Chapter 9
The Influence of Groupthink on Culture and Conflict in Twitter

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ABSTRACT

Groupthink puts pressure on individuals to conform to social norms, but anonymity has been found to reduce or lessen such influence. Apart from anonymity, the significance of the topic and self-censorship may or may not contribute to the influence of groupthink. Groupthink has been studied in the context of social media using various approaches, but to date it remains unclear how much and to what extent it influences the conflict among users within this cultural context. This chapter describes approaches to studying the influence of groupthink on the users of an open social media platform (e.g., Twitter) and proposes a methodology for conducting a study. Using data from a selected hashtag, it reports on the application of theory to research, considers the role and influence of groupthink, and discusses the implications of the findings for reconceptualizing approaches to the study of new media.

INTRODUCTION

In six main sections, this chapter systematically reviews contemporary research on groupthink, exploring its influence on culture and conflict to formulate a theoretical framework for studying the influence of groupthink on culture and conflict. It reports
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on an empirical test of that model within an online open community and discusses
the findings and implications for understanding and reconceptualizing new media,
before concluding.

BACKGROUND

A Review of the Groupthink Literature in Newer Media Settings

Overview

This chapter presents the outcomes of conducting a keyword search of groupthink,
social networking sites (SNS), culture, conflict and related terms in selected
databases in communication, focusing on Twitter. The rationale for focusing on
Twitter is based on the growing prevalence and use of Twitter as a social diary and
as a popular site for intercultural connection and conflict interaction. Twitter is a
medium for intercultural connections and expressions and conflict interactions that
may be integrative and disruptive. In the absence of a comprehensive review of
social media since the review of scholarship on SNS (Boyd & Ellison, 2008) and
later research on social networking sites spanning 2004-2015 (Meng, Martinez,
Holmstrom, Chung, & Cox, 2017), there is need for an overarching theoretical
framework and a method for studying SNS as an evolving aspect of new media
reconceptualization in human communication. Current concepts are presented in
this first section. This presentation begins with defining groupthink, its precursors or
predisposing conditions, and proceeds by defining culture, intercultural connections,
conflict, conflict interactions, social networking sites and Twitter.

Concepts

Groupthink, based on Janis’ (1972) social psychological theory, is characterized by a:

mode of thinking in which individual members of small cohesive groups tend to accept
a viewpoint or conclusion that represents a perceived group consensus, whether or
not the group members believe it to be valid, correct, or optimal. Groupthink reduces
the efficiency of collective problem solving within such groups (Schmidt, 2013).

Groupthink is associated with the desire to fit in, modifying our individual
opinions so that they move in the direction of a consensus, avoiding speaking out
based on one’s beliefs to keeping quiet to avoid causing problems (Katopol, 2015).
When there is dissent on social media such as Twitter, how do persons respond? It
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