

# Abstract

How does culture spread through representations? – This is the main question of my book that I attempt to address in a comprehensive manner while also making efforts to create a scientifically descriptive model for this process. Investigating the network characteristics of news and fake news spreading on Facebook social network site (SNS), the section dedicated to analysis looks into a particular case of the general model to be introduced in the theoretical part and created based on literature, while it is also demonstrated how data stored in digital footprints make the spread of representations transparent, thereby allowing for their reconstruction and research.

I created the double network model of culture spreading by way of representations, which can account for the dynamic process taking place at the level of both the individual and the society. The model developed in the context of my doctoral dissertation relies on as well as gives further considerations to Dan Sperber's ideas on epidemiology of representations (Sperber 2001). In my view, culture can be described as the spread of representations defined by the structure of two nested, interacting networks connected by individuals functioning as agents with an active and mediating role played in connecting these networks. Therefore, in relation to the individual, we can speak about an internal, mental network and an external, social network, which are in interaction.

There are two distinct types of representations spreading in the two networks: mental representation shapes the mental network, while public representation produces its effect within the social network. In fact, cultural diffusion takes place through the repeated transformation of the mental and public representations from one form to the other. Accordingly, the communication of mental representations causes physical changes in the environment (in the form of sound waves, images, or other signs), thereby creating public representations, whereas when another individual perceives and

experiences this sequence of signs public representations will be again transformed into mental representations.

A particular case of the theory under discussion is demonstrated in practice: the spreading of news and fake news on Facebook is placed under scrutiny. In the course of my analysis, I examine the data obtained from the Facebook pages of the top 5 Hungarian-language news portals with the largest base of followers as well as the data of the top 5 Hungarian-language Facebook pages with the largest base of followers and ranked among the so-called iffy pages (i.e. with doubtful reliability), often spreading misinformation and fake news. Therefore, the 'interview subjects' questioned from an anthropological and ethnographic perspective will in fact serve as data sources helping my case study. It is not the persons but the digital footprints left behind on Facebook social networking website that I interrogate, observe, and analyse.

Considering that public representations have a direct bearing on the representation network, the mixing of real and fake news renders their distinction increasingly problematic and tiresome at both the individual and social level. The amplified noise generated in the wake of representations makes it more and more difficult to encounter authentic and truly relevant public representations and build our lives and the decisions that affect the functioning of society upon them. In this scenario, one cannot even rule out the possibility of coming across an item of real news and mistaking it for fake news.