alongside the scarcity of educational and value-based spaces, creates an imbalance that favors superficial engagement.
- ❖ The weakening of the family's role in moral and intellectual upbringing allows trivial sources to become dominant in shaping values and behavior.
- ❖ Many young people experience a disconnect from older generations, feeling misunderstood and unsupported. This drives them to retreat into isolated digital spheres where trivial content is prevalent.
- ❖ The rise of an entitlement mentality among youth—marked by a belief in rights without corresponding responsibilities—further distances them from shared values, discipline, and purposeful engagement.

In a further effort to elucidate the manner in which social media contributes to trivialization, it becomes evident that the primary factors underpinning this phenomenon are psychological in nature, particularly the amplification of the ego within individuals. This may be characterized by some as narcissism. The manifestations of ego across these platforms include the following: (said, 2023)

- ❖ The phenomenon of trending involves the creation of content that distinguishes itself among other materials, thereby attracting increased views, comments, and interest. The intrinsic quality of the content is secondary, provided it remains engaging, whether through dance, humor, or other means.
- ❖ The pursuit of accumulating likes, red hearts, and emojis on social media platforms can be attributed to a psychological compulsion rooted in ego. Additionally, the tendency to amass a large number of friends on social media pages and to boast about this, alongside the sharing of personal life details, regardless of their triviality, is prevalent.

- ❖ phenomenon of individuals assuming the role of social reformers is widespread on these networking applications. This behavior is one of the manifestations of ego present on these platforms, which have facilitated the emergence of such personalities among the majority of users.

3.1 The algorithmic generation of a culture of triviality across digital spaces:

Robert Michels believes that no society can exist without a ruling or political class. A government or state can only be a body composed of a minority, and this minority aims to impose a "legal order" on the rest of society, which is in reality the sum of the total requirements of controlling and exploiting the masses. Even when mass dissatisfaction culminates in a successful attempt to deprive the bourgeoisie of power, this is only apparent, as a newly organized minority always necessarily emerges and elevates itself to the rank of the ruling class (Alain, 2020,pp57). Digital transformation and algorithmic power have become tools for controlling and directing public opinion and generating cultures that are circulated across digital spaces, such as the culture of illusion, digital ostentation, and triviality. The latter is generated algorithmically according to various communication policies, including "hashtag politics, trend politics, and the warm button..." Accessing and navigating the digital world, and its free nature, offers you personal information in exchange for it, allowing them to predict behaviors and change needs and beliefs. This is achieved through the continuous monitoring of users using social networking algorithms, as mentioned previously, in terms of their ability to highlight and promote certain personalities. This is what digital influencers exploit to achieve fame and a fan base by deceiving the algorithmic system and pushing specific content that feeds their fan base. Their process of publishing content is based on the nature of each application's work and not on the extent of creativity or content. For example, Instagram is based on a preference for reels over photos. To maintain followers and drive viewers to the profile, reels must be created. Stagnant posts, in addition to relying on the attention economy, are a policy based on besieging users with information and advertisements, and even relying on the "buzz" policy to gain the largest possible number of followers .(ella, , 2023,pp150-151)

Therefore, we can address the most important mechanisms for the emergence of trivial content and superficiality across digital spaces in the following points.

• Heating button:

Numerous studies have confirmed that the prominence of some content over others and the dominance of some content creators, especially those with trivial and low-quality content, is due to what is known as the heating button. This is an internal button that allows the owners and employees of the application to select specific videos to go viral. There is a method to manually boost the reach of videos by using a heating button. Citing a report by Forbes magazine, TikTok often uses the "heating" tactic to attract influencers and brands and entice them to partner with it by inflating the views of certain videos. (neves, 2023)

• Trend Politics:

American writer Shoshana Zuboff argues that the "surveillance capitalism" we currently live under aims to track our attentional movements to the point that our future behaviors can be monitored, predicted, and algorithmically framed. This is achieved through a variety of policies, including "trends," or the most popular trend, which can be misleading and artificial, using what is known as electronic flies and fake accounts that make a person more famous or an issue more popular. Trends, whether in the form of "challenges" on TikTok or as an event that imposes itself, generating a unified topic of discussion that engages users around the world or in a specific region, are at the heart of attention-grabbing culture. This trend, embraced by thousands and sometimes millions, helps algorithms recognize our preferences (and sometimes create them), thus managing and targeting advertisements in a personalized manner that ensures the continuation of our consumption. (Joy, , 2022)

• **Supporting Cringe Contents:**

"We have to face the reality that 96% of people have very trivial needs," explains Gao Han, a senior user interface designer and employee number 22 at bytedance, the company that owns TikTok. "This is in terms of the nature of their interactions across digital spaces and the content they prefer. We are in an age of digital triviality, rewarding trivialities and tokenizing them. Many social media networks operate under this logic, including TikTok. The latter rewards everyone who films and interacts with Cringes because this means more data for the app and, consequently, more profit for TikTok. TikTok encourages users, whether in terms of digital appearance or financial gain through live broadcasts and gifts from supporters, to attract attention, even if it means acting stupidly or dangerously. (Arafa, , 2024,pp66)

According to TikTok's algorithmic system, which is primarily based on promoting users' first videos to new users, regardless of how cringey or vulgar their content is, this gives them modicum of attention and fame. The higher the content, the more attention it attracts, and the more engagement and interaction it generates, under what is known as the "algorithmic heat button" principle. In light of this digital prominence, many users seek to create buzz and break taboos to gain fame and influence over algorithms. Similarly, it is necessary to address the concept of cringe, a term that has become more common among digital platform users. Following the spread of cringe comedy at the beginning of the third millennium through television programs and series, such as *The Office* and *It's Always Sunny in Philadelphia*, this type of comedy has risen to new levels as we enter the virtual realm, where clowning has become a daily practice and a tool available to everyone, not just comedians. Although there is no approved Arabic translation for this term yet, the concept of cringe is strongly present in Arabic content and has become a core value underlying a vast number of pages, videos, and posts bearing the title "Cringe." By this, we mean a type of comedy that, in addition to laughter, generates intense feelings of disgust and discomfort at the point of shuddering. This comedy borrows its name from the English term "cringe," which describes the internal shudder involuntarily caused by embarrassing social situations that provoke disgust and shame. These scenes force us to look away, but we find ourselves drawn to them. (Nahla, 2022)

Conclusion:

In conclusion, we can say that digital technology and the suitability of artificial intelligence have led to changes in many socio-digital practices, especially in light of the algorithmic structure of social media networks, which has altered the nature of communication and the media landscape. Many users exploit these networks to achieve fame and a fan base with trivial and superficial content aimed at distorting public awareness and plunging users into a digital maze of fabricated and artificial images and symbols, fed and generated through the various algorithmic mechanisms explained in this article. Through this argument, we have demonstrated that algorithmic feeding renders societal facts obscured and open to interpretation and doubt, creating an uncertain digital age in which objective facts are less influential in public opinion than societal feelings and emotions. This strategy is exploited by many creators of trivial and entertaining content to gain a digital presence and subsequent fame. The trivial nature of these content creators is evident according to the thesis of the thinker. Canadian Alain Deneault created a wooden digital language, exaggerating trivial details, ostentation, and vulgarity under the name of cringe content, which created a trivial digital context that must be moralized.

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