

Emerging Resentment in Social Networking Websites

Feelings (re)production from the
physical to the virtual square.

by Elisabetta Risi

(elisabetta.risi@gmail.com) –

University of Milan-Italy



Research objectives

This study aims to:

- n analyze the digital cultural practices of sharing and participation in special events
- n reflect on the construction processes of the socio-communicative representations that:
 - n involving the area of feelings
 - n are communicated and re-mediated online through emotional constructs



Affective fabrics

- n The web, in particular social web
 - n functions as *repository* of the web-mediated emotions (Fortunati, 2009)
 - n is becoming a place where permanent and searchable information (boyd, 2008) about moods are shared in real time (often by low-reflection)
 - n could be a creator and diffuser of feelings, since its capabilities suggest emotional styles and practices of expression
 - n is able to capture and (ri)orient emotional flows



Research subject: online (re)sentment

- n Theoretical frameworks are based on constructionist epistemology (to the sociology of emotions and feelings, see Doyle McCarthy, 1995) that assumes affects are generated and (re)produced in daily social contexts and their meaning is culturally and socially built
- n This study focuses in particular on the resentment, as it was considered as an heuristic category suitable for interpreting some social relations in the late modernity



Research subject: online resentment

- n Modernity: social resentment was vented through class conflict (see Barbalet, 1993) or against a common enemy (it has been identified in particular in those conflicts that continue over time, Retzinger & Scheff, 2007)
- n Late modernity: the social resentment development seems to concern the subjective patterns of individuals, in specific contexts
- n We explored the role that may be attributed to the online relations and communications in the processes of production, elaboration and possible 'sublimation' of resentment



The research case study

- n An empirical research has investigated how resentment is narrated, showed and shared through the online user-generated contents
- n The research focuses on UGCs:
 - n about the issue of the violent act of launching an object -a souvenir of the Milan Cathedral- against the face of the Italian Prime Minister Berlusconi by a subject with mental health problems
 - n since immediately following the occurrence (13 December 2009), until the end of April 2010



Methodology

- n Qualitative content analysis of (textual) messages published on Facebook
- n Narrative approach → the network is considered a *meta-narrative* medium (although increasingly consisting by multimedia languages)
- n Sample: messages of Facebook groups, fan pages, discussion forums
 - n all Facebook Pages; Groups and forums in Italian with at least 50 "members" (a total of approximately 200 online environments)
- n Emotional components considered: both explicitly (through verbal or symbolic cues) or implicitly emerged (interpreting the mood of the messages online)



Main findings

- n Social re-construction of the event through (social) media content → from the physical to the virtual square
- n Online social networks sites allow/support the proliferation of 'expressive' communities: online community built around the emergence of a particular emotions and feelings
- n The online narratives have used the structural semantics of the resentment:
 - n the victim, the offender, the scapegoat



Findings: online feelings (re)production

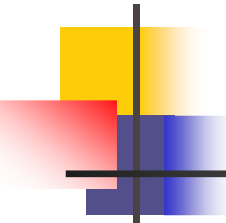
- n On the one hand in the online social networks as (emotions) sharing environments the energy of resentment-related violence has been (over)exposed and amplified
 - n the UGCs proliferation was “simplistically” sometimes interpreted by Italian mass media as representative of public opinion of Italians

- n The web seems (on the other hand):
 - n to play a dissipatory role regarding resentment
 - n facilitating the processes of rumination which characterise the structure of this feeling



Two possible direction

- n So in the medium-long term the social sharing of feelings online could
 - n be generative of potential social conflict
 - n lead to forms of *collective rumination* (Risi, in press) à online stories are the most visible (and public!) tip of the iceberg of individual resentment

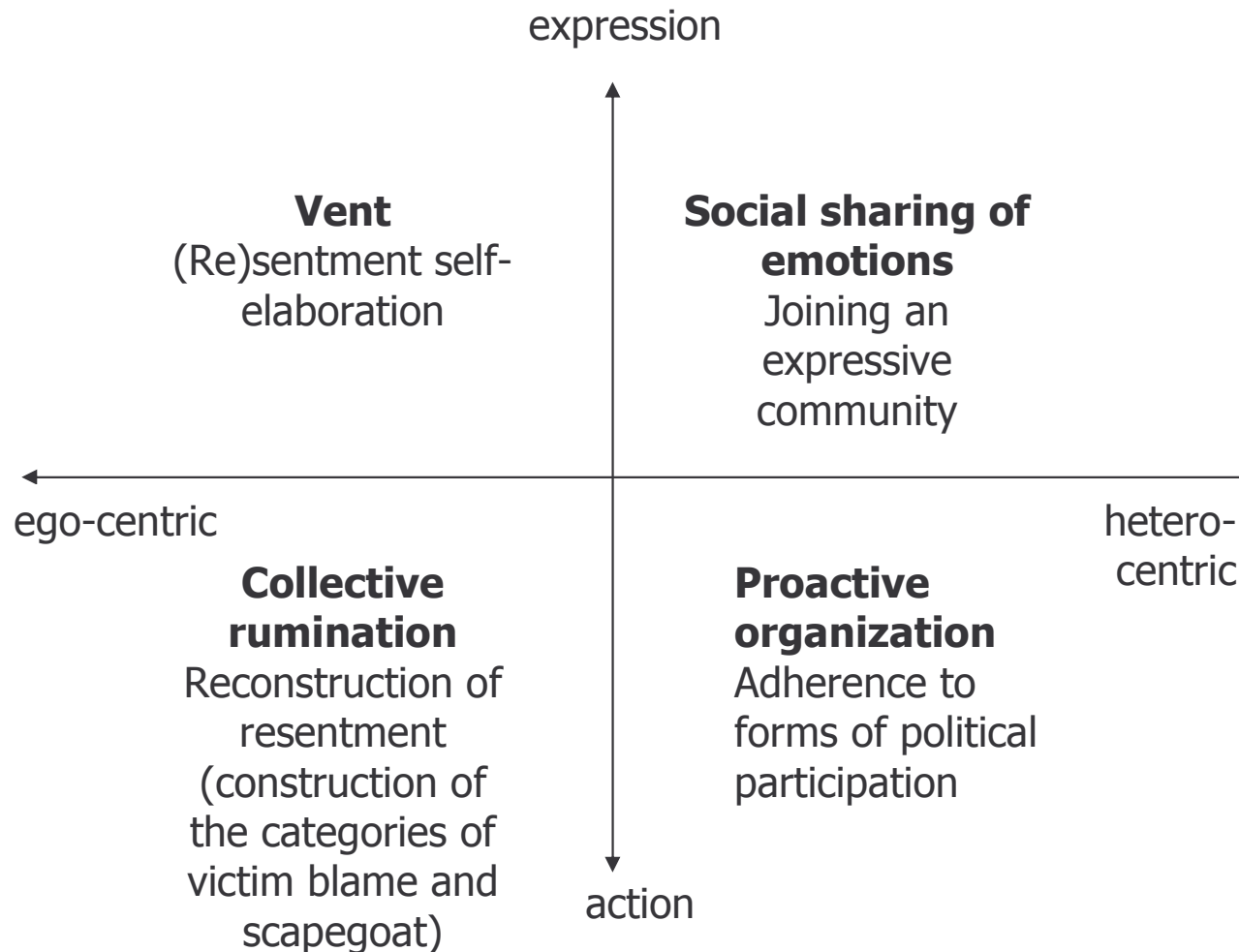


Semantic model of textual UGCs analysis

- n We have created a model of reading UGCs by the Italian viewers (especially medial) of the *launch of the statuette*
- n We have identified two axes which may represent:
 - n the main messages functions (expression vs. action)
 - n dimension of users involvement (ego-centric vs. hetero-centric)
- n In each of four quadrants could be inserted the online narrative (textual fragments: posts, comments, etc.) that are shared on Facebook



Typologies of narratives





Tipologies of narratives

- n From self...

- n Vent: writing online (even if by short fragments of narratives, such as post, comment, quote) allows the expression and processing their feelings
- n Collective rumination: each member identifies the guilty or the scapegoat against which to vent resentment (Berlusconi, Tartaglia, the *caste* politicians). Not propose collective action à self-representation community



Tipologies of narratives

- n To others...

- n Social sharing of emotions: resentment is socially developed in online communities, through emotional sharing (and it could evaporate/resolve)
 - n Proactive organization: from the virtual to the physical square. Online narratives seem (sometimes) to move towards forms of political participation that have a territorial anchoring