

## Social sharing in emotional culture

Stratan Nadejda, masterandă, UPS „I.Creangă”, Chișinău

### Rezumat

*Comunicarea socială a emoțiilor este un proces prin intermediul căruia o persoană își împărtășește experiențele emoționale personale sau colective. Motivele comunicării sociale a emoțiilor sunt diverse, printre cele mai importante fiind procesarea cognitivă, asimilarea informațională precum și acomodarea personală la evenimentul emoțional petrecut.*

*Comunicarea emoțiilor este universală însă cu nuanțe specifice în dependență de tipul și intensitatea emoțiilor, precum și de condițiile social culturale. Printre funcțiile comunicării sociale a emoțiilor se numără atragerea atenției sociale și astfel consolidarea relațiilor sociale, reprezentarea socială și diseminarea socială a cunoștințelor emoționale acumulate.*

When individuals experience an emotion, they generally tell about it in the next hours and days [4]. The majority of emotions experienced by individuals are shared several times and with several people. Indeed, social sharing of emotion is a widespread phenomenon [3]. Scientifically, social sharing is the term used to describe the process during which a person, having experienced an emotion, recounts this experience to his or her social environment. The process essentially entails the transmission of information and experience of a personal and emotional nature, from the person experiencing the emotion to his or her sociocultural environment. Social sharing implies two prerequisites, (a) the reevocation of an emotion in a socially shared language, and (b) at least at the symbolic level, an addressee [5]. By using language and by addressing others, individuals “unfold” the emotional material, label it, and organize it into sequential relationships conforming to the rules of rational thinking [1]. When people socially share an emotional experience, they may do so either by explaining the circumstances of the emotional event, or by describing their emotional reactions to this event, or both. Social sharing serves both informational and emotional goals [2].

The motives for social sharing are likely to include one or more of the following: cognitive processing of emotional information, cognitive processing of goal-related information, anxiety reduction through social presence, and achieving cognitive clarity about emotion stimuli or responses [2]. Indeed, emotion entails important consequences for the person’s cognitive activity. For example, after witnessing a traumatic event, many people experience intrusive thoughts or images. Such symptoms are manifested after even relatively minor or moderate emotion-inducing events. However, the intense emotion condition consistently lead to a

significantly higher extent of social sharing than do the moderate and the non-emotional conditions, the emotional intensity of the stimulus determines the extent of social sharing. Intense emotion challenges a person's mental model of the world. People are thereby compelled to assess the meaning or implication of the event, to reconstruct basic assumptions about the self and the world, and to assimilate event-related information and accommodate existing schemata [2].

Interestingly enough, the sharing process is not independent of the kind of emotional experience being shared as well as the culture where the sharing occurs. Thus, sharing fear is instituted to a greater degree than other emotions while shame experiences are shared with a longer delay, less frequently and with fewer people [5]. With regards to cross-cultural aspects, social sharing differs across individualistic versus collectivistic countries. Individualists value their independence and self-sufficiency, leading their sharing to have a passive quality, with no great demands being made on the sociocultural environment during the sharing process. The collectivists, on the other hand, value interdependence and emotional attachment to the ingroup, seeking to enhance it during the sharing process by actively involving the ingroup in their emotions [5].

Social sharing of emotions entails many functions. A first, very basic, function of emotion sharing is found in *rehearsing, reminding, or reexperiencing*. Individuals can enhance their, and their targets', current level of positive affect by retelling a positive emotional episode. For negative emotions, rehearsing can fulfill important functions with regard to the *memory* of emotional episodes. By talking about the emotional event, people gradually construct a social narrative and a collective memory. At the same time, they consolidate their own memory for personal circumstances in which the event took place [3]. Emotional sharing can be instrumental in *gaining social attention and interest from targets*, or in *arousing empathy among targets*. In line with such functions, emotional sharing appears as a powerful tool for stimulating *bonding* and for *strengthening social ties*. In addition, laypersons are well aware of the various levels of help they can expect from targets when they share a negative emotional experience: these levels can include *help and support, comfort and consolation, legitimization and validation*, as well as reception of *advice and solutions*.

Also, social sharing of emotion can fulfill many functions of the cognitive or of the symbolic type. The process of cognitive articulation can contribute to a *progressive distancing* from this experience and to adoption of a decentered point of view on the emotional material. The process of social sharing is well-suited to respond to the *quest for meaning* aroused by an emotion and to contribute to meaning production. In addition, *storytelling and the construction of a narrative* can be at play in the social sharing of emotion. In this way, social sharing of

emotion provides a frame in which *conversation* develops. Conversation can transform and absorb unfamiliar elements into *social representation*. By means of communication, emotional sharing propagates across a community. This collective process can contribute to the *construction and dissemination of social knowledge* about emotional episodes and emotional responses. In conclusion, individual emotional experiences have important potential consequences for both social knowledge and group integration [1].

In addition, sharing of a markedly intense emotional experience may be instrumental in *decreasing interpersonal distance* and in *strengthening social bonds*. Indeed, sharing emotions may contribute to the development and maintenance of close relationships [3]. Besides, social sharing may contribute to the *spreading of social knowledge* about emotions in the social network of the person who shares. Social sharing provides the listener with useful knowledge on what may happen in life, on how one can react to it, and on what the consequences may be [2]. Physiologically, sharing emotions secures physical health and psychological well-being in the long run. Also, it diminishes the intensity of the emotional upset elicited by the emotional memory, and thus contributes to emotional recovery or relief [3]. To summarize, at the individual level, sharing of an emotion with another person may go some way in meeting the needs of social comparison, cognitive articulation, dissonance reduction, and that of coping that are engendered by the experience of an emotion. At the sociocultural level, it is thought to be involved in the construction of both personal and group memory for important events, and in the social knowledge of emotion [5].

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