

DIGITAL BELONGING AND VIRTUAL EXILE: DIASPORIC STORYTELLING IN THE AGE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

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ABSTRACT

The art of storytelling among diasporic communities has found new life online. This article investigates the interrelationship between digital belonging and virtual exile in shaping contemporary diasporic experiences, with a focus on diasporic storytelling in the age of social media. It argues that digital platforms have modified the production and circulation of diasporic narratives, enabling dispersed communities to articulate identity, memory, and cultural affiliation across transnational spaces. Drawing on interdisciplinary frameworks from diaspora studies, media theory and digital humanitie this study explores how diasporic subjects negotiate presence and absence, visibility and marginalization, and connection and dislocation in online environments. Digital platforms offers diasporic individuals to captivate their lived experiences in multimodal, fragmented and participatory configuration that challenges the rectilinearity of traditional literary forms widely included memory, loss, nostalgia , displacement and belonging. Ultimately, the article positions social media as a paradoxical site that simultaneously facilitates belonging while intensifying new forms of estrangement. On one side social media connects us through online availabiltiy, connections, memories, online storytelling, and on the other hand it is making boundries, creating displacement, fragmentation and producing new forms of surveillance giving rise to conditions of virtual exile.

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INTRODUCTION

This is the time period of accelerated migration and digital connectivity, the art of storytelling among diasporic communities has gained a new life online. The concept of diaspora is traditionally linked with the condition of being physically displaced from one's own homeland, is now rapidly modified and expressed through These virtual spaces ranging from blogs and Instagram reels to podcast and YouTube channels serve not merely communications tools but as dynamic environments where diasporic subjects construct, archive, and share their stories (Diminescu; Brinkerhoff). As digital technologies transform the way we experience space, time and identity, the conventional boundaries of diasporic literature are also being redefined (Georgiou). Digital platforms offers diasporic individuals to captivate their lived experiences in multimodal, fragmented and participatory configuration that challenges the rectilinearity of traditional literary forms widely included memory, loss, nostalgia , displacement and belonging.

In this setting, diasporic existence is increasingly mediated by digital environment that allows people to stay both "here" and "there" at the same time, rather than being limited to physical spaces alone. In order to analyze how diasporic identities are created and questioned in the age of social media, this paper looks at the shared

ideas of virtual exile and digital belonging. On the other hand, social media sites like Facebook, Instagram, and X(formerly Twitter) provide diasporic communities previously unheard-of chances to preserve cultural connections, exchange narratives, and foster a sense of belonging beyond national boundaries.

However, the same platforms that facilitate communication also give rise to new kind of exclusion and alienation. This paradox is encapsulated in the concept of virtual exile, which describes how diasporic people may feel fragmented, marginalized or invisible in digital environments. The influence and reach of diasporic narratives can be restricted by algorithmic biases, content moderation rules and the sale of visibility, which effectively silences or distorts some voices. This study examines how people negotiate these conflicting pressure of exile and belonging by concentrating on diasporic storytelling in the age of social media. Diasporic people use storytelling as a crucial tool to express their experiences, negotiate cultural identities and challenge prevailing narratives.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. How do social media sites affect traditional concepts of diasporic belonging and community formation?
2. How do diasporic social media storytellers navigate identity, memory and cultural affiliation?
3. What part do platforms structures and algorithms play in allowing or restraining diasporic visibility?
4. How may the conflict between virtual exile and digital belonging be conceptualized in contemporary diaspora discourse?

LITERATURE REVIEW

With early frameworks focusing on loss, exile and the yearning for return, diaspora studies have historically prioritized issue of displacement, identity and belonging. Robin Cohen extended William Safran's conceptualization of diaspora to encompass a variety of diasporic experiences beyond victimization such as labor, commerce and cultural diasporas. Safran's criteria included collective memory, homeland orientation and marginalization in host communities.

The work of Stuart Hall marks that the notion of identity as a process of becoming rather than a fixed essence. Hall's idea is that cultural identity is

continuously produced through representation is especially pertinent. In a similar way, Avtar Brah presents the idea of "Diaspora Space" highlighting the interconnectedness of belonging, power and identity that goes beyond physical relocation to encompass relational and discursive processes.

With the advancement of digital technologies and globalization, scholars like Arjun Appadurai have emphasized the impact of global cultural-flows, ethnoscapings, mediascapes and technospaces in changing diasporic awareness with the emergence of digital technology and globalization. Appadurai's approach is especially helpful in comprehending how media technologies create disparities and disjunctures while also facilitating global relationships. Simultaneously, Manuel Castells proposes the concept of the "Network Society" in which identity is formed inside digitally mediated networks that surpass conventional spatial bounds.

By analyzing how social media platforms serve as a venue for diasporic involvement recent research in digital diaspora studies expand upon these theoretical underpinnings. Digital settings according to academics like Brigitte Suter and Radhika Gajjala allow for new kinds of self-representation and community development especially for excluded populations. Safiya Umoja and Taina Bucher highlight algorithmic power structures that influence visibility and frequently perpetuate pre-existing exclusions and disparities. There is still a lack of theory on the simultaneous coexistence of inclusion and exclusion in digital domains. In order to close this gap, this study looks at diasporic storytelling as a platform for articulating, negotiating and contesting these conflicts.

METHODOLOGY

This study uses a qualitative, interpretive research approach to investigate diasporic storytelling practices in digital world. The methodology is based on an interdisciplinary framework that blends diaspora studies, digital humanities and media theory and it examines story production and representation on social media platforms.

RESEARCH DESIGN

The research utilizes a digital ethnographic method, based on the work of Christine Hine, who conceptualizes the internet both a cultural aircraft and a location of social interaction.

DATA COLLECTION

Data is gathered from certain social media platforms (Facebook, Instagram, X) with an emphasis on posts, stories and interactions created by diasporic users that are accessible to the public. Purposive sampling is used, focusing on people and groups that actively communicate stories about migration, belonging and identity. These are consists of

1. Individual stories (posts, threads, captions)
2. Visual storytelling with digital art, reels and images
3. Hashtag communities (such as tags pertaining to the diaspora)

By anonymizing user data and making sure that only content that is accessible to the public is examined, ethical issues are carefully taken into account.

ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

The study utilizes thematic analysis to find recurrent patterns and themes in the gathered data. The work of Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke, serve as the basis for this method, who highlight the adaptability of thematic analysis in understanding qualitative data.

DISCUSSION

The analysis of diasporic storytelling in digital spaces shows a complicated and frequently contradictory relationship between virtual exile and digital belonging. However, this sense of belonging is neither consistent nor widely available. According to Safiya Umoja Noble, algorithmic patterns seen in digital platforms frequently favour some forms of exposure while marginalizing others. This study defines virtual exile as a situation in which diasporic voices are marginalized despite their involvement in digital network and this selective visibility plays a part in this phenomenon.

The results also align with Avtar Brah's concept of diaspora space where many subjectivities interact and are influenced by power dynamics. This area is expanded into the virtual world by digital surroundings where, identification is not only performed but also monitored, monetized and algorithmically selected.

CONCLUSION

This paper has examined how traditional conceptions of exile, identity and belonging are redefined by

diasporic storytelling in the era of social media. The study emphasizes the dual character of digital platforms as places that empower and marginalize, connect and separate by presenting the ideas of virtual exile and digital belonging.

Significantly, by highlighting storytelling as a crucial technique that people use to resolve these conflicts, this study advances the expanding subject of digital diaspora studies. It emphasizes the need for more investigation into how digital economy, platform governance and algorithms shape diasporic experiences. Future study could broaden this work by using mix-method approaches that integrate qualitative and quantitative data. Or by including comparison studies across various diasporic communities. Examining new platforms and technology may also shed further light on how virtual exile and digital belonging are changing. In the end the paper makes the case that comprehending diaspora in the twenty-first century necessitates a crucial engagement with the digital world where exile and belonging coexist inside the same mediated spaces rather than being opposing states.

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