



Incivility in Social Media Language: Reasons and Impacts on People's Thoughts and Attitudes

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Abstract

Incivility is currently invading social media, giving rise to deterioration in language used within the virtual world. Most apparent examples are from the West, where the widespread of social media in different fields of life has reached its utmost. Although scholars did not agree on a common definition of incivility, a plethora of them attempted to find out the reasons of its spread in social media language, and its relation with people's perceptions, polarization, and toxicity. Thus, this paper aims at shedding light on the effects of this phenomenon on the language used in social media with its different aspects: social, political and psychological. For this sake, we shall critically review and analyze literature on this topic, and deduce some conclusions about the reasons for incivility in social media language and its impacts on people's thoughts and attitudes. The findings will show that incivility is not only related to media users' personalities but may have roots in their social and cultural environments, in addition to people's perceptions to what is civil or uncivil as well. Moreover, the capacity to tolerate disagreement and the compliance of social media users with norms may constitute the best ways to control incivility in online comments, debates and discussions.

Keywords: Incivility, media language, impacts, attitudes, norms/values.

ملخص

تغزو الفظاظمة اللغوية حالياً وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي، مما أدى إلى تدهور اللغة المستخدمة في العالم الافتراضي. و تأتي أبرز الأمثلة على ذلك من الغرب، حيث بلغ انتشار وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي أوجه في مختلف مجالات الحياة. و رغم اختلاف العلماء بشأن تعريف الفظاظمة، إلا أنّ ثلّة منهم حاولت معرفة أسباب انتشارها في لغة وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي، و علاقتها بتصوّرات الناس و استقطابهم و سميتهم. و من هنا، يهدف هذا البحث إلى تسليط الضوء على تأثيرات هذه الظاهرة في اللغة المستخدمة في وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي بجوانبها المتعددة: الاجتماعية و السياسية و النفسية. من أجل ذلك، سنقوم بمراجعة الأدبيات المتعلقة بهذا الموضوع و تحليلها بطريقة نقدية، و من ثمّ استخلاص بعض النتائج بشأن

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أسباب تداول الفظاظ في لغة التواصل الاجتماعي وتأثيرها على أفكار الناس و مواقفهم. تبين النتائج أن الفظاظ اللغوية لا تتعلق بشخصيات مستخدمي وسائل الإعلام فحسب، بل قد تكون لها جذور في بيئاتهم الاجتماعية و الثقافية، علاوة على تصورات الأفراد لما هو مهذب أو غير مهذب. بالإضافة إلى ذلك، فإن القدرة على تقبل الاختلاف و مدى امتثال مستخدمي وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي للمعايير قد تشكل أنجع الطرائق للسيطرة على الفظاظ في التعليقات و المناقشات و المحادثات عبر الإنترنت.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الفظاظ، اللغة الإعلامية، الخطاب السياسي، محادثات وسائل التواصل الاجتماعي، السمية، الإدراك، الاستقطاب، اللغة المهذبة/ غير المهذبة، الإيذاء، المعايير/القيم.

Introduction

Online incivility is a widespread phenomenon nowadays. Its forms can be found everywhere in the networks. However, scholars did not agree upon a common definition of incivility since many factors are involved and should be well analyzed before determining its essence and shapes. One can face incivility frequently as it becomes part of our daily life. We can find it in the street, at work, in class, in the media, and even at home. It has shaped our views and thoughts so that it no longer affects us, and, in a certain way, we get used to it to the extent that it is now seen as an attraction, especially in political discourse.

Online incivility made its appearance with the technological progress that our era witnessed; in western countries, it reached a higher level mainly in the political discourse. It is also spreading among social networks sites' users (SNS). As a result, our language is getting ruder in these virtual environments due to a lack of face-to-face contact which encourages some users to resort to uncivil language without fear from any payoff.

In this paper, we try to explore the theme of incivility in social media, taking the case of the USA as a sample. It is based on a critical analysis of the literature related to the topic and deducing the main reasons and impacts of online incivility. It also attempts to define the correlations between incivility and other aspect, like: democratic norms, politeness, rudeness, social norms, polarization, victimization, ideologies, and personality patterns.

We have chosen a varied literature mainly from American universities. We tried to critically analyze it to achieve our purpose which is to show the harmful impacts of online incivility on people's thoughts and attitudes.

This work is divided into five sections, in addition to the introduction and conclusion. First, we define online incivility and determine its types and forms. Then, we investigate scholars' views on the reasons for its spread and its impact on people's thoughts and attitudes. Finally, we try to deduce some conclusions concerning the solutions to this problem and whether it is possible to get rid of it or not. A suggestion for further research is made at the end of the paper.

1. Definition of Incivility

Incivility is endangering social norms of politeness and decency. It is invading the social media discussions that are replacing gradually face-to-face ones.

Incivility in social media was discussed by Frischlich L. et al. (2021, p.196) who quoted: "Incivility is a "notoriously difficult term to define" (Coe, Kenski, & Rains, 2014, p. 660). Since individuals' views of reality are different, they are quite divergent concerning what's civil or uncivil language is; this is what Chen G. M. (2017) confirmed, "What difficult to come up with a rule of what incivility means or even describe discourse that is consistently viewed as uncivil. Part of the reason for the confusion is that our own experiences influence

what we see as uncivil." (p. 5). We can go further than this opinion by suggesting that not only our experiences are involved but the environment we live in, and our cultural values have an impact on our perceptions and attitudes, as well. Thus, our experiences are generally influenced by these two factors and are reflected in our social media language. So, what may be considered by an individual, with certain values, uncivil may not be so for another individual from a different community. This is what has been enforced by the assertion of Benson (2011): "it (incivility) is always situational and contestable." (Cited in Rega & Marchetti, 2021, p.110), that shows that incivility is part of our linguistic background influenced by the environment (situation) in which it is uttered.

While there is a consensus that incivility can be understood as norm transgressing communication (Kenski, Coe, & Rains, 2020; Mutz, 2015; Papacharissi, 2004)". This leads us to determine which norms are most apparently touched by uncivil reactions. Generally, two types of norms are distinguished, norms related to interpersonal communication and norms related to intergroup communication. Muddiman (2017) refers to these two types as transgressions of personal norms— "Communication that violates the norms of politeness" (Mutz, 2015, p. 6)— and transgressions of public norms—messages that "threaten a collective founded on democratic norms" (Papacharissi, 2004, p. 271). So, incivility does not concern people as individuals only, but even the groups' and communities' interactions as a whole. On the personal level, it is related to comments and discussions that go beyond politeness rules, while on the collective level, it concerns the reactions that transgress the essence of democracy. This is what we witness during electoral campaigns and political discussions among people of different political parties who try to defend their ideas through violent comments and critiques.

As far as the political context is concerned, incivility turned to an essential strategy to get votes especially in western countries; it is defined as "a manner of offensive discussion that impedes the democratic ideal of deliberation (Papacharissi, 2004; Shill, 1992, as cited in Anderson A. A. & al., 2014, p.375). In this sense, incivility online can range from unrelated, rude critiques and name-calling (Jamieson, 1997) to outrageous claims and incensed discussion, which is also known as flaming (Papacharissi, 2004). Political incivility in the media is engendered by differences in opinions that may lead opponent parties to use uncivil language to support their thoughts. It has many forms and can cause deep harm for the recipients, and sometimes make SNS users withdraw from the discussion and change their opinions. Otto Lukas P. et al. (2020) have discussed the different forms of political incivility in the media, and defined it as follows:

Incivility includes statements that show not only divergence of opinion and confrontation—which are part of every conflict—but that also show a deliberate lack of respect for an opponent, as well as language and behaviour that expresses this lack of respect in a hyperbolic manner. This also distinguishes incivility from negativity (i.e., a negative statement can be respectful and moderate.(p.90)

Incivility must be distinguished from other attitudes such as impoliteness and negativity; the former can be included as a form of incivility whereas the latter is a pessimistic and sceptical attitude that always expects the worst, which may not be disrespectful, so not uncivil.

From all the aforementioned definitions, we can say that most scholars agreed that incivility, and especially online incivility, is a transgression to interpersonal or intergroup norms. It is seen as a misuse of language in social media. Political incivility is common in

western countries during electoral campaigns and is used as a strategy to attract more viewers and supporters, by attracting their attention to the weaknesses of the opponents.

All in all, incivility has got many forms and types which can be concretised through uncivil behaviours or attitudes, in addition to language, which is the subject of this paper.

2. The Forms of Online Incivility

From what has been said in the previous section, incivility, and especially online incivility refers to any language that does not conform to private or public norms. It is often linked to impoliteness or rudeness, although several scholars think it is more than that. Chen G. M. (2017, p.6) affirms that incivility must exhibit at least one of three main attributes: insulting language or name-calling; profanity; and a larger category that encompasses stereotypes, and homophobic, racist, sexist, and xenophobic terms that may at times dip into hate speech. All these types of messages would be considered rude, but he also does not see incivility as synonymous with rudeness. Instead, he suggests that incivility goes beyond rudeness. That supports the definitions aforementioned (Look: section1) Uncivil language lies in three types of messages: insulting language, name-calling, and hate speech, depending on the context of the discussion and the topic being discussed. Henceforth, it is, most often, a reaction entailed by personal motives or in-group ones. On this basis, we can distinguish two main forms of incivility: personal and intergroup incivility.

- ***Interpersonal incivility***: is related to the individual's norms which may differ from one person to another. This type is characterized by a transgression of norms of politeness, as Gagliardone and al. (2016, p.19) suggested labelling this type as 'offensive speech' often studied under labels like 'flaming' (e.g., O'Sullivan & Flanagan, 2003), 'trolling' (Buckels, Trapnell, & Paulhus, 2014), or 'cyber-bullying' (e.g., Festl, 2016; van Geel, Goemans, Toprak, & Vedder, 2017). That was enforced by Chen G. M. (2017) saying that, "Incivility is part of aversive speech that both violates what is considered normal in conversation and also has the potential to cause harm. On the mildest side, calling someone 'stupid' would fit my definition of incivility." (p.6)

If we try to make some distinctions among the mentioned uncivil reactions, we can present 'flaming' as the act of posting insults, often including profanity or another offensive language, on the *internet*. In parallel, we have 'trolling' which is the deliberate action of posting offensive or unkind comments or thoughts on the internet to upset other users or start an argument with them. Cyber-bullying can occur through SMS, Text, and apps, or online in social media, forums, or gaming where people can view, participate in, or share content. It includes sending, posting, or sharing negative, harmful, false, or mean content about someone else. It can include sharing personal or private information about someone else causing embarrassment or humiliation. Some cyber bullying crosses the line into unlawful or criminal acts.

These different forms of personal incivility have the potential to harm individuals, whether intentionally or not, and may engender deep psychological effects on the recipients.

- **Intergroup incivility:** it has a larger sphere as it touches public norms of groups of people; it is presented as “‘hate speech’ (Silva, Mondal, Correa, Benevenuto, & Weber, 2016) intersecting with phenomena such as discrimination, racism, or ‘group-focussed enmity’ and sometimes characterized as ‘harmful’ or ‘dangerous speech’.” (cited in Frischlich L. & al. 2021, p. 196) So, intergroup incivility concerns a type of speech that alters democratic norms in the society and is most of the time destined to ethnic groups or racial or religious minorities. It is qualified by ‘dangerous’ since it engenders harmful and violent behaviours from the supporters of such ideas towards the targeted groups. An example of such incivility is ‘President Donald Trump’s assertion, in his 2015 campaign announcement speech, that Mexican immigrants were “rapists” would constitute uncivil discourse because it is a sweeping pejorative statement that defames a group.’ (Chen, 2017, p.6)

This kind of incivility is widespread in western societies that don't tolerate differences and ethnic diversity in their countries; they are nurtured by a certain political discourse that privileges 'hate speech' as a means to attract viewers and supporters or voters.

Overall, online incivility is a multidimensional phenomenon that has several faces and can affect individuals or entire communities. However, it is very important to know the reasons behind these kinds of attitudes, and the use of such uncivil language in social media.

3.The Reasons for Online Incivility

As we explained above, incivility has many faces and can be practised through different channels; among them is the media. However, what incites SNS users to perpetrate it is complex and may have different roots.

3.1. Psychological Reasons

Psychological theories relate linguistic manifestations and attitudes to some psychological factors which will be discussed in this section.

Jessor’s problematic behaviour theory (1991; Jessor & Jessor, 1977) argues that “norm-transgressing behaviour, such as uncivil participation, results from the interplay between a person’s characteristics, his or her environment, and, most importantly, that person’s perceptions of said environment.” (Cited in Frischlich L. & al. 2021, p.196). According to this theory, the environment, personality, and behaviour work in conjunction to either increase or decrease the risk for problem behaviours, and where the presence of one problem behaviour increases the likelihood of others, thus causing various problem behaviours to cluster together among at-risk individuals. So, uncivil language is the consequence of the interference of three main factors, of which two of them are psychological: the person's characteristics, his environment, and his perception of this environment. That means that what is considered by some people uncivil in one country, may be well accepted by others living in a different environment with different cultures, customs, and social norms. This is why, incivility spreads in some parts of the world rather than others, simply because in those specific regions what we perceive as uncivil is considered there as a pure practice of democratic norms.

Many psychological theories attribute the use of violent and harmful language in the media to psychological factors and individuals' personalities. "Norm-transgressing behaviour has been frequently associated with the so-called 'dark triad.' The dark triad describes three sub-clinical forms of offensive personalities: 'narcissism,' 'Machiavellianism,' and 'psychopathy'" (Paulhus & Williams, 2002, cited in Frischlich L. & al. 2021, p.197). Frischlich L. et al. indicated that these three personality patterns have three main common points that make them susceptible of committing incivility, which are: a sense of grandiosity, manipulateness, and lack of empathy.

Some comments and harsh language are due to these personality patterns, especially in social media where there are no boundaries; these types of people are more likely to perpetrate bullying and trolling. (Frischlich L. & al. 2021, p.197)

Furthermore, anonymity and lack of pay-off generate a feeling of freedom and loss of individuality, which push internet users to become part of the mob and get involved in uncivil discussions without limits or fear of punishment. In fact, "Anonymity and a lack of social cues in some online environments can accentuate, for instance, a sense of "deindividuation with the effect of disinhibiting users' behavior. (Chen & Berger, 2013; Oz, Zheng, & Chen, 2018)." (Rega, Marchetti, 2021, p.115) In social psychology, online incivility provokes the attempt to show one's feelings without shyness because internet users don't use their real names and can easily escape punishment from society. Thus, the danger will be higher since there is no compliance to any rule or norm to control online discussions.

Human beings tend to be closer to those sharing the same cultural features and ideological trends. In contrast, they resent anyone behaving against these thoughts. This has been proved historically, in different fields, and most apparently in the political one, which will be discussed in the following section.

3.2. Ideological Motivations

Some scholars link the spread of incivility among SNS users to political ideologies. Commonly, parties' members or supporters start uncivil discussions due to ideas' divergences, mainly because they don't tolerate other opinions, although it is an important factor in democratic practices. "In a series of interviews with users who produce hate speech, Erjavec and Kovačič (2012) identified ideological motivations, like defending one's in-group against a perceived enemy, as the core characteristics of a certain type of uncivil actors, the so-called "believers." They found out that ideology shapes people's ideas and attitudes and induces them to use hate speech to defend it in face of opponents. This phenomenon is perceived during electoral campaigns in which it reaches its utmost. They consider the other party (Democrats / Republicans) as a potential 'enemy' whom they can attack in social media using uncivil language for the sake of defending its position in the political arena.

These results are supported by an experiment with 935 participants representing all classes of American society, conducted by Chen G. M. (2017) that predicts that uncivil disagreement can jumpstart a chain reaction that leads to greater political participation. The results show that when people were confronted with news story comments that disagree with their views in a nasty way, this led first to negative emotions and then to great intention to get

politically involved. This experiment enforces the higher potential of incivility to draw people to produce uncivil contributions.

Incivility marked different political periods in America and demonstrated the power of language in shaping ideas and provoking aggressive attitudes. For instance, "during the first sixty years of the nineteenth century, the discourse of the Congress went from bad to worse, as the dispute over slavery got hotter and hotter and the possibility of a peaceful solution faded. There are records of fistfights and invitations to duels on the floor of Congress." (Lakoff, 2021, p.64) So, uncivil language may degenerate into violent behaviours. The most striking period was McCarthy's one (1947 -1957) called McCarthyism. The Republican senator was well known for alleging that numerous Communists and [Soviet](#) spies and sympathizers had infiltrated the United States federal government, universities, film industry, and elsewhere. As a result, the USA witnessed a 'new incivility' via mass media that led to accusing many famous people, actors, politicians, and scholars of belonging to the "Reds". Many of those accusations were not founded, and that engendered a state of phobia against the potential enemy of the Cold War, the Soviet Union.

Nowadays, Politicians are relying on social media to spread their ideologies and political thoughts to get more supporters, and thus, more voters. Lakoff (2021) said in this context: "Politicians and others in the public eye have developed armies of specialists whose job it is to construct public meanings via the skilful manipulation of language: old-time speech-writers, image consultants, media advisors,...and many more "Just language" has become big business. If in Calvin Coolidge's time, the business of America was business, in ours the business of America is language." (p.20) Language is the vehicle of ideas and thoughts, it can reflect them and provoke a deep effect on social media users, especially when it's associated to images and sound." (Lakoff, 2021) That leads to the spread of uncivil language used to face violent and hate speech in the media among parties' supporters.

To sum up, incivility is used by politicians as a strategy to impose their ideas and get more supporters whose reaction will be quite uncivil if any member of the opposing party criticises or belittles their party. This leads us to speak about the language war which characterizes this era.

3.3 The Language War

Today, incivility affects our lives, it turned from mere semantics into pragmatics (Lakoff, 2021) This is due to the international context which was characterized, at a certain period, by the spread of conflicts that were nurtured by uncivil language. In this section we will tackle the deep effects of language on our lives, as Lakoff (2021) asserted, "Language is, and has always been, the means by which we construct and analyze what we call "reality".(p.20)

Our interpretation of the world is achieved through the language we use; moreover, it revealed itself as an important means to get power. When the individual masters the rhetoric, he gains the ability to speak on behalf of his community, and control their ideas. "We often consider language ... incompetent to be the motive force behind social change. The power to make language and through it meaning has been vested in one powerful group (typically

middle-and upper-class white males) for so long and so totally crazy.” (Lakoff, 2021, p.19) Meaning is the holder of power, and those who can express it rhetorically hold the power. Nevertheless, Lakoff seems to be against focalizing that power in a specific group, as linguistic experience is global, but in reality, only a minority is controlling meaning, which is represented by politicians, mainly. Furthermore, in the quest for this power, politicians require rhetorical skills, and sometimes uncivil language to attract people's attention to their speech and thoughts. This “crazy” manner is beneficial for politicians as it increases their popularity and leads voters to choose them.

These assumptions are supported by a study conducted by Chen G. M. and Pain P. (2019), in which they analyzed 30.386 of President Trump's Tweets, from May 2009 till January 2017. They used an interpretative qualitative analysis method, and focused on the characteristics of language and visuals as communication, with attention to the text and visual (McTavish and Pirro, 1990). They showed that Trump frequently casted himself as a political outsider who could alone save America. They found out that his racist and sexist language with his confrontational style left no room for deliberate discourse. His message may be populist in character, but it is aversive and uncivil and lacks normative attributes of deliberation that one would expect in the leader of a powerful nation, such as the USA.

The findings showed that 10.5% of his tweets were uncivil. The content and language of his tweets, especially the extensive use of words in all capital letters – a grammatical device linked to incivility (Chen, 2017) were striking. Very often, his tweets either angrily refuted what others were saying or reacted against perceived slights. For example, in a 2016 Tweet, Trump wrote, “HAPPY NEW YEAR to all, including to my many enemies and those who have fought me and lost so badly they just don't know what to do. Love!”

Moreover, Trump's tweets castigated people of colour, immigrants, women, and other marginalized groups with an uncivil speech in a disrespectful tone (Coe et al., 2014) For example, Trump used racially loaded terms, such as ‘thugs’, or denigrated immigrants by calling them 'disgusting'. In 2016, on the occasion of the protests against Trump's plans to build a wall at the US border with Mexico to keep immigrants out, he tweeted, "The protestors in New Mexico were thugs who were flying the Mexican flag. The rally inside was big and beautiful, but outside, criminals!"

So, these findings join our assumption that language is an arm, if used uncivilly it might transgress individuals' and groups' norms. Trump's use of Twitter was directed to polarize views and get more voters who shared the same views or just thought they shared these views, or their views were shared in specific contexts and situations.

Overall, incivility is a double-edged sword phenomenon; it can be positive, in some cases and contexts, but most of the time, harmful and has nasty impacts on individuals as well as groups of people.

4. The Impacts of Incivility on People's Thoughts and Attitudes

Social media are considered fundamental means of communication; they are replacing face-to-face interaction gradually. As said previously in this paper, incivility is provoking the spread of violent and uncivil language in social media, especially in political discussions and newspapers' comments.

When trolling, flaming, or hate speech are used against individuals or groups, they can generate many effects. The most apparent ones are: polarization, toxicity, and passive victimization.

4.1. Polarization

According to Lakoff (2021), incivility has become a catchword because of the polarization of views in public discourse. He affirmed, "We are continually mired in debates whose presuppositions permit no ground for compromise, give no quarter. Neither side is willing to acknowledge that there might be a middle ground. That leads inevitably to name-calling and ultimately even to death threats." (p.65) In fact, incivility engenders division among internet users and induces them to defend their factions' ideas; because there is no possibility of compromise, this leads to the use of rude speech, or beyond that, to threaten members from the opposing faction. This is the polarization of views as named by Lakoff (2021). This division can degenerate to extremely harmful reactions, "When there is sharp polarization and essentially even division of the population between the sides; when the fight is such that there is or seems to be, no possibility of compromise or commonality of view, the debate can only progress by turning up the heat." (p.65)

Thus, polarization is deepening intolerance, giving rise to more complex phenomena such as racism, discrimination, and prejudice. That has been noticed in the US during electoral campaigns, as affirmed by Baumgartner & Towner (2021), "The most notable development in twenty-first-century America politics is polarization." (p.50)

They distinguish two types of polarization: elite and citizen polarization. "At the elite level, politicians have continued a trend that began in the mid-1970s of ideological division. Democrats have moved to the left and Republicans have shifted even more so to the right." For America, it is closely related to the two parties: the Republican and the Democrat that announced a new era of political division.

Concerning the second type which constitutes an 'affective polarization' based on the partisan animosity toward those from the other party (Baumgartner & Towner, 2021). In contrast to elite polarization, which is a strategy to get the support of voters, the citizens' one is related to people's emotions towards their favourite party or politicians. So, how can uncivil language influence social media users' feelings? Lakoff (2021) affirmed that it is due to the different interpretations of negative discourse, and the rhetorical capabilities of politicians to direct the audience's feelings towards positive interpretations. He added, "it is necessary to realize first that when ambiguity is uttered and it involves the possibility of both positive (innocent) and negative (harmful) interpretation, the one requiring exegesis the negative. If I say, "You're a real genius", the literal interpretation is the positive one, you are smart; the

ironic, that is, the nonliteral one, is negative, you're idiot." This follows from our instincts as social animals for politeness and self-defence: better to be some distance away (or on to a different topic) when the hearer gets what I meant. (Lakoff, 2021, p.28) Hence, polarization is subsequently related to shaping views, as whatever our favourite political figure says or utters, it is always positive and polite, and none can change this impression.

Moreover, it goes beyond that to shaping views concerning general public matters that get politicized, as "audiences reading uncivil language in blog comments may find the message hostile and make judgments about the issue based on their pre-existing values rather than on the information at hand. This develops polarized perceptions on issues among audience segments that hold different values." (Anderson & al. 2013, p.374) This affects public opinion on major matters and may cause a polarization against them such as climate change, immigration, and Covid-19 vaccination issues.

However, incivility may also cause an opposite effect to polarization, known as 'depolarization'. "Incivility polarizes when it comes from the other party...However, incivility can also be depolarizing when it comes from one's partisan sources. For example, if a Democratic source is uncivil to a Democratic audience, the audience turns against the party somewhat, thereby leading to less distance/polarization from Republican." (Braumgartner & Towner, 2021, p.51) This demonstrates that a reverse effect may be engendered by incivility against the party's supporters, polarizing them in favour of the opponent. It can also give rise to loss of trust in the party because of uncivil comments of one of its representatives.

Overall, polarization is the principal outcome of incivility in online political discussions which depends on users' interpretations and reactions to uncivil language and its source, whether from their party or the opponent one. Therefore, incivility may have a reverse impact if it is perpetrated against one's supporters, namely depolarization.

Polarization is one of the incivility's effects on groups; it has several impacts on individuals, as well.

4.2. Toxicity and Passive Victimization

Toxicity is another impact of online incivility which was the theme of several studies. For instance, Antoci et al. (2016) reported:

The Pew Research Center (PRC) has documented the rising incidence of incivility in SNS-based interactions: for example, 73% of online adults have seen someone being harassed in some way in SNS, and 40% have personally experienced it. 49% of SNS-using adults have seen other users behaving cruelly, 60% witnessed someone being called offensive names, and 53% had seen efforts to purposefully embarrass someone. 92% of Internet users agreed that SNS-mediated interaction allows people to be more rude and aggressive, compared with their offline experiences (Duggan, 2014)

These statistics summarize the findings of a survey made by the Pew Research Center in the USA on 2849 web users on June 30, 2014, and provide evidence that Internet networks are becoming toxic environments.

Facebook pages, Twitter accounts of actors of public interest such as political parties, magazines, and celebrities provide a typical setting for online incivility (Rost, Stahel, Frey, 2016, p.2) The statistics also show that SNS users are getting familiar with incivility, and that's engendering a transgression of etiquette norms of Internet use, and individual norms of politeness as well. Moreover, as much as users face incivility, they adapt their reactions to the type of uncivil language, which leads them to react uncivilly, "interaction in SNS leads individuals to condition their behaviour on the behaviour of other users, in a strategic manner. For example, users may react to a hostile online environment where incivility is prevalent by in turn behaving rudely, or by abandoning the social network." (Antoci & al., 2016, p.2)

From that, we can deduce that not all SNS users adapt their interactions and turn uncivil, especially those who are more norm-bound, "People who are older (Ben-Porath, 2008), conflict-avoidant (Mutz & Reeves, 2005), and who score high on the big Five personality traits of agreeableness (Kenski, Coe, & Rains, 2017) may react more strongly to incivility than others." (Chen, & al., 2019, p.2) So, they rather prefer withdrawing from social media simply because they refuse to face this toxicity, or suing the institutions responsible for letting those toxic participants interact through their sites.

When toxicity prevails in Internet networks, the impacts will be apparent on social norms, "There is a fear that repeated exposure to incivility in digital spaces will degrade what is normatively acceptable – leading to a dystopian society where even the most offensive speech is tolerated." (Chen & al., 2019, p.2) This social norms' degradation is becoming a fact to the extent that most SNS users tolerate incivility, or just ignore it.

Toxicity hinders civil language and interaction, and prevents from establishing sane online environments. It is related to toxic personalities that use uncivil, violent language: bullying, trolling, and hate speech, to harm other users. This is confirmed by Cho, Corkett, & Steele (2018), when they said, "While communal online environments have the potential to be valuable collaborative spaces, the opportunity to learn from each other is negated when civil discussion is prohibited by a dominant aggressive culture." (p.310) So, toxicity is preventing us from learning from one another experiences, which is the normal function of social media, because of the prevalence of aggressive language online; it is introducing a culture of violence which is, unfortunately, reflected in the group's behaviours and attitudes in real life. As McLuhan (1994) affirmed a long ago, "We shape our tools, and then tools shape us." In this sense, it can be argued that offline microaggressions can be fuelled by the rampant toxicity online (Johnson, 1997) – especially when there are little to no repercussions for this kind of behaviour. (Cho, Corkett, Steele, 2018, p.311) Even though, the spread of toxic online environments transgresses social norms, it has often little impact on SNS users who got used to such language since no punishment or payoff is engendered. In this context, Cho et al. recognized, "Without rules to abide by, the group's social infrastructure quickly deteriorates into a cruel and dangerous free-for-all." (p.315) So, whenever rules are disobeyed or not applied, violence and disorder prevail.

Toxicity is alienating social media users as it compels some of them to withdraw from the networks in general, while others will suffer from social alienation, depression, and distress, especially women, teens, and famous actors in the society, turning them into passive

victims (Twale & De Luka, 2008); they start blaming themselves for having done good actions, like providing aids for immigrants or refugees; thus, they will not only stop their help but also give the opportunity to toxic personalities to invade social media.

All in all, polarization, toxicity, and passive victimization are the main effects of incivility on the individual level and the group, as well. The former is more evident in political discussions and debates that tend to shape supporters' views and induce them to support their ideas violently. The second concerns individuals' personalities who use uncivil language to attract attention and make Internet users turn to incivility to face that toxicity, making social media toxic environments. Consequently, many users opt for a passive reaction which is closing their accounts to avoid toxic personalities and suffer from psychological disorders as victims of uncivil language.

The studied factors lead us to discuss the possible ways to get rid of incivility in social media and lessen its harmful impacts on individuals and communities.

5. How to Reduce Incivility in Social Media

We need a social media detox (Chia, Jorge, Karpi, 2021, p.70) to get rid of incivility. That can be achieved by the participation of all actors: linguists, jurists, psychologists, sociologists, social media actors and influencers, and even SNS users themselves.

5.1. SNS Users' Role

Internet networks' users have the most crucial part in the attempt to reduce incivility. Hence, many positive actions can attenuate aggression and violence in social media. For instance, face to uncivil language, one must not leave the discussion, instead join it and reply with civil language, "Join the conversation. The more positive, thoughtful, intelligent voices we have in comment streams, the more likely it is that a conversation will not digress." (Chen, 2017, p.183) SNS users should choose the news site or website wisely and carefully; the use of language must be weighed and thought about before sharing opinions. This is what Chen G. M. (2017) affirmed,

...different sites foster widely varying online communities. Put on your armor before you go in: Take no affront personally, count to 10, or even step away from the computer before responding, be judicious about which comments warrant your reply. Yet, offering a supportive comment to someone who has been challenged may calm others down, or at least let that person know she is not alone.

Moreover, participating in online discussions requires participants to be reasonable, and look for evidence, not just mere thoughtless replies without any rational basis, as supporting ideas or opposing them needs to be built upon facts. So, whatever, the topic is, SNS users must keep objective and not get involved in hot discussions, especially political ones. According to Chen (2017, p.183), "Online speech does not have to be perfect to have value. We cannot afford to leave the online space to the trolls and miscreants." So, SNS users should be controllers that direct discussions to more civil language. The challenge lies in having the will and capacity to keep civil face to all those venomous people who are invading social media, to be civil when there is no reciprocity in return. As Akaiso and Ajudua (2019)

said, "Your challenge is to maintain a level of civility at all times even when standing up for yourself to not behave in a manner that will, in any way, lower yourself." Thus, instead of opting for a passive reaction – withdrawal from online interactions – and making themselves victims of 'social poverty trap' (Antoci & al., 2007), social media users should adopt a more positive reaction, and help reduce toxicity in the virtual environments.

5. 2. New Policies and Practices

Other scholars think that users' will to make social media civil environments is not sufficient; it needs to be supported by new policies and practices from the part of Internet networks to control incivility. This has been demonstrated by Chen & al. (2019), "A work by Ksiazek (2015) suggested some policies and practices that could reduce incivility, including requiring on-site or third-party user registration, moderating comments before they appear on-site or after they've been posted, and using reputation management systems that reward positive contributions via mechanisms such on-site, votes, and badges."

Another way to get rid of incivility is requiring the use of specific algorithms that measure the rate of toxicity in sites, detect it and block toxic interactions automatically, "...the development of Google's toxicity algorithm also presume that detecting incivility is possible using a universal definition." (Chen & al., 2019, p.2) Adopting such technological devices may play a role in identifying incivility and thus reducing toxicity. However, it is less efficient when it comes to defining incivility since it has been noticed that people have different perceptions of what to consider civil and uncivil; therefore, it is quite difficult to create an algorithm that can detect all types of incivility online. It can be applied as a complement to the aforementioned measures.

We are living in a community in which we share values and comply with norms; this is why it is fruitless to think about reducing incivility online without establishing a real community of civility.

5. 3. Building a Community of Civility

Creating a community of civility may appear utopic in a world where incivility and intolerance are prevailing; however, it is possible if we start from the source, ourselves. To achieve this goal, one must be civil (Akaiso & Ajudua, 2019) One should oblige himself to be civil for the good of the community, to be thoughtful and reasonable in his face-to-face interactions with children at home, neighbours in the neighbourhood, and colleagues at work. Spreading civil language in our daily discussions will impact interactions in social media. Seeking facts and evidence before giving an opinion is also a daily practice that we must get familiar with in real life. Not understanding anything uttered, having critical thinking are skills that we need to acquire to be able to weigh political discourse, and avoid polarizing matters.

We need to obey and respect laws, rules, and democratic norms, especially in communities with several ethnical minorities, various cultures, languages, and religions.

Most importantly is to 'adjust lives not standards' as Akaiso and Ajudua said, because both real and virtual environments incite us to adapt our reactions according to the situation; however, this adaptation must not touch our values and norms.

Overall, the attempt to reduce incivility in our lives may encounter many obstacles, especially when we know that it is an important strategy used by politicians to impose their ideologies. So, any actions to lower it and limit it constitute a real challenge for the future.

Conclusion

In this paper, we tried to tackle the topic of incivility in social media from different aspects: psychological, social, linguistic, and political. It has been proved that incivility is a relative concept which definition depends on people's perception of what is civil or uncivil and on the situation in which the speech has been uttered.

Scholars identified different forms of incivility: personal incivility in which individual norms of politeness are transgressed and intergroup incivility which transgresses democratic norms. These two main types include several forms of uncivil reactions and attitudes that SNS users face every day, such as: trolling, bullying, name-calling, hate speech...etc.

Many factors lead to perpetrating incivility in social media. Among them, we have psychological factors related to the users' personality characteristics. Then, ideological motivations; as incivility has become a crucial strategy for politicians to motivate and attract voters to behave in favour of them. Electoral campaigns rely on their uncivil representatives' language and rhetorical skills to shape social media users' views against the opposition parties.

As far as its impacts are concerned, many studies tackled the effects of the phenomenon of incivility in the USA either on individuals or the community. On the individual level, we discovered that it may be harmful, causing alienation and passive victimization. Users who experienced trolling, cyber-bullying, harassment, or even threats in social media withdraw from social discussions and networks and suffer from depression, as they find themselves alone in front of that aggressive and aversive language and attitude. This is noticed in main actors of the society, such as actors, politicians, and journalists. On the group level, there is polarization which is engendered by social media toxicity and the use of uncivil language to attract voters; politicians tend to ignite social media using different forms of incivility. Hence, they polarize views to some social and cultural issues to gather more supporters who will defend those ideologies face to the opponent parties using the same uncivil language.

Incivility is assumed bad because of its nasty effects; however, getting rid of it in social media is still a matter of debate. There are laws issued in many countries to punish the perpetrators of incivility in social media, but most of the time they are neglected or disobeyed. There are other measures to take against incivility, such as: adopting new policies to control the rate of toxicity in online discussions. All these procedures are fruitless without the commitment of Internet users to keep civil reactions face to aggressive language, and direct online discussions to more civil contributions, for when civil language prevails, all users follow the trend, decreasing incivility and toxicity of the virtual environment.

More researches should be conducted to investigate incivility in media language in the Algerian context.

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